

The politics of neoliberalism in Latin America: dynamics of resilience and contestation

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, academic debates around neoliberalism in Latin America have shifted from evaluations of the drawbacks and virtues of the application of neoliberal policies for achieving socioeconomic development, towards discussions imagining and implementing alternatives. After thirty years of neoliberal reform, even neoliberal advocates have increasingly recognised the pernicious effects that the process of neoliberalization have had on people's lives. The fleeting left and centre-left moment brought renewed hopes and expectations of a post-neoliberal future. However, post-neoliberal states could not solve the contradictions of neoliberalism and told us much about its resilience and adaptability. This article offers an overview of the dynamics of neoliberalism's resilience and contestation in Latin America as treated by extant literature as a way to account for the politics of neoliberalism in the region, its rise and its current status.

KEYWORDS

contestation, neoliberal resilience, neoliberalism in Latin America, politics of neoliberalism

1 | INTRODUCTION

The previous two decades have seen in a discernible shift in academic debates around neoliberalism in Latin America, from evaluation of the relative drawbacks and virtues an unassailable neoliberal development model (Huber & Solt, 2004; Weyland, 2004) to a more critical discussion imagining alternatives and envisioning ways to

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challenge neoliberalism's hegemony (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2009; Plehwe & Walpen, 2006). Even among its advocates, there has been an increasing recognition that 30 years of process of neoliberalization and structural adjustments have produced at least dubious (Furceri et al., 2016) and at worst catastrophic effects on the majority of people's lives (Navarro, 2007). The consolidation of already significant inequalities, precarious jobs and informality, political closure and social exclusion, are today among the best-known legacy of neoliberal policies, indicators that compare unfavourably with the previous import substitution industrialization model (ISI) that it superseded (North & Clark, 2017). Thus, the most prominent questions for both scholars and activists today are not whether the region should follow a neoliberal path towards modernization, but rather how alternatives developmental strategies can be developed, what this could mean for the relationship between the state and the market, and which institutions and actors (local and international) will be functional to this purpose.

To be sure, the issue of the crisis of neoliberalism and its excesses on one hand, and the possible alternatives to it, on other, is not new in the region (Petras, 1997). 3 years after the dramatic rioting against austerity measures in Venezuela which came to be known as the *Caracazo* in 1989, in a TV interview candidate Hugo Chavez pointed to the necessity of developing a third way between 'savage neoliberalism' and 'communist statism'. Moreover, by the end of the nineties, similar social unrest triggered the World Bank to re-package a post-Washington consensus with measures ostensibly aimed at achieving a new more humane version of neoliberalism, attentive to equity, as an alternative to its dogmatic 'original' incarnation (Kuczynski & Williamson, 2003).

The emergence of left and centre-left governments critical of neoliberalism at the end of the nineties came with expectations of the amelioration of some of the traits of the neoliberal reforms. Consequently, academic literature heralded a paradigm shift to 'Post-neoliberalism' (Kaltwasser, 2011), term which encapsulated policy and political efforts at not just correcting or providing neoliberalism with a more equitable and progressive dimension, but of offering a feasible alternative to it. But with the end of the commodity boom on which countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia depended to sustain their policies, the prospects of a truly way out of neoliberalism's traits seemed to fade. Following this the prospects of a true rupture from neoliberalism diminished quickly.

The debates over neoliberalism and its crisis on the one hand, and the projections of alternatives to it on the other, reflect a larger social and economic process which according to most analysts follow a Polanyian logic. This is to say, the implantation of market-oriented reforms to different degrees, from different political regimes over different period of times, have been met with a societal 'countermovement' aiming at protecting of its effects in most Latin American countries. The results of these dynamics of neoliberal reform application, contestation and subsequent neoliberal's adaptation, are renewed iterations of a cycle of recognisable economic and social outcomes. So it is reasonable to ask: why does neoliberalism retain such an obstinate presence in the region's politics, despite significant levels of resistance and contestation? Is there anything beyond the narrative of neoliberal resilience and its contestation?

