

Between Realism and Revolt:  
Governing Cities in the Crisis of Neoliberal Globalism

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*In Solidarity with Black Lives Matter*

*and with Love to Natalia*

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## Contributing Investigators

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This volume was developed from an ESRC funded study *Collaborative Governance Under Austerity: An Eight-case Comparative Study* (ES/L012898/1). The author draws on case studies led by co-investigators, citing their published works and unpublished project reports:

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## Preface

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This book explores urban governance in the “age of austerity”, focusing on the period between the global financial crisis of 2008-9 and the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. It was originally born of a question about how modes of governing have been transforming in the post-war period, particularly the proposition that where hierarchies once ruled, networks now predominate. With this question in the background, the book considers urban governance from the perspective of governability. How did cities navigate the crisis and the aftermath of austerity, with what political ordering and disordering dynamics at the forefront? To attempt an answer, it engages with two influential currents, Urban Regime Theory and Gramscian state theory, with a view to understanding how governance enabled austerity, deflected or intensified localised expressions of crisis, and generated more-or-less resonant political alternatives.

The book follows the critical tradition in exploring mechanisms that produce inequality and weighing struggles for equality. The goal was to locate reasoned, if cautious, grounds for hope, or even optimism, while looking unpalatable realities squarely in the face. This approach is at odds with the managerialist crusade to monetise research through services rendered to “stakeholders”. It also problematises the voluntarist ethos in anarchist and post-Marxist theory, expressed in the proposition that “we can always just begin by doing things differently” (Biesta, 2008: 176). The reader is invited to consider whether this attempt to hold structure and action in a constructive tension works.

The research was generously funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council under the title *Collaborative Governance under Austerity: An Eight-case Comparative Study* (ES/L012898/1). An earlier phase of research involving two of the cities discussed in this volume, Barcelona and Leicester, was funded by the Spanish Government’s Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness under its National Development Plan (Ref: CSO2012-32817) as part of a larger study of austerity governance in Spain and the UK: *Transformations of Urban Governance in the Context of the Crisis* (TRANSGOB).<sup>1</sup> The research discussed here was inspired by TRANSGOB and the outstanding leadership of its Principal Investigator, Dr Ismael Blanco (Autonomous University of Barcelona).

Research for the ESRC project was conducted over three years by a fantastic team working on eight case studies in the cities of Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Greater

Dandenong (Melbourne), Dublin, Leicester, Montréal and Nantes. The lead investigators (named as contributors), and research assistants who played a prominent role in the local case studies are due immense thanks: Ioannis Chorianopoulos and Naya Tselepi (Athens), Madeleine Pill (Baltimore), Ismael Blanco, Yuni Salazar and Iolande Bianchi (Barcelona), Helen Sullivan, Brendan Gleeson and Hayley Henderson (Greater Dandenong), Niamh Gaynor (Dublin), Adrian Bua and Mercè Cortina Oriol and Ed Thompson (Leicester), Pierre Hamel, Roger Keil and Grégoire Autin (Montréal) and Steven Griggs, David Howarth and Andrés Feandeiro (Nantes). Our project consultant, Paul O'Brien also played a major role in the project, creating vital channels for communicating the research to non-academics. It was a privilege to work with these colleagues and to be able to draw from their research in the current volume. The current author, Principal Investigator on the ESRC project, is entirely responsible for the analytical framework employed and transversal conclusions here drawn, for the secondary analysis of published and unpublished research documents, and for errors of fact and interpretation. A team reading of the project and its practical implications for building alternative urban futures will be published by Bristol in a collectively authored companion volume (Davies *et al*, 2021).

Until the gravity of the Coronavirus pandemic became clear, I imagined the book to be an up-to-date account of urban politics in the eight cities, and of the emancipatory potentialities in urban struggles. I found the early weeks of the crisis disorienting and the immediate temptation, when it became clear what a game-changer COVID-19 could be, was to try and adapt the text. But the folly of a retrofit quickly became obvious. It would only muddy and obscure the story the book was supposed to be telling about governance and resistance in the age of austerity, while saying little of value about the implications of the virus for urban futures. For this reason, I decided to let the text speak to the period in which it was researched and written, with a few references to the pandemic where they seem prudent and a short Afterword considering early implications for governability and transformation. If the crisis is truly epoch-breaking, and makes the book obsolete, then *c'est la vie*. The story of urban austerity governance 2008-2020 is, in any case, an important record of the historical and political period preceding the Coronavirus, the conditions into which it erupted, and for considering the kind of urban worlds that could plausibly emerge from it.

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To lead a major research project was my main ambition, when I joined De Montfort University in 2011. It is thanks to the enabling environment at DMU that I was able to do so. Particular thanks go to colleagues in the *Centre for Urban Research on Austerity*, especially Adrian Bua, Mercè Cortina Oriol and Ed Thompson, Jenni Cauvain, Steven Griggs and Valeria Guarneros Meza for their support over many years. I am also very grateful for support from Leicester Castle Business School and the University's Research Services Directorate. I single out Jan Holland, Suzanne Walker and April Perrie for their immense efforts in getting the administrative side of the project up and running.

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# Introduction

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In April 2009 soon-to-be British PM, David Cameron, announced that “the age of irresponsibility” was “giving way to the age of austerity”.<sup>ii</sup> In his final budget as UK Labour Chancellor in 2010, Alistair Darling warned that repairing the damage to public finances done by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) would require “deeper and tougher” cuts than even the Thatcher years (cited in Elliot, 2010). With these soundbites, austerity became the official bipartisan doctrine of the British political establishment, embraced by forces from the moderate left to the Tory right. The national austerity consensus was not seriously challenged in mainstream British politics until the election of democratic socialist, Jeremy Corbyn, to the leadership of the UK Labour Party in 2015. As it was in Britain, so it was across Europe and North America. “Age of austerity” doctrines became ingrained in the politics of conservatives, liberals and social democratic pragmatists alike. More than a decade after the GFC, cities were still plagued with austerity, even as it lost traction in mainstream political discourse (Jordan, 2019).<sup>iii</sup> Its continuing legacies included municipal retrenchment and bankruptcy, the evisceration of public welfare, coercive state rescaling and restructuring and pervasive neoliberal groupthink with its complement in corporate handouts and competitive urban growth strategies: the latter often from the realms of fantasy (Dean, 2014).

It is well-established that austerity targeted the worst-off (Meegan et al, 2014; Hastings et al, 2017), whilst elements of the middle class were also sucked into economic precarity (Blanco et al, 2020; Gaynor, 2020). Cucca and Ranci (2017: 267) diagnosed three common characteristics emerging from neoliberalisation, aggravated by austerity: “state delegation of further responsibility for local economic development as well as social integration, strong cuts in central funding and tighter constraints on local budgets”. They found that even in cities like Copenhagen and Munich, not commonly associated with austerity urbanism, any balance between social inclusion and competitiveness had tipped so far to the latter that little remained of the so-called “European City Model”.

This book is about the governance of this seemingly ubiquitous problematic in its many local determinations and distinctions, set against the international backdrop of austerity and the increasing political and economic turbulence arguably constituting what Gramscian thinkers call an “interregnum” in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism (Stahl, 2019). Neoliberal globalism envisages an open, competitive world market order, under an

internationalised regulatory apparatus governed by entities including the IMF, OECD, WTO and the World Bank. In the hegemonic ideal of neoliberal globalism, the primary task of states, always vulnerable to the investment whim of mobile capital, is to create markets and enhance competitiveness throughout the governmental apparatus (Broomhill, 2001). In the neoliberal globalist imaginary, cities and city-regions became particularly important as competing agglomeration magnets. Successful cities equip themselves to attract investors and mobile workers from the financial, informational and “creative” sectors (Florida, 2003) while unsuccessful ones, unable to rebuild moribund industrial economies, de-populate and go bankrupt, like Detroit (Eisinger, 2014).

Neoliberal globalism constituted a powerful orthodoxy in international political economy. It dominated largely unquestioned by European and American political and economic elites from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the beginning of the GFC, and then provided the ideological warrant for austerity construed as medicine to refit the state, reduce welfare dependency and enhance competitiveness. At times in the intervening decade, it seemed that the orthodoxy had held. As Slobodian put it (in Brandes, 2019: 642), as of early 2016 the “reproduction of the status quo seemed all but assured”. In the tumultuous period since, it has lost much of its political grip and efficacy, albeit with considerable geographical unevenness. Efforts to restore neoliberal business-as-usual faltered. Recoveries were uneven and often paltry, and global growth stagnated. Even before COVID-19, recessionary and ecological threats abounded. Public weariness and resentment were mounting, while threats from left and far right were emerging to challenge, and in the latter case try and rescue, the political-economic orders through which austerity was mandated and proselytised. Today, the neoliberal globalist hubris that blossomed with the fall of the Berlin Wall is over (Marquand, 2004). The normalisation of austerity as a governing strategy is over too, and sometimes even declared to be over by leaders of the very parties that were once its greatest enthusiasts. Even before COVID-19, neoliberal globalism confronted a raft of unintended consequences, contradictions and rebellions, whose politics were incubated, enacted and dramatized in cities across the world. The research discussed in this volume was conducted as this portentous historical moment began to crystalize. Gramsci famously wrote (1971: 275-6; Q3, §34),<sup>iv</sup>

If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant”, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great

masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously ... The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

Gramsci here alludes to periods of weakening and contested hegemony, stagnant and declining accumulation regimes, fragmenting social orders and sharpening polarisations that can foreshadow sharp, conjuncturally decisive, crises of authority, legitimacy and governability. He argued that in periods like this, new political forces take to the stage and begin to contest and re-politicise that which was previously taken for granted or taboo. Outcomes, however, depend on political struggle. Thinking back to the post-WW1 period he went on to ask “[w]ill the interregnum, the crisis whose historically normal solution is blocked ... necessarily be resolved in favour of a restoration of the old” (1971: 276; Q3, §34)? Stahl (2019: 336) further defines the interregnum as a “period of uncertainty, confusion, and disagreement among the dominant elite, in which former ideologies, although they still have institutional power, lose traction and become disoriented”. Although there are doubtless many exceptions and qualifications, the notion of the “interregnum”, describing extended periods of turbulence, uncertainty and crisis, disrupting phases of stronger hegemony, is a useful provocation for considering the governance of cities since the Global Financial Crisis (hereafter GFC). A longstanding premise of urban studies is that the city is no mere agglomeration magnet. It is also the political crucible in which urban, national and international orders are made and unmade (Lefebvre, 2003). Focusing on governance and governability, the aim is to cast light on mechanisms of normalisation, disruption and transformation through the age of austerity, and contribute to theoretical discussions on the provenance and politics of Gramsci’s interregnum, as a purportedly defining, if variegated, characteristic of the period. Chapter 1 develops this central analytical theme.