This article offers an overview of the dynamics of neoliberalism's resilience and contestation in Latin America as treated by extant literature. First, I justify why the specificities of Latin America provide a particularly insightful vantage point from which to observe the realities of neoliberalism in the Global South. I then review literature on how neoliberal policies were implemented in Latin America as an alternative to the predominant ISI model and its subsequent socioeconomic and political outcomes. In Section 1.3e, I present and discuss some of the implications of the contestation of neoliberalism at the level of social movements and at an electoral level, with a focus on the continuities and discontinuities between neo and post-neoliberalism. I finally offer reflections on some topics and disciplinary approaches which allow us to think of alternatives to neoliberalism, and the prospects of finding common language to speak about them.

2 | FROM NEOLIBERALISM IN LATIN AMERICA TO A LATIN AMERICAN NEOLIBERALISM

In her influential article on the idea of plural neoliberalisms, Wendy Larner stated that 'Developments in the 'periphery' may be as significant, if not more so, than those in the 'core' in explaining the spread of neoliberalism'

(Larner, 2003, p. 510). While this applies to the Global South in general, Latin America's experiences of the realities of Neoliberalism are deep-rooted. Description of this influence of neo-liberal thinking can be traced back to the early 1960s particularly in the cases of Brazil and Colombia (Bailey, 1965) and Chile (Fischer, 2009). There is broad consensus that Chile constituted the first 'neoliberal' experiment in the world. Chile is a unique case in which a brutal military dictatorship paved the way for the application of wholesale market reforms without any opposition permitted (French-Davis, 2002; Harvey, 2007; Solimano, 2014). As pointed out by María Eugenia Romero Sotelo, corporate interests and local ruling classes were on the frontline diffusing the economic and intellectual ideas of the Neoliberals (Sotelo, 2019). Recent literature has also emphasised the necessity of developing a decolonial Global South based view of neoliberalism, one that debunks or at least relativizes the predominant narrative which portrays neoliberal ideas and policies as essentially European exports which travelled and landed with greater or lesser degrees of success in Latin American lands (Connell & Dados, 2014; Webber, 2017).

What makes Latin American countries an instructive case for observing the politics of neoliberalism? What are the specificities of the region? What makes the Latin American trajectory towards neoliberalism so paradigmatic? There are at least four themes that can account for the specificities of the neoliberal development in the region.

2.1 | Democratization, neoliberalization and the legacies of authoritarianism

As I will show in the next section, neoliberal reforms were initiated during the 1970s and 1980s in most Latin American countries as a developmental strategy to supersede the import substitution industrialization model (ISI). The ISI model worked under the premise that economic modernization in the form of industrialization would work as the foundation for the flourishing of democratic institutions (Collier & Cardoso, 1979). However, as the Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell famously pointed out, at the political level, industrialization was followed not by democracy but rather by authoritarian-bureaucratic states (O'donnell, 1978). O'Donnell coined the term 'bureaucratic-authoritarianism' to refer to a specific type of state, arising first in Brazil (1964) and then in Argentina (1964, 1976), and spreading to Chile (1973) and Uruguay (1973) under military rule. It was based on a technocratic approach to policy, an exclusionary approach to the popular sector, and a closed non-democratic political system. Although some authors see in the authoritarian-bureaucratic state the point of departure of neoliberal reforms (Cavarozzi, 1992), others have stressed the discontinuities between a type of state still oriented toward industrialization and a state which triggered the reprimarization of national economies towards favouring the export sector (Schamis, 1991).

By the late 80s, in an international context marked by the globalization of markets, nearly all Latin American countries had to some degree adopted neoliberal reforms. Even though the majority of neoliberal reforms programs were initiated under democratically elected governments (Remmer, 1998), the origins of neoliberalism in the region are closely attached to democratization, understood as the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, in international and regional contexts marked by the oil crises and the debt crises respectively. Consequently, what specifically characterises the development of neoliberalism in the region is first the legacies of authoritarianism (including the so called 'authoritarian enclaves') (Garretón, 2004; O'Donnell et al., 2013) and second, the type of democracies that these processes brought about in the region, including the scarce redistribution of power and the extents of the exclusion of the popular sectors (Schmitter, 2014).

2.2 | The 'persistence of inequality' and the coloniality of power

Divergent from countries in the Global North, Latin American countries paths towards development, indeed the very idea of development, have been strongly conditioned by its colonial past and its relationship of dependence and subordination with the core economies, as well as the structures of power resulting from these asymmetries. While some approaches trace back persistent inequalities in many areas of Latin America's social and political life to the

colonial period, suggesting the past explains, to a large extent, recent and current economic disparities (De Ferranti et al., 2004), others have proposed a more nuanced stand based around a fine-grained analysis of how land inequality derived from the colonial *haciendas and encomienda* systems, fed specifically into income and other asset inequalities (Frankema, 2009). Furthermore, other approaches have emphasised the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts in which those inequalities are reproduced, contained or reshaped, and of the ways in which colonialism—considered as a matrix of power relations—operates at interactional, institutional and structural levels (Quijano, 2007).

The Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano developed the concept of the coloniality of power to account for the entangled ways in which relations of subordination and discrimination initiated during colonial rule and has been subsequently reproduced after colonial administration ended (Quijano, 2007, 2008). This approach has undergone several reformulations which emphasise the continuities of the racial, sexual, political and epistemic hierarchies of the colonial past—based on the supposed superiority of European versus Non-Europeans—and on the pertinence to present times (Grosfoguel, 2011; Lugones, 2007, 2016). The entanglement between these structures of power and domination and Latin American countries' uneven integration into the international division of labour provides a distinctive context that has impacted in particular ways upon the rise and subsequent developments of neoliberalism in the region.

2.3 | The radical nature of neoliberal reforms

Although acknowledging the variety of inter-regional trajectories towards neoliberalism, most of specialized literature concurs in asserting the radical, extreme and orthodox character of neoliberal reforms in the region (Munck, 2003; Stokes, 2001; Veltmeyer et al., 2016). Divergent from the Western trajectory, where neoliberalism has come to coexist to a lesser or greater degree with pre-existing social democratic and welfare institutions, and where the transition to versions of the neoliberal model can be considered as comparatively 'soft', the initiation and diffusion of neoliberal reforms in Latin America have been harsh and abrupt since the structural adjustments (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2018). Starting with the military experiments of the countries of the Southern cone during the 1970s, neoliberal reforms aiming at liberalising capital and labour markets, privatising state controlled industries and reducing state regulatory role in the economy, expanded throughout the 1980s and 1990s in countries such as Peru, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico.

Three factors have been stressed in arguing for the 'revolutionary' nature of neoliberal reforms in Latin America: (1) prohibition, persecution and/or demobilization of the political opposition and the popular sectors either by brutal military repression—as was the case in the countries of the southern cone during the seventies—or authoritarian rule and enclaves (including political constitutions) within democratic regimes (Buono & Lara, 2007; Burdick et al., 2009); (2) the dismantlement of the previous state-centric and industrial development strategy included not only a restructuring of the economy to favour the liberalization and functioning of an increased financialised market, but also the marketization of key areas of social provision such as education, health, pensions and housing (Diamond, 1993; Kritzer, 2000); (3) the transition from ISI to export oriented industrialization—a major achievement of neoliberal economists—crucially led to a reinforcement of primary sector development and a reduction of tariff barriers, opening up the domestic economy to the global market. Both foreign multinationals and local capital profited considerably from this opening up for imports (Riesco, 2009), signalling the subsequent reorientation of the state around a new constellation of managerial and financial interests to maintain elites and business groups' privileges (Margheritis & Pereira, 2007).