## Problematizing Urban Austerity Governance

The research discussed in chapters 2-7 was conducted over three years from April 2015 to July 2018, in eight cities: Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Greater Dandenong (Melbourne), Dublin, Leicester, Montréal and Nantes. It sought to explore how urban governance navigated the “age of austerity”, in the wider context of prolonged

neoliberalisation, severe economic crises and restructurings, and struggles for alternative political economies. The initial guiding focus was, what happens to “collaborative governance” in austere conditions? Collaboration, in the generic sense of governmental and non-governmental actors cooperating in pursuit of common or congruent goals, is both as old as government itself and pervasive. Not even the most extreme authoritarian regime or state apparatus can entirely subsume its economy and society (Davies, 2012a: 2700). However, the research was informed by the peculiar ideological significance acquired by the idea of “partnership” during the “global capitalist renaissance” of the 1990s and early 2000s (Marquand, 2004) and the neoliberal boom (sometimes called the “great moderation” in the boom-bust cycle). International organisations and governments sought to construct state-market-civil society partnerships, focusing particularly on the mobilisation of business and civil society actors. They privileged collaboration variously as a necessity in dealing with “wicked problems”, as a rapidly proliferating phenomenon, and as enacting a new and virtuous form of sociability in de-traditionalising, post-scarcity and knowledge-rich societies (Giddens, 1996; Davies, 2011a; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018). They also privileged locality, neighbourhood and place as promising arenas for “new” modes of collaborative, participatory and partnership-based governing. This was because of the close proximity of governmental and non-governmental actors in towns and cities and the rehabilitation of cities and city-regions in elite policy discourses, as engines of growth and cultural vitality (Konvitz, 2016). This study took the city as its point of departure for similar reasons, *inter alia* because cities are at the front line of austerity (Peck, 2012), have long been laboratories for governance experiments (Swyngedouw, 2005) constructing socio-spatial proximities and distances between governmental and non-governmental actors (John, 2009) and are a key locus of resistance to austerity and neoliberalism (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017).

What made collaborative governance especially attractive to governing elites in this period? Contributory factors included the easing of brute poverty in the global north in the decades after WWII, the emergence of so-called “post-scarcity” societies (Giddens, 1996), universal education, the apparent moderation in the capitalist boom-bust cycle after the tumult of the 1970s and 1980s and the quelling of organised working-class struggles located in stricken industrial heartlands. Another crucial trend was the “rise and rise” of “civil society” in liberal-democratic governing ideologies (Edwards, 2009: 11), as the “working class” lost political and discursive traction (re-emerging in bastardised form in Britain when the toxic

prefix “white” became fashionable after the global financial crisis). These conditions were thought to have unleashed potential for new modes of sociability, complementing much-heralded urban agglomeration economies, in which networked relations based on trust could flourish (Davies, 2012a: 2690). Thompson (2003: 40) described the ethos of “network governance”, as being dependent on “co-existent attributes such as sympathy, customary reciprocity, moral norms, common experience, trust, duty, obligation and similar virtues”. For networks to thrive, “a generalized trust, honesty, and solidarity must transcend any minor negotiating infringements” and “a shared common overriding objective” must exist. The presumption that we were entering an epoch of network governance rested on these “ethical virtues” flourishing in prosperous societies with growing levels of connectivity (Thompson, 2003: 47).

Whereas “collaboration” in its Fordist or corporatist guise saw worker representatives bargaining with employers over pay, hours and conditions, hailing “civil society” as a “partner” gave it a very different valence. The “new” state-civil society partnership was to be a constructive enterprise, mobilising resources around (at once banal and fantastical) place-based governing objectives articulating what Davies (2010) called the “contributory principle”. Nor was it confined to the Global North. Although conditions purportedly favouring this new mode of governance never existed in much of the urban world, international organisations and experts nevertheless promoted them through more-or-less coercive policy transfers; from structural adjustment programmes to government grants and assistance from NGOs (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Davies and Msengana Ndlela, 2015). At a meeting in June 2015 to develop parameters for this study, Professor David Howarth (Essex) coined the term “collaborative moment” to capture the international zeitgeist.

Critics quickly tempered the epochal sense of excitement about the transformative potential in collaborative governance, even as the neoliberal boom continued (Davies, 2002; Marinetto, 2003). Leading proponents Sørensen and Torfing (2018) observed three prominent criticisms: that collaborative governance was a marginal phenomenon within the state apparatus, that even if significant it was nothing new, and that it had “dangerous implications” for democracy and inclusivity. At the same time, suggestions that the neoliberal boom heralded a “post-crisis” phase in the development of capitalism, in which old cleavages would dissolve, and trust-based modes of sociability could flourish, were greeted with the warning that nasty surprises lay in store (Callinicos, 2001: 55). The first surprise

materialised with the GFC itself, which Giddens wrongly claimed had been “foreseen by very few if anyone” (2010: 36). In fact, pre-GFC literatures were replete with warnings about mounting contradictions in the neoliberal growth model (e.g. Harman, 2007). Žižek (2009: 9) aptly described establishment denials that the GFC was foreseen or foreseeable as a “sustained effort of wilful ignorance”.

The most intense periods in the GFC occurred in 2008-9 with the international wave of recessions, and again in 2011-13 with the sovereign debt crisis and retrenchment in the Eurozone, and peaks in the international resistance to neoliberal austerity marked respectively by the occupied squares movements and the “Arab Spring” uprisings against dictatorships, many influenced by neoliberal globalism, in the Middle East and Northern Africa. However, a degree of neoliberal normality was gradually if unevenly restored, even as many countries afflicted by the crisis struggled to recover peak output and trend growth rates (see chapter 2) and the Arab Spring was defeated by brute force and attrition. In this period, national and international institutions combined to manage the fallout and re-allocate the costs to citizens. Forces seeking to construe the GFC as a crisis of capitalism, financialised capitalism or of neoliberalism did gain traction in public debate (Mason, 2012), but were soon overwhelmed by neoliberal orthodoxy reasserted in the governmental sphere and mainstream media. The faux Keynesianism of the immediate post-crisis period (Evans and McBride, 2017: 3-4) was supplanted by an aggressive neoliberal austerity doctrine, embraced with greater or lesser enthusiasm by social democrats, liberals and conservatives and which the international wave of rebellions could not overcome (Theodore, 2020). In hindsight, the window of relative normalisation after the 2011 crises and revolts appears to have signalled a brief, tenuous and geographically uneven restoration of neoliberal globalism in-between phases of tumult. Crouch (2011) labelled this restorationist phase “the strange non-death of neoliberalism”.

However, critical thinkers were sceptical that neoliberal globalism could fully recover its hegemonic position, arguing that the GFC had showed it to be “dominant but dead”, dubbing it “zombie neoliberalism” (Peck, 2010) or “zombie capitalism” (Harman, 2009). In the next phase of its crisis, coinciding with the three-year period of this study, neoliberal globalism was de-stabilised by more portentous and dangerous forces. In 2016, neoliberal globalists received a second round of surprises with the UK Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency. With the election of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency of

Brazil in 2018, and the coup against Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2019, these were the most dramatic exemplars of a much more extensive international backlash: the rise of conservative nationalist or neo-reactionary forces across a broad spectrum, many influenced by or tending towards neo-fascism (Brown, 2018). So-called “populist” and self-anointed “alt-right” currents pose a serious threat to global peace (such as it was), and to (post-) democracy in its already shrivelled, neoliberalised form (Crouch, 2004). Whether they threaten neoliberalism itself is another matter, for while nativism contradicts the pseudo-cosmopolitan ethos of neoliberal globalism, fascism and other forms of right-wing authoritarianism have long served as mechanisms of capitalist restoration. Conservative nationalist currents have pursued a variety of measures associated with neoliberalism including tax cuts and corporate subsidies (Peck and Theodore, 2019), while also distancing themselves politically from the idea of austerity. With the outbreak of Coronavirus, austerity has, in many countries, been at least temporarily abandoned as state ideology and fiscal policy (Standing and Davies, 2020). The research discussed in subsequent chapters was conceived before the neo-reactionary offensive really gained momentum, and this is not its subject. However, the book does highlight the conditions in which such currents have been able to foment.

At the same time, a heterodox array of egalitarian anti-austerity forces re-emerged across Europe and the USA, including “new municipalist” currents (Russell, 2019; Thompson, 2020). These currents, discussed further in chapter 1, have been influenced mainly by network-theoretical ideas linked to Anarchist, Altermondialiste and libertarian socialist traditions, in which solidarity is anchored by affinity and counter-hegemony is rejected as strategy (Day, 2005). Writing in the heady days of 2011, Mason (2012: 84) captured the zeitgeist in his celebration of networked resistance: “It can achieve those elements of instant community, solidarity, shared space and control that were at the heart of social revolutions in the early industrial age. It can be... a space to form the bonds that would take them through an insurrection... a means absolutely imbued with the nature of ends”. Chapters 5-8 explore the politics of new municipalism and other counter-currents in greater depth, assessing achievements, limitations and potentialities for transforming urban governance.

The study was originally framed as an inquiry into what happened to the “collaborative moment” after the GFC. Did claims for the transformative potential in collaborative governance stand up, or were they confined – in relative terms - to “good times” associated with the upbeat tonalities of the neoliberal boom (Davies and Blanco, 2017: 1532)? Early on,

however, it became clear that the question “what happened to collaborative governance under austerity” had quite different valences in the eight cities – more so than anticipated. Nor did the term “austerity” translate as well across the eight cities as anticipated; either in terms of a state-led effort driving retrenchment and restructuring, or the localised construal of governing challenges. The same was true of collaborative governance, and the extent to which the ideas of the “collaborative moment” resonated beyond its European heartlands.