2.4 | Laboratory for resistances

As numerous scholars from different disciplines have pointed out (Petras, 1997; Roberts, 1998; Silva, 2009; Zibechi, 2012), Latin America stands out not only for the radical character that the neoliberal turn took in most of

countries, but equally for the variegated of resistance that emerged as a reaction to the application and effects of neoliberal reforms. Latin America has a long tradition of formal and informal resistance to oppression since colonial times. Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s, many organised groups uprising challenged corrupt governments and the assumptions underpinning land ownership and urban elites' powers, the Cuban revolution being the paradigmatic manifestation of this revolutionary 'spirit'. Urban working-class movements have been fundamental in the history of Latin America, especially during the first incorporation period under the national populist state (Cook, 2010; Erickson et al., 1974; Madrid, 2003). Peasant, feminist and urban poor movements have been also relevant since the middle of the twentieth century (Escobar, 2018; Jaquette, 1973; Veltmeyer, 1997). Nonetheless, whilst there are continuities in this 'tradition' of resistance, the particularities of resistance to neoliberalism lie in two key factors: (1) the multiplicity of mobilizations and the development since the seventies of new trends as the expression of changes in the global geography of neoliberalism—including a turn towards autonomy and territorialization, in movements such as the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement (CONAIE—Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil, the Chilean Pobladores, the Piqueteros in Argentina, Peasants and Indigenous struggles in Bolivia, Feminists movements across the continent, among others (Zibechi, 2010, 2012) and (2) the democratic formal context in terms of rules and electoral processes, which despite its institutional flaws and limits, have proved to be important for the 'post-neoliberal' period (Roberts, 1997).

3 | THE RISE OF NEOLIBERALISM: CRISIS AND REFORMS

As I mentioned in the previous section, the rise of neoliberalism took place in a context marked by incomplete democratization, the legacy of colonial power structures, and a reconfigured authoritarianism that consistently favoured market-based policies. The politics of neoliberalism, that is, the set of practices disputing the normative, economic and political orientation of societies in Latin America have been mainly said to be the results of a combination of international and domestic factors (Remmer, 1998). The fall of the Keynesian post-War consensus in Western countries, the aftermath of the oil shocks of the 1970s, and the debt crisis, prompted a shift from state-centric societies to market-oriented ones. In the domestic arena, political and economic instability and crises led to the end of the developmentalist model based on the protection of domestic industry and inward growth (North & Clark, 2017). In this context, neoliberalism appeared for its proponents as the solution to the crisis of ISI and therefore as constituting a superior development model.

Although the designation of the ISI model has a mainly economic connotation, several authors have highlighted the political dimensions of the development conundrum in Latin America (Escobar, 2011). Since the 1930s but more strongly after the Second World War, and based on the recognition of their peripheral and dependent positions to core economies, Latin American states sought after their own path of political and economic modernization. Politically, national 'populist' states incorporated for the first time groups from the urban popular sectors, managing to establish a fragile but nonetheless durable compromise between the oligarchic sectors of the colonial pact, a growing bourgeoisie that had emerged in the export boom period in the early 20th century, and popular urban sectors that begun to formally organize themselves into parties (Silva & Rossi, 2018). Economically, influenced by ECLAC guidelines and CEPAL thinking, developmentalism was a strategy based on the principles of industrialization, inward-looking growth and planning as a remedy to deal with the tendency of the terms of trade to deteriorate and, consequently, to achieve higher degrees of development (Edwards, 1996).

The literature has highlighted both internal and external factors to account for the crisis of the ISI model. Among the internal factors, some authors have emphasized the political dimension of the crisis, linked to its inability to foment governments which pushed the boundaries of democratic governance into broader sections of society (Cohen, 1987). Moreover its inability to manage the conflict between the interests of different groups and classes without making deeper changes to the production structure (Taylor, 2006), the economic structure was incapable of adapting to the changing world economic conditions (Edwards, 1996). More broadly, the crisis was

largely caused by the exhaustion of a development model that despite having reached levels of industrialization in consumer goods, depended heavily upon central economies for the import of capital goods and investment that made industrializing policies and the domestic economy sustainable (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979). As for the external factors, a revamped version of U. S. hegemony, the emergence of plans of 'economic aid' and installation of military bases in Latin American countries—what was known as 'Operation Condor'—and towards the end of the 1980s, the emergence of an increasingly integrated global market—albeit unevenly—and an economy based on financialization and on multinational conglomerates, affected the sustainability of the ISI model.

The first wave of neoliberal reforms began during the 1970s in the southern cone with the aforementioned dictatorships. This first wave has been considered the most 'radical' insofar as they attempted to implement orthodox monetarist political policies to varying degrees. Chile is a paradigmatic case of the depth and type of reforms during this first wave. The second wave was tied to the debt crisis and the seemingly intractable difficulty that governments in countries such as Peru, Argentina and Brazil had in dealing with the crisis under their previous models (Edwards, 1996). In both waves, economic policies were strongly constrained by the structural adjustments of international financial institutions such as the IMF and The World Bank (Silva & Rossi, 2018; Weyland, 2004). These policies involved two stages: the first stage included measures such as the liberalization of capital and labour markets, the privatization of public enterprises, and incentives for foreign investment. The second stage included measures such as the privatization of services alongside the targeting of low public spending. This set of economic policy prescriptions derived from these changes that were formalized towards the end of the 1980s and dubbed the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1990).

The Washington Consensus was conceived as a way to control the damage of the debt crisis and reorient economy policy through creating the conditions for the improvement of export income and investment. This proved to be catastrophic for countries such as Argentina, whose currency board defied Williamson's recommendation of flexible exchange rates and adopted dollarization. The importance of the Washington Consensus lies not so much in having invented a set of pro-market policies, many of which already had already operated earlier in some Latin American countries, but rather in making explicit the conditionality of aid and credit for countries hit by the effects of the debt crisis on these policies, as well as explicitly presenting these economic instruments as the only possible way to achieve economic development. Thus, the Washington Consensus was literally a 'call for the debtors to fulfil their part of the proposed bargain by 'setting their houses in order' as Williamson put it. The package of measures or instruments included: fiscal discipline to avoid fiscal and budget deficit, the reduction of public expenditure, the liberalization of interest and exchange rates, privatization of state-owned enterprises, and deregulation, among others (Williamson, 1990).

When it comes to analyzing the effects of the processes of neoliberalization in the region, nowadays most of the literature falls on the critical side, albeit for divergent reasons. Walton, for example, argues that the results are rather mixed, and that the expectations were too high if we consider Latin American weak institutions and insufficient commitment to reforms (Walton, 2004). But a general shared conclusion is that after more than 20 years, neoliberal policies were not able to provide a viable and sustainable strategy for development, or even to provide any meaningful economic stability (Furceri et al., 2016). Part of the literature acknowledges that at least from the mid-1980s until the end of the 1990s neoliberal reforms did bring limited positive outcomes, such as economic growth, inflation control and foreign investment attraction (Margheritis & Pereira, 2007). However, income inequality increased vastly in most of the countries as well as informal-sector employment (Santiso & Dayton-Johnson, 2012). As Huber and Solt acknowledge: 'Overall, the picture of progress in the areas of growth, stability, poverty, and democracy is not particularly encouraging' (Huber & Solt, 2004, p. 152).

From a sociological point of view, the introduction of neoliberal reforms during the span of 30 years meant a redefinition of the relationship between state, political parties and civil society. The actors benefiting from these policies were those who pushed in the first place for their implementation: business sectors and the right wing parties (Madariaga, 2020). As a result of the relative capture of the state by elite and business groups, democracy was deeply disfigured by neoliberalism in the region. While most of the countries had already adopted formal

democratic procedures and rules, this redefinition also further marginalized urban and rural popular sectors from the formal political sphere. In this way it is important to note that citizenship rights in Latin America have developed not so much because of the political system opening up to the majority of the population, but rather, as a reaction and protest impulse from civil society against consecutive waves of institutionalized political exclusion and deeply embedded economic inequality produced by the implementation of neoliberal reforms (Petras, 1997; Silva, 2009; Silva & Rossi, 2018).

4 | POST-NEOLIBERALISM?

Since the late 1990s a number of left-wing and centre-left governments were elected in several Latin American countries. Hugo Chavez's victory in Venezuela (1998) was followed by that of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil (2003) and Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006). In other countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador and Chile, the left and centre left also won elections during this period. Although the period looked auspicious for the 'pink tide', the political crisis in Venezuela following Chávez's death, the election of businessman Mauricio Macri in Argentina and the political crisis and subsequent impeachment of Lula da Silva's successor Dilma Rousseff signalled if not the end of an era, at least a wake-up call regarding the difficulties and contradictions of going into practice beyond neoliberalism. The literature concentrated in what has been named 'post-neoliberalism' as an attempt to grasp this shift to the left.