These circumstances called for a broader comparative framing, where the “age of austerity” takes in overlapping but differentiated processes of neoliberalisation, structural crisis and crisis construals, and austerity itself is a concept referencing markedly diverse governing practices. They also call for the reframing of “collaborative governance”. The book develops a variation on the theme of Stone’s (2015) concept of the “Urban Political Order”, through which he revised earlier thinking about urban regimes (Stone, 1989) to take account of the influence of civil society actors in the governing arena. Here, “urban political (dis)order” denotes the more-or-less durable multi-scalar alliances and conflicts among state, market and civil society actors working in, with or against crises, neoliberalism and austerity. In foregrounding both ordering and disordering dynamics, the concept echoes the Gramscian idea that as an effective governing ensemble, the local state is constituted through alliances of governmental and non-governmental actors whose hegemony is rarely comprehensive, require considerable effort and resources for everyday reproduction, can be internally differentiated (Blanco, 2015a) and are generally subject to political contestation and internal contradictions (Jessop, 1997). The purpose is to problematise governability in a way that discloses mechanisms stabilising and undermining austere neoliberalism, or facilitating resistance and transformation, making them visible as social relations within an encompassing analytical framework, elaborated in chapter 1 and applied throughout subsequent chapters. Chapter 8 reflects on what the research reveals about governability in the crises of neoliberal globalism and the potential for emancipatory politics incubating in the urban sphere. The Afterword reflects briefly on the implications of COVID-19, which erupted just as the first draft of the manuscript was completed.



## Eight Cities as Case Studies

The project followed Savitch and Kantor (2002: 15) in studying cities with a degree of similarity, but also variation (also Storper and Scott, 2016). Some similarities and variations were anticipated and designed into the research, while others were disclosed in the study itself or emerged in real-time to disturb prior assumptions. The research derives from a tri-continental sample of one Australian, five European, two North American cities, of different sizes, traditions, populations and positions in urban economic hierarchies. It was conducted in Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Dublin, Greater Dandenong (Melbourne), Leicester, Montréal and Nantes. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of each city. The selection was intended to capture a spectrum of cities occupying different positions in spatial and scalar hierarchies, and facing a range of related, if non-identical, socio-economic challenges in the post-crisis period.

All the cities are located in countries which went through Fordist or “peripheral Fordist” development phases based schematically on (semi)organised capitalism (Lipietz, 1982) and states providing at least some collective consumption goods; what Jessop (1999) called the Keynesian Welfare National Regimes established across Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand in the post-WWII period. All have confronted crises and dislocations since the 1970s and pursued a variety of trajectories away from the Fordist archetype towards neoliberalisation (see chapters 4 and 5). For the duration of this study, between 2015 and 2018, the cities were all led by municipal governments gravitating from a nebulous centre towards the left of the political spectrum. Given the international bi-partisan austerity consensus, this alignment was helpful in cataloguing urban responses and adaptations to the austere orthodoxy from the so-called “progressive” wing.

When site selection was made, austerity was very much an existing or looming problematic for all the cities. However, the combination of urban particularities and changing political circumstances meant that by the time fieldwork commenced, this was not entirely the case. Barcelona had elected an anti-austerity municipal leadership in May 2015, altering its political priorities if not its fiscal situation within the Spanish austerity state, whilst the city of Nantes saw itself as somewhat insulated from pressures affecting many other French cities and described its response to the increasing squeeze from central government as ‘Keynesian’ (Griggs and Howarth, 2016). Meanwhile, the threat of an ideologically driven austerity

programme in Australia under the brief Premiership of Tony Abbott, had receded by 2015 (see chapter 2).

According to Mufti (2005), the possibility of having to transform objects of analysis exists in any comparative exercise. With this in mind, and instead of swapping case studies to enhance similarity, the project team decided to work with widening asymmetries between the eight cities. It adopted a de-centred case study approach in place of the anticipated heuristic comparison, and re-problematized the core terms of the project, “collaborative governance” and “austerity”. This re-reading of the research, through the framework of governability and urban political (dis)orderings is the author’s approach to bringing eight de-centred case studies into comparative dialogue.

### Issues in Comparative Urban Studies

Traditional comparative urban research has been subjected to searching critique for its tendency to shrink the urban universe to a small sub-set of cases revolving around Northern “global” cities and the concepts generated from these studies (e.g. MacFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011; 2016). Robinson (2016) encourages urbanists to think cities “through elsewhere”, bringing new places and questions into the ambit of urban research. Studying austerity governance through the lens of cities moving away from Fordism pre-supposes that which never existed in much of world: an organised economy and evolved local state apparatus, with its corollary in a relatively mature civil society. Nevertheless, the differential impact of the 2008 crisis on the governance of cities emerging from the KNWS, Fordist and peripheral Fordist traditions, remains an important endeavour in understanding urban change and merits a defined research programme. This was the premise of the study and it reflects the geographical and analytical positionings of the author.

As a comparative study, this work is anchored in familiar framings of city, city-region and metropolis. So-called “methodological cityism” (Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2015), the tendency to view urbanity in terms of clearly demarcated settlements defined by administrative and cartographic boundaries, has also been subjected to powerful criticism. In developing the concept of planetary urbanism, Brenner and Schmid (2015) re-read Lefebvre’s claim that the world is becoming completely urbanised. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, familiar modes of concentrated urbanisation continue, but alongside increasingly extended, elasticated, networked and differentiated forms which tend to erode the distinction between urbanity and its outside (Brenner, 2018). Planetary urbanism has, in turn, been criticized from several

standpoints. Post-structuralist thinkers see it as reproducing universalising, masculinist and heteronormative perspectives (Derickson, 2018). Scholars concerned with analytical precision argue that if “urban” is unmoored from agglomeration dynamics, density, centrality, nodality and propinquity, it has no inside, no outside and becomes effectively meaningless (Storper and Scott, 2016). The present work does not directly engage in these debates. Like any analytical lens, the city-regional focus has limitations, but also strengths. It is also reflexive on methodological cityism. All the case studies read urban governance in the context of wider geographies - inside, outside, above and below - and with regard to jurisdictional and territorial complexities associated with governance and resistance.

Robinson (2016) identifies two modalities of comparative analysis. The ‘genetic’ mode traces interconnected roots of repeated, related but distinctive urban processes: how specific processes or features recur and diverge in different, but inter-linked cities. The comparisons in this study are “genetic” in that they explore the governance of different cities in and against landscapes of austerity urbanism (itself bounded). In broader terms, the research addresses the question of governance and governability in relation to a problematic articulated in all the cities: rising public need and demand, juxtaposed with diminishing or flat-lining resources (Cucca and Ranci, 2017; Henderson, Sullivan and Gleeson, 2020). Robinson observed that in Clarke’s (1995) comparative taxonomy of institutional logics arising from urban restructuring and de-industrialisation, we see the postulation of a process affecting many places within the US, in different ways. Similarly, this volume analyses situated case studies through which it discerns ways of governing in and beyond the neoliberalisation-crisis-austerity conjuncture. Chapter 8 draws the threads together in discussing patterns and distinctions. Robinson’s “generative” mode shifts from interconnected processes to analytical proximity and conceptual insight. Concluding reflections on governability, hegemony and (dis)ordering seek to be generative in this sense.

As explained earlier, tasks of “complexity reduction” and “enforced selection” led the project team to construe cities and city-regions as an apt focus for the research (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 151). The locus of comparison within this framing was the governing strategies cities adopt, and the range of actors involved in producing, executing and resisting them, through more-or-less durable vertical and horizontal coalitions. These strategies and coalitions are exemplified in each city through empirical accounts of policy arenas, programmes, institutions, discourses and practices (chapters 4 and 5). However, they do not

form units of comparison in themselves. The objective is rather to develop an account of the major political-economic currents involved in defining and addressing (or potentially refuting) the austerity problematic in each city. All the case studies are about “governability” in this strategic sense. The task is to identify prominent themes in the constitution of urban political (dis)orders and develop insights into the characteristics of the period defined by Gramscian thinkers as an “interregnum” in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism (chapter 8). Retroductive analysis is applied to (mid-level) explanations for the urban political (dis)orderings, continuities and changes occurring through the age of austerity (Easton, 2010).

### Data and Analysis

The following chapters draw on a variety of project resources. Eight case study-based papers, together with an introductory essay by Theodore (2020), were published in issue 42(1) of the *Journal of Urban Affairs* (2020).<sup>v</sup> The team developed a common repository of 26 unpublished (confidential) working papers written in English, constituting a shared data resource. These papers are cited throughout and referenced in the bibliography. The Principal Investigator (current author) coded these sources into a transversal NVIVO project, from which the current volume draws. Fieldwork was conducted between autumn 2015 and spring 2018. Each research team applied a common instrument, adapted for locality, snowballing the sample to determine which actors, institutions, policies practices, spatialities and territorialisations should constitute the foci of inquiry. The composition of the dataset varied a little between cities. Each team undertook up to 40 semi-structured interviews, alongside 3-5 observations and focus groups. In each city, researchers engaged a range of respondents, including elected politicians, public officials, business leaders, voluntary and community organisations, faith groups, services users, anti-austerity activists and trade unionists. The research teams used NVIVO to analyse local data. Common themes in the research instrument formed the basis for coding into major nodes relating to urban governing strategies and resistance in the age of austerity. Others were added by investigators to capture localised themes (as described by Henderson, Sullivan and Gleeson, 2020: 128).

Over the period of the study, four meetings of the international project team were held in Leicester (June 2015), Dublin (April 2016), Barcelona (January 2017) and Athens (January 2018) to work on emerging research questions, provisional findings and comparative insights.

Face-to-face meetings were supplemented with regular online discussions. Local teams organised stakeholder dissemination workshops to inform respondents, validate and extend findings. Original transcripts in English, French, Greek and Spanish are deposited with UK Data and can be consulted, subject to the consent of local investigators. A stakeholder report, in four languages, can be downloaded from the *Centre for Urban Research on Austerity* website.<sup>vi</sup>

### Further Methodological Considerations

One of the difficulties in comparing cities in eight different countries, was obtaining comparable data. As a project focused on governance, and unable to measure local economic indicators directly, quantifying retrenchment in one city, let alone attributing it to austerity (of whatever kind) or comparing it with other cities, turned out to be fraught with difficulty. Changing patterns in municipal spend, adjusted for inflation provide a rough proxy (chapter 2) but taken alone, this indicator could be very misleading. For example, baseline statistics suggested that over roughly the same time frame, the municipal budget of Athens was cut by less than that in Leicester, when adjusted for inflation. Yet this could not plausibly be construed as “less austerity” for Athens, once the impact of the economic crisis itself, the catastrophic collapse of the Greek economy, and the multiplication of human crises is considered. Nor does the proxy take account of population change and its impact on revenues and demands.

At the same time, the multitude of agencies and spatial/scalar/sectoral complexities involved with determining funding and spending patterns makes it impossible to obtain a plausible picture of austerity at urban, metropolitan and municipal scales without dedicated, granular research. The question of jurisdiction (Skelcher, 2005), which authority/agency funds and runs which services, was an important factor in all the cities, particularly the Federal systems of Australia, Canada, Spain and the USA where competing political parties, each with different responsibilities and sometimes different priorities, occupy the tiers making inter-scalar political relations difficult (see chapter 3). It was further complicated by the territorial (dis)organisation of functions at the municipal, metropolitan and city-regional levels.

Over and above these complexities, austerity data is also politically contentious. For example, the Irish government closed the national Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) shortly before the GFC, a move perceived to have been politically motivated. According to one

respondent, it “was to take out this particular body, to disperse it, and to disperse its staff. To make sure the kind of work that it had been doing - it had been documenting poverty, and issue-based poverty - didn’t happen anymore” (Gaynor, 2020: 79). Closure left the city bereft of data on the impact of austerity in Dublin’s neighbourhoods. This move was not a one-off. Government funded state-civil society partnerships were instructed not to hire researchers, and community development projects warned not to employ social policy officers. As Gaynor (2020: 79) observed, the squeeze on budget and remit, limiting activities to service provision alone, eliminated research capabilities in many civil society organisations. Consequently, Dublin lacked socio-economic data on trends in poverty and inequality arising from austerity. The inability of municipal officials to detail the extent of cuts or provide documentation, when asked, was also noteworthy. Dublin reinforced the message, also heard in Athens (Chorianopoulos, 2016), that the collection and control of data is political and that eviscerating public knowledge a potent weapon in the armouries of austere neoliberal regimes.

## Structure

Chapter 1 explains the analytical framework through which urban political (dis)orderings are read in subsequent chapters. It begins by engaging ongoing debates about vantage-point: whether it is better, from an anti-austerity perspective, to focus on diagnosing the workings of power through critical political economy, the disruptive potentialities in everyday and organised resistance or to hold the two positions in constructive tension. It secondly develops a framework for Gramscian regime analysis, through which it aims to avoid unhelpful (dominance vs resistance) dualisms (Las Heras, 2018). It thirdly navigates overlaps and distinctions between concepts often used inter-changeably, but which diverge empirically: crisis, neoliberalism and austerity. The discussion is framed by Gramscian approaches to the periodization of capitalist development, highlighted in urban studies by Peck’s two-part conjunctural analysis of late entrepreneurialism (2017a,b) and the positing of an interregnum in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism (Stahl, 2019). The research problem arising from this framing is how diverse experiences of crisis-neoliberalism-austerity interact and contribute to shaping urban political (dis)orders. The remaining chapters employ the

analytical lens to discuss the research undertaken in Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Greater Dandenong, Dublin, Leicester, Montréal and Nantes.

Chapter 2 introduces the eight cities and sets out data to provide a rough indication of how each has been affected (or not) by the GFC and subsequent fiscal squeeze. It proceeds to dis-aggregate and re-capitulate local configurations of neoliberalism-crisis-austerity. The main finding is that urban histories and traditions mediate the economic impact of the GFC as a local and global phenomenon, in sometimes unexpected ways. Second, variants of economic rationalism dominate governance thinking, even in Barcelona, the beacon of anti-austerity struggles. Third, however, while crises occur in cities as part of the tempo of capitalist boom-slump cycles, they are also weaponised to justify, oppose, or downplay austere neoliberalism. Diverging construals are significant determinants of urban governance, although (neoliberal) logics of scarcity and growth remain prevalent. Fourth, it is important to consider temporalities of neoliberalisation as well as its forms and hybridisations: fast, slow and static, forwards, sideways and also reverse. Finally, the chapter suggests caution in diagnosing an emerging late neoliberal or late entrepreneurial conjuncture (Peck, 2017a), a question revisited in chapter 8.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore different facets of urban regime politics – the political coalitions and alliances that accrete and deplete governing capacity in each city. Chapter 3 focuses on state rescaling and territorialisation from the perspective of how fiscal and jurisdictional reforms since the GFC have affected local political autonomy. One of the most important dimensions of regime politics is the relationship between tiers of the state and the jurisdictions of public authorities. Accordingly, the chapter considers structural changes in local government finance, fiscal disempowerment mechanisms, changes in functional and spatial jurisdiction, including developments in and barriers to city-regionalism. It concludes that whether or not directly implicated in austerity, municipalities have been subjected to further upward and downward constraints on effective political autonomy, either narrowing the scope of legal and legitimate political action or by exposing cities to market forces and lending urgency to the search for alternative sources of revenue through place-marketing and business partnership building.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore lateral relations between state, market and civil society actors and the regime configurations through which the eight cities are (un)governed, together with evidence of change since the GFC. Chapter 4 explores Athens, Baltimore,

Dublin and Leicester, where harshly austere and authoritarian modes of neoliberal governance were entrenched. Chapter 5 focuses on the cities that diverge from this pattern. It first discusses Montréal and Nantes, cities where regime capacities appear weak or diminishing, and then turns to Greater Dandenong and Barcelona. The latter cities were in a period of regime construction, respectively at a distance from, and against, austere neoliberalism. These chapters follow a similar structure, explaining local state strategies and tactics, restructuring in civil society, patterns in collaborative governance including coalition-building and maintenance, and regime continuity and change.

Chapters 6 and 7 explore resistance to austerity and its impact on urban regime politics. The chapters consider how resistance is effective, or not, limiting and containing the activities of multi-scalar neoliberal austerity regimes, blurring or hybridising agendas or leading towards more thoroughgoing transformations within the local state in its inclusive sense. Chapter 6 is concerned with how practices of resistance reconstitute contentious civil society, its generative capacity in producing durable forms of organisation, and rolling resistance beyond inaugurating events. It explores the resources for contentious politics and other progressive forms of activism within civil society itself, where this depletes the co-optive power of the governing regime but without necessarily altering its trajectory. Where chapter 6 focuses on how resistance multiplies contradictions and forges new solidarities, chapter 7 returns to the ever-present problem of containment, de-mobilisation and defeat. This endeavour casts light on a number of issues: the means by which urban regimes manage resistance, and insulate themselves from it, the chilling effects of social partnership traditions on anti-austerity struggles, and the limits on regime transition at the city scale disclosed by the study of Barcelona.

Chapter 8 considers insights and lessons drawn from conjunctural comparative analysis. It identifies five more-or-less prominent and widespread characteristics, which recombine to explain each city's position in and against the conjuncture of austere neoliberalism. These are the prevalence of economic rationalism(s) (chapter 2), weakening hegemony (chapters 4 and 5), the retreat to dominance (chapters 3- 5), weak counter-hegemony and radically contagious politicisations (chapters 6 and 7), from which it draws cautious optimism. Here, discussion returns to the question of what happened to the "collaborative moment" as a moving spirit of governance in the pre-austerity period and reflects on Gramsci's notion of an "interregnum" in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism,



further mooted in urban concepts like “late neoliberalism” (Enwright and Rossi, 2018) and “late entrepreneurialism” (Peck, 2017b). It suggests four plausible trajectories from the standpoint of Peck’s conjecture, including the possibility that entrepreneurialism might function, if not flourish, in conditions of weak hegemony. The chapter concludes with reflections on governability and its limits in the continuing crisis of neoliberal globalism, now in arguably its most intense phase with the eruption of COVID-19. The Afterword offers brief considerations on the implications of Coronavirus for the analysis developed in chapters 1-8.

# Chapter 1: Studying Urban Political (Dis)Orders

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## Introduction

Chapter 1 develops the framework through which urban political (dis)orders are explored in subsequent chapters. It begins by engaging debates about critical vantage-point: diagnosing the workings of capitalist power through critical political economy, privileging disruptive potentialities in acts of resistance, or considering power-resistance relationally. It advances a Gramscian approach to urban regime analysis, through which it pivots between perspectives, and explores the encounter between power and resistance in struggles over the normalisation, disruption and transformation of austere neoliberalism (Las Heras, 2018). The discussion is further framed by neo-Gramscian conjunctural analysis (Hall et al, 1978), which derives from Marxist thinking about the history and periodisation of capitalist development and phases of struggle. Conjunctural analysis was brought to renewed prominence in the urban field by Peck's two-part essay positing an emerging phase of late entrepreneurialism (2017a,b), which is allied to the broader thesis of an interregnum in the hegemony of neoliberal globalism (Stahl, 2019). The problem arising from this framing is how the dynamics of crisis, neoliberalisation, austerity and resistance play out in cities and constitute urban political (dis)orders, and what these in turn reveal about conjunctural continuity and change. The remaining chapters employ this perspective to explore empirical research in Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Greater Dandenong, Dublin, Leicester, Montréal and Nantes.