As with the concept of neoliberalism, there is no consensus on the defining features of post-neoliberalism. On a general level, as mentioned above, the concept names the ideological and political movement aimed at counteracting to varying degrees the effects of neoliberal reforms at the levels of electoral politics and mass mobilization during this period (Grugel & Ruggirozzi, 2012; Kaltwasser, 2011; North & Clark, 2017; Ruckert et al., 2017). Stressing the ideological dimension of the change, post-neoliberalism point to the fact that after technocratic consensus and relative social demobilization of the Washington Consensus era, 'neoliberalism is no longer the only game in town' (Roberts, 2009, p. 1). However, when moving from description to evaluation, controversies around the analytical utility of the concept and the real nature of the changes it seeks to encapsulate arise.

Some authors have pointed at clear disparities between the utopian dimensions of post-neoliberalism as a projected society 'beyond neoliberalism' and the reality of concrete policies and broader economic structures in which those policies are embedded (Yates & Bakker, 2014). Others have argued that while it is true that most governments of the so-called 'pink tide' attempted to undo some of the neoliberal reforms and to restore the political capacity of the state to regulate the economy, important degrees of continuity exist between the policies and practices enacted by the pink-tide governments and the neoliberal political era (Ruckert et al., 2017). Post-neoliberalism can be thus better characterised as a search for progressive alternatives or as an attempt at breaking with neoliberal policies than as coherent set of practices that supersede the 'previous' neoliberal model (Macdonald & Ruckert, 2009).

Acknowledging the difficulties that the concept of post-neoliberalism poses when evaluating it in relation to neoliberalism—as the concept might simultaneously evocate a form of anti-neoliberalism, the end of neoliberalism, or just a new version of classic neoliberalism—Macdonald and Ruckert (2009) suggest using post-neoliberalism as a conceptual tool 'to capture the discontinuity within the continuity of policies that are currently implemented by a wide range of governments in the Americas' (Macdonald & Ruckert, 2009, p. 7). On the continuity side, different authors argue that at a macro-level, most countries in Latin America continued to adhere to 'classic' neoliberal prescriptions, such as trade liberalization, moderate inflation, balanced budget (Ruckert et al., 2017), and significantly, most of them rely heavily on natural resource extraction and primary commodity exports (Cisneros & Christel, 2014). On the discontinuity side, authors highlight trends such as: a change of perception about the inevitability of neoliberal fundamentalist policies (Roberts, 2009; Silva, 2009), partial reversion of privatizations, efforts at restoring the regulatory role of the state (Heidrich & Tussie, 2009), increasing social spending, and innovative anti-poverty policies (Grugel & Ruggirozzi, 2018), among others.

In one of the most recent and complete conceptual reviews of post-neoliberalism in the Americas, Ruckert et al. (2017) survey the main areas in which post-neoliberalism has effected significant change and those in which the change has been rather minimal. They point to an increase of social spending and the establishment of better state-society relations in terms of the relative incorporation of some excluded groups (especially indigenous communities in the case of Bolivia and Ecuador) as the main areas of discontinuity. On the other hand, a fair amount of continuity can be observed in crucial areas such as the dependence on extractivism, a fiscal policy still far from progressive tax systems, failed attempt at incorporating excluded groups of the popular sectors (Silva & Rossi, 2018), unresponsiveness towards women and LGBTB demands and rights (Friedman, 2009), and trade agreements (Costoya et al., 2010).

Despite that even critics of the post-neoliberal project recognize that the ascendancy of left and centre-left governments during the first decade of the 2000s stands out as a historic period which brought unprecedented social and political transformations (Kingstone, 2018), and considering the impact that the end of the commodity boom driven by the slowing of Chinese growth had on pink-tide governments, both the authors who are in favour of the analytical utilities of the concept of 'post-neoliberalism' (North & Clark, 2017; Ruckert et al., 2017), as well as those who discard it (Stolowicz, 2015; Webber, 2017), agree on the contradictory nature of 'post-neoliberal' regimes and the limits of capacity to transcend neoliberalism.