## Studying Urban Political (Dis)Orders: Between Pessimism of the Intellect and Optimism of the Will?

The concept of urban political (dis)orders is positioned as a contribution to recent debates about the most fruitful way to approach critique and transformation. Means and ends blur, but two broad perspectives can be discerned, each drawing on a multiplicity of theoretical traditions. Those influenced by Marxism and modern socialist theory focus on the critique of capitalist political economy and see the quest to replace it in terms of project-based systemic struggles, which occur through revolutionary or reformist means (e.g. Luxemburg, 1900; Miliband, 1961; Callinicos, 2006). Anarchist, autonomist, open Marxist

and libertarian socialist currents, are more concerned with negating power, interstitial struggles for autonomy and pre-figurative practices unbound from, uncontained by and overflowing capitalism and the state. Though divided on theoretical questions about dialectics, periodisation and structure and action (see Söderberg and Netzén, 2010 for a review), counter-hegemony is viewed as impractical and debilitating, as totalising and undesirable or as obsolete (e.g. Day, 2005; Dinerstein, 2015; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Holloway, 2005; Olin-Wright, 2019).

At stake in these debates are very different understandings of reality, and principles of organising, which means they are prone to taking a polarised form. The Anarchist thinker Richard Day (2005), for example, announced Gramsci to be “dead”. Gramsci is manifestly not dead as an influence on contemporary political struggles and debates (Purcell, 2012), but if Day’s provocation is understood as a judgment on prevailing anti-capitalist practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it arguably resonates much more strongly. Day argued that the Deleuzian-Guattarian commitment to “becoming minor”, through political acts that affirm difference and seek to dissipate all power and domination is fundamentally at odds with the “majoritarian” (in fact, universalising) Gramscian-Marxist objective of transcending capitalism through counter-hegemony (Day, 2012). In anarchist thought, the expression of affinity in indigent struggles, Occupy! and the Arab Spring constitutes both means and ends. Gramscian currents, even post-Marxist derivations, seek to harness solidarity-in-struggle to build alternative hegemonic discourses and apparatuses (Thomas, 2009).

“Minor Marxist” currents begin with Deleuze and Guattari (Holland, 2011), but seek to overcome what they see as binary perspectives on autonomy and structure (Dinerstein, 2014). For example, Bailey *et al* (2017) begin by acknowledging the analytical power of diagnostic research in critical political economy but call for a change of perspective taking issue with what they see as domination-focused accounts. For Bailey *et al*, Minor Marxism positions itself against a pessimistic, “capitalism always wins” mode of theorising and “macro-analyses that depict forebodingly powerful structures of inequality and domination” (Bailey *et al*, 2017: 2). Gibson-Graham (2006) memorably dubbed this the epistemology of “capitalocentrism”. For them, “capitalism” becomes an intellectual and political yoke of our own making. Minor Marxism contends, similarly, that CPE accounts of the post-GFC period have fallen into what Brown (1999) termed “left melancholy”. They blame epistemological error, and while distancing themselves from voluntarism, pivot the quest for knowledge

towards “disruptive agency” (Bailey *et al*, 2017), or “the art of organising hope” (Dinerstein, 2014). Dinerstein discloses four elements of autonomy: negating, creating, contradicting and exceeding capitalism, through which she seeks to overcome structure-action binaries. All four elements, she argues, are played in the “key of hope”, a concept she draws from Ernst Bloch, where hope is a wilful act of subversion that conjures utopias. Hope motivates and is made concrete through the praxis of the four autonomies (Dinerstein, 2014: 61-80).

The critique of “major Marxism” is that while its systemic analyses might be broadly correct, it induces “left melancholy”. The counter-hegemonic gaze, preoccupied with large-scale transcendent and ruptural struggles is, if not totalising, then debilitating if only because history shows they occur so infrequently. Counter-hegemony tends to overlook the vitality of political agency and resistance in the fissures and cracks of everyday life (Holloway, 2005), making neoliberal domination appear ubiquitous and seamless. The purpose of disruption-focused CPE, and minor Marxism in general, is to make visible myriad practices of and potentialities for radical change that purportedly cannot be seen from the vantagepoint of counter-hegemony. Cleaver (1979), (cited in Las Heras, 2018: 3) captured the rationale for this shift:

If one’s attention is focused uniquely on the enemy’s activities on the battlefield, the battle will assuredly be lost. In the class war, as in conventional military encounters, one must begin with the close study of one’s own forces, that is, the structure of working-class power. Without an understanding of one’s own power, the ebb and flow of the battle lines can appear as an endless process driven only by the enemy’s unilateral self-activity.

### The Case for Strategic Pessimism

Should the “key of hope”, important as it surely is, negate other keys? Gramsci’s famous formulation argues that the revolutionary needs to maintain a constructive relationship between pessimism and optimism: “the challenge of modernity is to live without illusions and without becoming disillusioned”. He continued, “I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will” (1994: 300). Intelligence and will might be much more closely related in human cognition than this binary suggests, while as Yanis Varoufakis recently commented, “hope” does not require “optimism” (cited in Eaton, 2020). Beyond this conceptual muddle, however, Gramsci’s point was that it is necessary to undertake a hard-headed assessment of forces, including the strengths of the enemy, while seeing in the key of

“hope” that courage, determination and political imagination confer political agency. Minor Marxist, anarchist, autonomist and libertarian socialist currents shun pessimism in the Gramscian sense. In doing so, they arguably overlook ways in which strategic pessimism, as distinct from emotional pessimism, is also a source of agency.

The existence of left melancholy is scarcely deniable, and some wear it as a badge of honour. “Bleak is the new red” announced *Salvage*, an online magazine of Marxist intellectuals attempting to retrieve a “desolate left” from the ashes.<sup>vii</sup> “Optimism is cowardice” declared Olusoga (2019), targeting the asinine and mendacious cheeriness of Brexit fundamentalists on the British right. Elaborating the case for pessimism in an essay provocatively titled *For A Left with No Future*, Clark (2012: 57) argued that socialists should reject utopianism and transpose politics not into “the key of hope”, but rather “a tragic key”; a “tragic sense of the life possible for the left”. The left should begin with the “bitter moment” of its defeat and embrace present-centred politics, while “mocking its own presage” (2012: 73), in which caricature the next big crisis always looms, and the revival of a revolutionary proletariat is just around the corner. In diagnosing the historic defeat of the proletariat, the tragic key shares one common analytical premise with Anarchist voluntarism, expressed in Day’s assertion (2005: 126) that “the masses of the First World have chosen quiescence, and nothing we can do will change their behavior for the better”. In this context, hope is found only in the vitality of micropolitical experimentation and struggle (Carroll, 2006: 31-2).

In another defence of “uncompromising pessimism”, Burawoy (2011: 75) took critics to task for erasing the distinction between research and politics. The former, he insisted, must speak unpalatable truths to inform the latter:

.... sociology is of little use if it cannot give some guidance to labor as to the tendencies of capitalism, a theorization that pays attention to history and geography, it is of little use to labor if it fixes the data so that labor appears stronger than it is, or if it ignores the data and declares an imminent upsurge on the grounds that we can never know when the next upsurge will arrive. It is the responsibility of professional and public sociologists alike to combat arguments and claims that have neither concrete nor theoretical foundation.

Burawoy concluded, invoking the spirit of Gramsci, that “in times of defeat and retreat as intellectuals we should be all the more ready to rethink our assumptions, redirect

our studies, and entertain alternative theoretical frameworks”. Cogitating on defeat might be distasteful, but it is necessary medicine.

Anchoring these perspectives is a purposeful and strategic “pessimism of the intellect”; bound up, in other words, with the recognition that people can and do “make history”, a reality that defines and gives concrete grounds to both “hope” and “optimism”, rendering them meaningful. There is a qualitative distinction, then, between active, strategic pessimism (or realism) and lachrymose despondency. The latter abnegates both “hope” and the very premise of critique: that disclosing injustice is what makes justice conceivable and intelligible as a concept (Fraser, 2012). As Roitman (2013) observed in her critique of the concept, inhering in Marxist theories of crisis (and all critical theory) is precisely a wager on contingency. From a Gramscian point of view, strategic pessimism authors not passivity or despair, but rather a more acute understanding of the ever-shifting grounds on which political agency is constituted. The retort to Cleaver in the spirit of strategic pessimism might therefore be that “unless one also knows the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy, we cannot know our own”. Minor Marxist scholarship recognises that it means little to consider autonomy without also considering its enmeshment in structure. However, it arguably misconstrues the strategic and agentic character of “major” Marxist pessimism. Partly for this reason, it also neglects how changes in capital accumulation – of kind, tempo and the very possibility of realising surplus value - impinge on the conditions of possibility for autonomy, and the variable configurations of Dinerstein’s autonomies that emerge over time and always in a relationship with constraint.

### The Duality of “Power” and “Resistance”

The contention here is that the study of hegemony makes little sense, either methodologically or politically, without the study of disruptive agency. Conversely, the study of disruptive agency makes little sense without understanding its positioning in and against hegemony. Instead of privileging either “domination” or “disruption”, Gramscian perspectives provoke a productive tension between power-centric and resistance-centric accounts, positioning research at the point of encounter. The encounter is readily observed in the urban environment, where urbanity constitutes a “mediating” sphere between struggles in everyday life to negate the power of capital, and putative counter-hegemonic apparatuses (Kipfer et al, 2012: 117). The Gramscian proposition is that transcending austere neoliberalism and developing new political economies rooted in democracy, common

ownership, equality and solidarity requires repeated shifts between and syntheses of these perspectives. Las Heras (2018) saw, for example, that labour occupies a contradictory position. Workers simultaneously challenge and legitimise the social order, something that can only be seen by looking both ways. Gramsci's methodology of the subaltern demonstrates that worker struggles pull in contradictory directions (as Enwright and Rossi's (2018) concept of "ambivalence" also recognizes). Gramsci "theorised both working class and state formation as a process of shaping and being shaped by the space in which social classes and the capitalist state exert their ideological and coercive powers" (Las Heras, 2018: 10). The methodology of the subaltern requires the researcher to grasp hegemony, domination, subalternity and resistance as relations, which play out in different configurations over time and produce more or less defined and durable socio-spatial (dis)orders.