Why 'post-neoliberal' governments could not deliver on the expectations of moving away from neoliberalism? Just as with neoliberalism, there is a risk of generalization when addressing this question, as governments carried out different policies in different and various socio-political contexts. However, three factors in which most of the governments seem to converge according to the literature are: first, the unviability of advancing post-neoliberal reforms and policies while relying significantly on primary extractive industries. This replicates to some extent the historic disadvantaged position of Latin American economies in the global order whilst erodes the life and interests of peasants and indigenous communities. Second, the reluctance or incapacity of post-neoliberal states for solving the contradictions of neoliberalism and, on the contrary, act upon its structural premises—crucially, the sanctity of private property and the idea of rational individuals who need to be protected of market's externalities (Taylor, 2009); and third, the reaction and ascendance of the new right-wing versions of authoritarian neoliberalism, epitomised by the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

As argued by Barry Cannon (2016) and others (Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014), despite that Right-wing hegemony was challenged with varying degrees (from high degrees in countries such as Venezuela and Bolivia to low degrees in Colombia) by left and centre left governments, the right still controls much of the economic and ideological apparatuses in most of the region' (Cannon, 2016, p. 110). The back to power of the right in countries such as Chile, Brazil and Uruguay through institutional, non-institutional and violent strategies, proved that even when their influence and electoral power diminished during the post-neoliberal period, the right, along with the domestic elites and business groups, have enough power to reorganise for the defence of their interests (Cannon, 2016; Luna & Kaltwasser, 2014; Petras, 1997).

5 | BEYOND NEOLIBERAL RESILIENCE AND CONTESTATION?

In Chile, the coordinated evasion of subway by secondary school students after the announcement of a 30 pesos increase on fares in October 2019, escalated to demands for a new constitution and the resignation of president Piñera, who is held responsible for what according to Amnesty International has been 'the worst human rights crisis since General Augusto Pinochet's regime' (Amnesty International, 2019). Since the mid of the 2000s a constellation of anti-neoliberal movements started to emerge in some cases and reorganize in others after a decade of technocratic consensus and demobilization (Donoso & Von Bülow, 2017; Garcés, 2012; Rodríguez, 2020). Feminist mobilizations and the movement for the right to dignify pensions (No más AFP) had gained momentum the years

before the social uprising. Given the symbolic importance of Chile, the current cycle of protests seems to end a circle beginning with the brutal implantation of the first neoliberal reforms in the region and the world.

'Neoliberalism was born and will die in Chile' a message on a wall in Santiago read. Indeed, the consequences of the process of neoliberalization in areas such as social security, health, education, and access to water are at the core of the current uprising. Moreover, the 1980 Constitution, written under Pinochet's dictatorship to codify the new neoliberal socio-economic order will be replaced as a result of a political agreement forced by the revolt of October. In this new scenario which includes the ongoing social crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a constitutional convention to be held in April 2022, and impunity over human right violations and state repression, the atmosphere is one of hopes, fears and uncertainty (Mac-Clure et al., 2020). Considering this new cycle of protests along with the recent the electoral triumphs of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico, Luis Arces in Bolivia, and Alberto Fernandez in Argentina, it is difficult not think that we are about to enter into a renovated cycle of contestation and subsequent neoliberal resilience.

But perhaps bringing about a post-neoliberal world requires a re-description of the politics of neoliberalism and its effects, one that untangles the practices of resistance and contestation of neoliberalism from its object of critique of which finally its critical purchase depends on. This is indeed what some social movements and Latin American intellectuals have been attempting to do. In what follows I will briefly sketch out three ways in which attempts at undoing some of the categories implicated in the resilience-contestation narrative have been recently made. I suggest these trends help to broaden the scope of research and discussion about the politics of neoliberalism in the region.