The conceptual framing of "urban political (dis)orders" establishes a range of overlapping dualities through which to consider the problem of governability relationally and temporally: governance and resistance, realism and revolt, revolution and restoration, stability and flux, as well as normalised and exceptional and recuperative and disruptive politics. Concrete configurations might be situated near one polarity, in conflictual and ambivalent positions, and move between them (Enwright and Rossi, 2018). As Newman (2014a: 139) put it, anti-austerity activism is "both implicated in, and stands in opposition to, transformative governing projects". The starting point in exploring collaborative governance under austerity was the proliferation of institutionalised participatory governance mechanisms during the neoliberal boom and how they evolved or retreated in the age of austerity (Davies and Blanco, 2017). Yet, making sense of these processes also required attention to apparatuses of state power and resistance. From this perspective, it is difficult to make sense of disruptive agency without considering who or what is, or is not, disrupted through which actions, the efforts those vulnerable to disruption undertake to prevent it, the efficacy of different modes of disruption over time, and the lessons that can be drawn from prior experiences of disrupting more or less successfully. Conversely, research into capitalist domination must recognize in practice, as well as theory, that there are always cracks and fissures in a contradictory hegemonic apparatus, including small-scale disruptive actions that sometimes alter the subjectivities and practices of the actors involved in significant and durable ways (Bailey et al, 2017). Ultimately, the point is to learn from the balance of continuity and change arising from any act of domination or resistance.

As Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017) ask, what happens after the “rupturing event” of an urban uprising, in which an ostensibly novel political subjectivity is inaugurated? Very often, the newly inaugurated politics is quickly “exaugurated” whether through defeat, repression, recuperation or simply de-mobilisation. Intensity dissipates, lessons are forgotten, the movement vacates or is compelled to vacate the squares, or it ossifies (Deaton, 2015; Hearne, Boyle and Kobayashi, 2020). The political challenge, say Dikeç and Swyngedouw, is “to move from outbursts of indignation to the slower process of sustained transformative strategies through which a new socio-political spatialization becomes imagined, practiced and universalized” (2017: 14).

The never-ending mystery is how, through what kind of apparatuses, practices, institutions and ensembles? Taking up this theme, Deaton (2015) argued that to endure, urban revolutions must colonize secondary spaces to provide leadership, physical protection and resources for activists – an apparatus. His research on uprisings in Tehran, Prague and Paris, found these secondary spaces in theatres, mosques, churches, factories, shops and civic organizations. For good or ill, many of the great international mobilisations against neoliberal austerity answered the question of how to move from insurgency to transformation, by looking once again (albeit with scepticism) to the local state. This occurred most notably with the anti-austerity platforms in Spain, making the leap from street to City Hall in 2015. The institutional turn foregrounds the question of what organizational resources are required, if episodes of disruption are to transform a “consolidated order” (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017).

### Sources of Socialist Agency

Davis (2018: 18) identifies three conditions of socialist agency in Marx: “organizational capacity, structural power, and hegemonic politics”, through which transformational capacities are assembled and executed. For Thomas (2009), this ensemble constitutes an alternative hegemonic apparatus. A hegemonic apparatus “is the wide-ranging series of articulated institutions (understood in the broadest sense) and practices—from newspapers to educational organisations to political parties—by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political power”, throughout state, market and civil society. In an extraordinary diatribe, the distinguished Open Marxist Werner Bonefeld (2016: 29) made the untenable claim that “hegemony is not a critical concept”. He asserted that it ignores the capital relation and that it “smacks of capitulation to the capitalist



economic interests". Moreover, counter-hegemony "posits the people as righteous, demands government in the interest of the nation, requires the investment of money into productive activity to secure the employment and welfare of the dispossessed" (2016: 30). In short, Gramsci's entire conceptual framework is conflated, minus any textual engagement (Thomas, 2020), with feeble social-democratic programmes for colonising the state and managing capitalism (also Day, 2005). The far more serious reconstruction of Gramsci's thought by Peter Thomas (2009, 2020) contends that anti-hegemony falsely conflates the concept of hegemony with state sovereignty, because it is read not through Gramsci, but through "conjuncturally overdetermined interpretations" by others (2020: 15).

Thomas argues that in Gramsci, the potential for subalterns to assume political power depends, in equal measure, on "the elaboration of an alternative hegemonic project and its concretisation in a hegemonic apparatus adequate to it" (Thomas, 2009: 227). Far from merely forming a government, and seeking to retrofit the state apparatus, counter-hegemony entails the rejection of "sovereignty" and the construction of democratic institutions throughout state, economy and society. In the Bolshevik period, the hegemonic apparatus consisted in a revolutionary party, a bespoke repressive apparatus, the communist press, unions and worker, peasant and soldier councils constituting – initially - an alternative source of political authority to both the old Tsarist apparatus and the Duma. The Third International was founded to cultivate international solidarity and (in its pre-Stalinist phase) globalise the revolution. Though soon defeated and recuperated, this apparatus proved sufficient for the revolutionary period in which it arose. The importance of Thomas's reading is that it posits the alternative hegemonic apparatus as something that arises independently of the bourgeois integral state, purposefully articulating the goals, desires, practices and organising mechanisms that evolve through a cycle of contention (Barker et al, 2013: 2).

The Battle of Seattle in 1999 is seen as a watershed in the re-constitution of the radical left in the West after the collapse of Stalinism, the crises of Fordism and setbacks for organised labour. Themes that converged in Seattle - anti-capitalism, feminism, environmentalism and anti-racism - drew inspiration from earlier waves of struggle in the Global South and united around the slogan purportedly coined by Sub-commandante Marcos, "another world is possible" (George, 2004: 250). These themes have continued to influence struggles for the past 20 years, including anti-austerity movements and new municipalisms in which anarchist and libertarian socialist traditions ally uneasily with

institutionalist and state-friendly variants of democratic socialism (Taylor, 2013; Barcelona en Comú, 2019). Any counter-hegemonic apparatus emerging from 21<sup>st</sup> century cycles of contention will undoubtedly be imbued with contemporary experiences of building democracy, solidarity and equality through intersecting feminist, anti-racist, ecological and class struggles. It is likely to have a very different complexion than the apparatuses of October 1917, while continuing to build on innovations from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as workers' councils, and having to find ways of disarming the capitalist state.

At its most radical, new municipalist thinking begins to grapple, somewhat indirectly, with the question of alternative apparatuses – if not their potentially hegemonic character. Bookchin (2019: 16), for example, suggests that “municipal assemblies” could comprise counter-veiling powers to the nation state. Alt-governance institutions, such as worker councils, and worker-occupied factories, have come and gone throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, usually as social crises and waves of struggle peak and recede. The experiences of Solidarnosc, and the occupied factory movements in Latin America are but two examples (Atzeni and Ghigliani, 2007). Chapter 8 reflects on the potential for alternative hegemonic apparatuses to emerge from anti-austerity struggles. The central point is that Gramscian theory problematises the question of what kinds of apparatuses are necessary and sufficient to overcome capitalism and seeks to evaluate and influence the efficacy of the struggles from which they emerge. Despite many appropriations of Gramsci, the notion that the concept of hegemony necessarily induces passivity, excessive abstraction or involves subsumption into the capitalist state apparatus, is ill conceived. In practical terms, each struggle is considered at a granular level to establish what powers and liabilities accrue to which actors and institutions (Ward, 2010), through what ordering and disordering mechanisms. This framing brings the tools of urban regime analysis to the fore.

## Gramscian Regime Analysis

The following paragraphs borrow from Davies and Blanco (2017), Davies (2017a) and Davies et al (2020) in developing a framework to explore how urban political (dis)orders assemble around particular (austerity) governance strategies and the powers/liabilities they accrete. This is the reformulated approach to “collaborative governance” discussed in the introductory chapter. Urban Regime Theory is about the dynamics of building and

maintaining governing coalitions among governmental and non-governmental actors. In developing regime theory, Stone (1989) argued against structural Marxism that the spheres of state, market and civil society are but contingently and loosely coupled (following Tilly, 1984). At the urban scale, profit-seeking corporations control production and development, while in representative democracies citizens exercise electoral oversight. The prevalent coupling of state and market spheres materialises in US cities because neither can accomplish its goals without the resources of the other: local government needs the confidence of investors to raise revenues while business requires support from city hall to extract higher rents and profits. The capture of economic and municipal power, respectively by business and city leaders, creates a structuring environment in which resource interdependent actors attempt to constitute governing agendas and coalitions capable of delivering them. Regime theory therefore downplays “power over” for a social production model, “power to”, where pragmatic actors build alliances to “get things done” (Davies et al, 2020). Durable alliances of governmental and non-governmental actors capable of setting the governing agendas for a city are what Stone called “urban regimes”.

Nevertheless, regime theory sees the local state and profit sectors as better able to pre-empt the governing agenda than other actors. Stone’s (1980) theory of systemic power, distinguishes public democratic and private business power constituted at the national and international scales, and enacted in cities through regime politics. Urban regimes are founded on the dilemmas this context imposes on city leaders: the need for business to secure political support for development, and for political leaders to obtain investment from the private sector, whilst satisfying an electorate. These structuring factors create an urban environment where business and city leaders are more likely to find congruent interests and construct governing alliances around them than others, although the discussion of Baltimore in Chapter 4 shows that universities, hospitals and non-profits can be powerful regime actors too (Pill, 2020). On the other hand, lower class opportunity regimes are rare because resource mobilisation and sustenance are much harder to achieve. Stone saw greater potential in policy areas like education not (historically) tied directly to the mobilisation of business resources, pointing the possibility of multiple, perhaps competing, circuits of regime power in a given city – an idea elaborated further by Blanco (2015a). In theory, neoliberalisation blurs or eliminates these distinctions by subordinating all domains of public

life to the rules of competition and utilising them as mechanisms to instil competitive governmentalities among policy makers, educators and students.

Regime theory has elective affinities with the neo-pluralist proposition that in market societies, elected governments are likely to find reasons to indulge the preferences of business leaders, especially in economic development policy, but that coalition dynamics vary across policy domains. Within these structuring parameters, urban regimes emerge contingently from the concrete objectives and coalition building endeavours of resource-privileged urban political actors. Stone's central point was that whatever the structural parameters, and whatever the implications of capital mobility might be in altering the balance of power, governability arises from constructive political action to create durable alliances: regime building of any kind takes effort (Davies and Msengana Ndlela, 2015).