5.1 | Undoing development

One way of thinking about alternatives beyond neoliberalism is to conceptualise development as a political construct, a set of practices and discourses emanating from the Western world to account for the social and political realities of the Global South. In this vein, Arturo Escobar coined the term 'post-development' to account for a decentred vision of development that crucially would allow to identify alternatives to development rather than a development alternative (Escobar, 2011). Another important contribution in this line is the work of the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. She has juxtaposed Subaltern Studies with indigenous intellectual history to recover theoretical and methodological tools and use them to both approach the social realities of Latin America and to resist intellectual colonialism. Finally, de Sousa Santos (2015) and his Epistemologies of the South project seeks to develop critical theory rooted in the experiences of those who struggle and resist oppression, including the marginalization of their own experiences and knowledge. Finally, decolonial feminist approaches have articulated Marxist, feminist and ecofeminist perspectives on development in order to highlight the centrality of gender equality for the sustainability of life (Lagunas-Vázquez et al., 2016). By taking seriously the realities of colonialism in the region, these approaches have advanced the idea that given that different accounts of neoliberalism in Latin America assert a reality of poverty, inequality and oppression, the multiplicity of knowledges and practices constructed and used by the oppressed over two centuries can be useful to reframe the problem of neoliberalism.

5.2 | Broadening the spectrum

Another strategy to think beyond the dynamics of neoliberal resilience and contestation is to take both sides of the equation seriously and deepen the democratic side, taking it beyond its inherently limited western liberal formulation. As I have shown, the political and socio-economic de-incorporation was one of the key failures of neoliberalism as pointed out by extant research. Indeed, most citizens in Latin American countries do not value institutional politics precisely because they do not see neither their interests represented nor their voices heard

(Latinobarómetro, 2017). Moreover, under post-neoliberal governments tensions have arisen between institutionalised social movements and those excluded from the political arena (Petras, 1997). However, as mentioned by several scholars, autonomy is especially valued by some social movements, whether as the core of their politics or as of a component of it. In Latin America the politics of autonomy developed by social movements does not equate to a total refusal of state politics; rather, it entails a complex relationship which involves a stance 'in, away and against' the state and the market (Dinerstein, 2014).

5.3 | Bringing capitalism back into the analysis

The recent trends in the developments of forms of resistance to neoliberal policies by different social movements have brought back capitalism into the analysis. During the last 10 years, there have been several attempts to clarify of the nebulous phenomenon of neoliberalism. Institutionalised, state-centred research seeking to specify and give detailed account of how neoliberalism works in reality and in practice implicitly and explicitly criticises what they consider accounts which are too abstract, general and totalising (Larner, 2003; Perreault & Martin, 2005). The reworking of classic dependency theory by the World System approach, its distinction between core, peripheral and semiperipheral states (Grosfoguel, 2007; Wallerstein & Wallerstein, 2004), has provided if not a bridge between those approaches, a fruitful articulation of the global impersonal socio-economic processes of global capitalism and its concrete local and territorialised manifestations. This is in line with indigenous movements, agro-industrial, feminist and other urban poor movements which have highlighted the devastating effects of the extractivist logic underlying the capitalist mode of organising production, consumption and distribution of goods in contemporary societies on communities and people (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). Accordingly, together with a questioning of the plausibility of the 'post' Washington consensus developing a corrected 'more human' versions of neoliberalism, renewed attention has been placed on the underlying dynamics of capitalist accumulation (Heyes et al., 2012). The recognition of the shortcomings and advantages of both theorising at the level of capitalist economy, capitalist social formation and neoliberalism might also provide a productive way of reframing the politics of neoliberalism in Latin America, as the effects of the ecological crisis unfold in a context of greater social inequalities, informal jobs and precarity, in ways gravely endanger our very survival.

These reflexions constitute a tentative beginning aimed at identifying some of the possible ways in which the conversation about the politics of neoliberalism can be broadened out. The sense of imagination and anticipation that some of these developments bring about can be strategic both in strengthening the analysis of the wide range of mechanisms and scales through which neoliberalism operates and in offering a realistic account of the historical and intellectual legacies underpinning the considerable force and mutability of neoliberalism; granting legitimacy to the multiplicity of paradigms and crossing disciplinary boundaries may be fundamental to cultivating a real sense of possibility.

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