Regime theory has generated much debate in the past 30 years; notably over its purported neglect of capitalist political economy on the one hand (Imbroscio, 2003) and the interpenetration of state and civil society on the other (Jessop, 1997). Marxists saw it as over-privileging the political, because it set aside the crisis-prone dynamics of capital accumulation, the impact of financialization, the role of education and media in ideology-production, and the tendency (with support from higher tiers of government) for corporate interests to encroach and make ever-greater demands on municipalities. In the neoliberal period, they must become ever-more competitive and responsive if they are to appeal to footloose capital and thereby sustain governing capacity. In contrast with Marxist critics, Stone himself suggested that regime theory had focused too much on the state-corporate nexus and neglected civil society as a repository of governing demands and resources. He accordingly elaborated the concept of the *Urban Political Order* (Stone, 2009) which inspires the question of governability addressed in this volume, and reformulated the core principles of regime analysis (Stone, 2015: 103):

The guiding tenet in inner-core regime analysis (its "iron law") is that for any governing arrangement to sustain itself, resources must be commensurate with the agenda being pursued ... A companion proposition is that for any substantial and sustained agenda, a stable coalition is needed to provide the necessary resources.

Stone here re-affirms the theoretical core of regime theory as being about the collaborative effort involved in creating and sustaining governability, but in a helpful way that

opens it to dialogue with other theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, Davies and Blanco (2017) argued that regime analysis required further adaptation, refining the parameters of the iron rule. They suggested firstly that while governing depends on coalition building through persuasion, negotiation and bargaining around congruent goals (power to), it also rests on hierarchy, coercion and administrative diktat (power over). In other words, studying governability requires a more expansive and relational perspective on power than is typical of regime approaches, recognising the inter-penetration of coercion and consent as well as structured and emergent inequalities (Jessop, 1997).

Second, Davies and Blanco (2017) argued that regime theory, even with the extended concept of the urban political order, tends to focus on a limited terrain of urban politics around city government, local business elites and, latterly, non-profits. They argue that austerity governance necessitates consideration of how multi-scalar politics – international, national, regional and municipal, as well as “scaling from below” (Nielsen and Simonsen, 2003) - concatenate in the city and metropolis, and delimit its powers. They also point to the need for an enlarged conception of the “local state” encompassing all governmental and quasi-governmental agencies situated within the city/metropolis and having the city/metropolis as their primary concern (a formulation developed by Magnusson, 1985).

Stone’s latest work (2018) lends further weight to the case for bringing inter-governmental relations into the study of urban political (dis)orders. This point speaks to the two-sided question of jurisdiction addressed in chapter 3. Local government may be situated in subordinate or competitive relationships with other governmental actors and agencies responsible for critical functions, such as welfare, infrastructure, social services, education or housing. Moreover, municipal and other local state administrative jurisdictions are often poorly aligned with the economic, demographic and infrastructural characteristics of an extended urban area, its agglomeration dynamics and metropolitan, suburban and city-regional governance characteristics (Scott, 2019). Finally, scale and jurisdiction are central to the stakes of the struggle for and against austerity. The Gramscian local state is a heterodox “landscape of antagonism” (Newman, 2014b) constituted through provisional, partial and contested ensembles of governmental and non-governmental actors that might only rarely be fully concerted across an entire urban area, if ever.

Third, and critically for the concept of urban political (dis)orders, Davies and Blanco (2017) suggested that privileging the study of governing coalition insiders led regime

theorists to overlook the disruptive effects of occasional eruptions and episodes of urban rage, but also the efficacy of resistance as a durable facet of urban political life, capable of throwing grit into the machine and altering its focus as well as constituting new autonomies. Just as neoliberalism shapes the character of urban resistance (Mayer, 2016), so resistance, like the fly in the ointment, might influence the character or deplete the capacities of austere neoliberal regimes. This brings us back to the question of disruptive agency. Everyday struggles can produce new solidarities and transform the subjectivities of activists. Davies and Blanco suggest that they also denude neoliberal coalitions of governing capacity, or alter the nature of those capacities, and in this sense should be seen as co-constitutive of regime outcomes that open and shut down the space in which autonomies flourish. In other words, before and after the inaugural staging of an “equalibertarian” event (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017), everyday resistance, including organised labour, can deflect, divert, impede or deplete urban regimes of their capacity to govern without necessarily challenging them directly, or gaining access to decision-making processes. Disruption can also occur without disruptive intent. The attempt to impose neoliberal reforms has always encountered “difficulties, problems and obstructions” (Bailey, et al. 2017: 5), attesting to both the durability of resistance, and the faltering development of neoliberalism in some cities and parts of the world. Bringing resistance inside the regime analytical space addresses the need to bring molecular disruption, ambivalence and construction into the study of urban political (dis)orders, without according them epistemological privilege.

These adaptations are consistent with Stone’s iron law, and they also point regime analysis towards a renewed dialogue with Gramscian state theory, concerned with the nexus of “power to”, “power over” and “counter-power”. Early Marxian critics of regime analysis developed a body of scholarship on how to work with and adapt the concept (e.g. Lauria, 1997). Jessop (1997) suggested that the regime perspective on coalition building was useful, when situated in a dynamic account of international transformations linked to crises of Fordism and the fading international Keynesian National Welfare Regime system. To this end, he brought Gramsci’s concept of the Integral State to urban studies. This strand of dialogue with regime theory quickly died out, but is worth reviving in light of later theoretical developments in both fields.

The Gramscian approach begins from a very different position, rooted in Marxism and conceiving bourgeois society as an emergent-emerging provisional totality, animated by

accumulation dynamics and riven by structural contradictions - what Gramsci called the “historical bloc” (1971: 137; Q13, §10). Crisis-tendencies inscribed into the historical bloc (Gramsci, 1995: 428-435; Q10II, §33, §36, §41vii) foment instability and periods of radicalised political contingency; the power to enact transformations fundamental to the achievement of communism. Accordingly, sustaining a hegemonic political order requires persistent work, continuous ideological and political effort against crosscurrents from within and without. For good or ill, every social order encounters structural limits and contradictions, as well as everyday agential disruptions within the sphere of “normal” politics.

The theory of the integral state is Gramsci’s conception of the political order, within the parameters of this propulsive, contradictory historical bloc (Davies, 2011b; 2012a). It connotes the provisional unity of “political society + civil society” (Gramsci, 1971: 262-3; Notebook 6, §88), where political society is the ruling class in its state form, with attendant coercive, ideological, cultural and administrative apparatuses. Civil society is the terrain of “so-called private organisations, like the church, trade unions, schools and so on” (Gramsci, 1971: 56 fn; Notebook 19, §24). These organisations today include countless varieties of non-profit, NGO, TNO and charitable foundation, as the research discussed in chapter 4 in particular highlights (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020; Pill, 2020). For Gramsci, civil society is the terrain of the struggle to constitute a hegemonic apparatus. In trying to make sense of the durability of modernising capitalist states during the revolutionary period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he observed that when the state “trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed ... a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” (1971: 238; Notebook 6, §138). This suggests that civil society is ultimately the grounds of state power. Without robust civil society institutions to resource political leadership and nurture consent, bourgeois regimes would depend on direct coercion for survival. Governability is rooted in the capacity of governmental and non-governmental actors to secure hegemony through inter-penetrating repertoires of coercion and consent operating throughout state and civil society.

A schematically Gramscian hegemony occurs when a durable alliance of class forces wins control of economic, political, cultural, ideational and bio-political levers of power and exercises leadership across the governmental and societal realms, signifying the “cathartic”, or “ethico-political moment” of the state (Gramsci, 1971: 208; Q10II, §15). Or, as

Arrighi put it (2005: 32), hegemony refers to the “additional power that accrues to a dominant group in virtue of its capacity to lead society in a direction that not only serves the dominant group’s interests but is also perceived by subordinate groups as serving a more general interest”. The theory of hegemony explains why, as discussed below, economic crises rarely trigger immediate political crises, but also why hegemonies in this elevated sense are generally incomplete, if not fleeting in historical terms. Rather, the familiar concepts of passive revolution and the interregnum imply that periods of true hegemony, where the ideas of the ruling class are widely held by subalterns to represent their interests, are unusual and perhaps increasingly so as the bourgeois epoch ages (Arrighi, 2005; Stahl, 2019).

Despite foundational differences between the Stonean and Gramscian perspectives, there are helpful affinities. Like regime politics, the reproduction of hegemony requires continuous maintenance (Thomas, 2009: 255). Moreover, like regime theorists, Gramscians see that hegemonies are never closed, and rarely comprehensive and encompassing (Jessop, 2007: 241). Stone, relatedly, conceived the power of pre-emption (1988: 83) as the “capacity to occupy, hold and make use of a strategic position”. He argued that powers of pre-emption can be exercised without hegemony in Gramsci’s elevated sense of ethico-political catharsis. The concept of pre-emption lends support to the Gramscian analytical distinction between leadership and domination, illustrating how a governing regime can subsist from a narrow social base, without mass consent, and at the same time how domination itself requires effort and resource. It is distinguished analytically from co-optive power (Guarneros-Meza et al, 2018), through which a governing bloc interpolates an extended social base to its ideas and agendas, secures legitimacy and active assent. Just as hegemony is bound up with both coercion and consent, regime power derives from combinations of pre-emptive and co-optive power.

In short, Gramscian and regime analyses converge at the point of studying how broader or narrower combinations of actors mobilise material and ideational resources to produce and contest more-or-less durable urban governing arrangements. They are concerned with coercive and consensual means through which governing capacity accretes – but also how it is undermined, and depleted. With the third adaptation suggested by Davies and Blanco (2017), the study of Ward’s (2010) “liabilities” becomes central to regime analysis: what does disruptive agency accomplish, but also how do internal contradictions and urban struggles burden governing coalitions and contribute to the accretion of contradictions and



pathologies? Are liabilities absorbed by re-allocating costs or do they aggregate and mature into more-or-less acute and extensive political crises (Hay, 1999)?

## Crises, Neoliberalism and Austerity

Urban regime and Gramscian theories part company in the latter's understanding of the structural interpenetration of state, market and civil society domains, and the tendencies to crisis inhering in the capitalist system. Gramscian scholarship has sought to extend Marxist theory by grasping crises as political phenomena, discerning phases and tempos of development in which periods of relative stability are interrupted, respectively, by impasse between contending forces and sharper moments of political upheaval and transformation. In the history of capitalism, such periods have resulted in significant changes in the organisation of capitalism, through second-order passive-revolutionary transformations that reconstitute bourgeois class power, while de-mobilising or recuperating subaltern classes (Morton, 2011). Gramsci-influenced analysis of crises is concerned with the spatio-temporal dynamics of normalisation, upheaval and transformation.

### Crisis, Interregnum and Conjuncture

The language of "crisis" is ubiquitous, but often poorly specified (Hay, 1999). Roitman's (2013) provocative intervention *Anti-Crisis* sought to deconstruct the concept and displace it from what she called its position in modernist theory as a "transcendental placeholder", substituting God and religious redemption with a secular philosophy of contingency. The concept of "crisis" has been hugely influential in urban studies, perhaps even more so since the GFC (Weaver, 2017). Few would disagree that this was a "crisis" of some kind, perhaps a plurality of multi-causal crises, but like neoliberalism and austerity, discussed below, it is a slippery concept with myriad valences (Bayırbağ, Davies and Münch, 2017).

In Marxist theory, "crisis" refers simultaneously to the capitalist slump dynamic that invests social class with its material animus, and to the radicalization of political contingency in periods of turbulence; the capacity of forces competing for hegemony decisively to shift the course of historical development. At the heart of the concept are ideas about contradiction and upheaval (May, 2017). The Greek term 'krisis' denotes a decisive and unexpected turning-point (Haus and Kuhlmann, 2013: 7). Then British Prime Minister Tony Blair invoked this meaning after 9/11, when he stated: "This is a moment to seize. The

kaleidoscope has been shaken, the pieces are in flux, soon they will settle again. Before they do let us reorder this world around us and use modern science to provide prosperity for all".<sup>viii</sup> A useful reminder that the meaning of crisis is always the subject of struggle (Weaver, 2017), Blair's intervention also identified crisis as a tipping point at which decisive political interventions can change the course of history – where "optimism of the will", or "hope", can generate authentically transformative action.

In accentuating the political and cultural dimensions of crisis, Gramsci sought to understand the often-extended temporal disjunction between structural economic crises, and the political expressions of crisis in conflicts and uprisings. He distinguished crisis in this acute and transformative sense from "organic crisis", understood as a breakdown in hegemony and signifying a "radical rupture in the links between representatives and the represented" (Kouvelakis, 2019: 78), characteristics pervading international political economy today. For example, Jessop (2016: 2) explained how the conjunctural events of the Brexit referendum articulated and further aggravated "a long-running split in the establishment, a worsening representational crisis in the party system, a growing crisis of authority for political elites, a legitimacy crisis of the state, and a crisis of national-popular hegemony over the population". These are characteristics of a Gramscian interregnum, conceived as an extended breakdown of hegemony, punctuated by disruptions and upheavals of greater or lesser significance.

Stahl (2019: 355) observed in his analysis of hegemony in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that turbulence and instability are "natural" states within capitalism, and an interregnum between stronger hegemonies can drag on for decades, with more or less frequent and critical punctuation points. Only rarely (perhaps only once) does organic crisis result in a decisive systemic rupture of the kind marked by October 1917, and as both the Jacobin and Bolshevik experiences also showed in different ways, even sharp ruptures are vulnerable to inertia, reversal, recuperation and defeat. Nevertheless, in a growing crisis of neoliberal globalism, economic pathologies and political conflicts have been conjoining to begin unravelling the dominant politics of the post-Thatcher, post-Soviet global capitalist renaissance (Marquand, 2004). According to Streeck (2016), the interregnum is characterised by generalised social entropy and increasingly ungovernable societies, but with no plausible alternative world order on the horizon.

If weak hegemony is unremarkable in the history of capitalism, passive revolutionary dynamics are an important part of the explanation and also (arguably) one of the main mechanisms by which capitalism reconstitutes itself. Gramsci further distinguished the rupturing revolutions in France in 1789 and Russia in 1917 from passive revolutions, where revolutionary impetus was recuperated and the transition to bourgeois society enacted through a conservative “revolution-restoration” (Callinicos, 2010). For Gramsci, passive revolution became the dominant trait in capitalist state formation after the failed European uprisings of 1848. With bourgeois forces losing revolutionary zeal and impetus, partly in fear of the rising working class, they enacted “revolution from above”, to neutralise bottom-up revolutionary ferment. Gramsci saw passive revolutions leading to a weaker form of capitalist state, characterised by “dictatorship without hegemony” (1971: 106; Q15, §59), and exemplified by the Italian Risorgimento through which the North subordinated the South without ever truly absorbing or subsuming it.

The revolutionary period in Europe after WW1 marked a break, albeit temporary, from the passive revolutionary phase of bourgeois development. In Gramsci’s and later re-readings after Bolshevism, passive revolution is also associated with major transitions occurring within capitalism through “revolution from above” (e.g. Morton, 2011): the concepts of Fascism, Fordism, Keynesianism and neoliberalism exemplify phases or modes of capitalist development enacted through passive revolution. Hay (1999), for example, employed conjunctural analysis to explore the intense period of political crisis through which Britain reached a tipping point, moving beyond its moribund Keynesian National Welfare Regime into early Thatcherite neoliberalisation (also Hall et al, 1978 and Clarke, 2010). For Gramsci, imprisoned by Mussolini, fascism was the “current or actual” form of passive revolution (Thomas, 2009: 154 fn). It rears its head again today, as insurgent elements within the authoritarian neoliberal elite look for ways to resolve growing crises of authority and revitalise faltering accumulation regimes, now cratering because of Coronavirus (Thomas, 2009: 154-5, Peck and Theodore, 2019).

A central premise of Marxist analysis is that no political-economic order can be sustained indefinitely because of the tendency towards exhaustion in capitalist accumulation regimes (Rosenberg, 2005). In what conditions an interregnum matures into a sharp crisis and whether any resulting change is “conjunctural” in the sense of preserving an existing social form like neoliberalism, or “fundamental” in the sense of rupture (or

decline and collapse), depends on politics. What are the competing visions and apparatuses? Who can be made to bear which costs? How high a price can be extracted from subalterns across the spheres of production and reproduction, and in which parts of the world, in order to sustain austere neoliberalism in, perhaps, neo-fascist post-fascist or some other authoritarian guise? What transformations might be possible? Through what means? The task of conjunctural analysis is to parse and intervene in the struggles that answer these questions, which appear increasingly to be of epochal significance.

### Conjunctural Analysis

Excavating the roots of the concept, Koivisto and Lahtinen (2012) trace the origins of “conjuncture” to Machiavelli’s revolutionary break with the mediaeval notion that fate was pre-ordained by the astronomical/astrological conjunction of heavenly bodies. They see Machiavelli’s claim that even when “fortuna acts like an enraged river” people can “prepare for the flood”, as the first step to secularising the concept and deeming humans capable of acting on fate. Gramsci referred to this trait as Machiavelli’s “neo-humanism” (1971: 248-9; Q5, §127).

The *raison d'être* of conjunctural analysis is emancipatory political agency. What aligns it to Marxism, argued Rosenberg, “is the central explanatory role accorded to the organic tendencies of capitalist development”. Marxist analysis takes on a conjunctural form through the double-historicisation of organic tendencies: first disclosing their “character at a given stage of their historical development” (diachronic analysis), and second by revealing how they operate “in the historically given circumstances of the time” (synchronic analysis) (Rosenberg, 2005: 29–30). Minor Marxist thinkers, like Holloway (2005), are sceptical of Marxist periodisation on the grounds that it draws overly rigid distinctions between continuity and change, where change is confined to rare moments of upheaval and granular ever-present struggles are passed over or trivialised. The account of hegemony elaborated above is sensitive to both everyday and exceptional forms of resistance, but “Major” Marxism nevertheless rests on the argument that human development is usefully classified into dominant modes of production, extended historical periods of which capitalism is the latest. Conjunctural analysis seeks to disclose political-economic rhythms of development and disruption within capitalism, and its points of crisis and punctuation.

Stuart Hall played a founding role in bringing Gramscian conjunctural thinking into political, social and cultural theory, particularly through his work on the emergence of

Thatcherism and neo-liberalisation (Hall et al, 1978; Hall, 1979). *Policing the Crisis*, the seminal analysis of proto-Thatcherite crisis-making, was read through the rising moral panic around mugging. Reflecting on the project thirty years later, one of its co-authors, John Clarke (2010: 342), defined a conjunctural crisis as the point “where different temporalities - and more specifically, the tensions, antagonisms and contradictions which they carry - begin to come together”. Conjunctural crises usually have structural dimensions but are constituted and politicized through struggles over “construal” (Jessop, 2015) and “narration” (Hay, 1999). An “organic crisis” with structural roots only becomes “fully articulated” as a political crisis, when captured, construed and, in vernacular of Bayırbağ, Davies and Münch (2017), “owned” by a class fraction and hegemonic bloc. The politicisation of a structural crisis depends, as Lenin put it, on whether a ruling class can find ways of continuing in its old way, and whether the working and subaltern classes are willing to do so. “There is no such thing as an absolutely hopeless situation” for the bourgeoisie, he warned.<sup>ix</sup>

In the Marxist tradition, the objective of conjunctural analysis is to “expand the capacity to act politically by helping to examine the conditions of a political intervention in their complexity” (Koivisto and Lahtinen, 2012: 267). Whether conjunctural crises brewing within the arc of a prolonged interregnum turn out to be decisive, and whether they are resolved through revolution from above or below, is a political question determined through praxis. The series of conjunctural crises provoked and won by Thatcherism in the UK (moral panic, struggles with the trade unions, the collapse of the Eastern bloc) are instances of punctuations through which the interregnum of the 1970s was resolved in favour of neoliberal globalism, through multiple tipping points (Jessop, 2016).

In reflections on “urban crisis”, May (2017: 2191) suggests that in the post-GFC period, the world has moved from political “slow time” to a quickening tempo. In the wave of urban revolts since 2008, he observes an “increase in the intensity of oscillations between continuity and discontinuity”. May’s analysis suggests that as with hegemony, Gramscian conceptualisations of crisis, conjuncture, and interregnum can fruitfully be read across scale, place and territory (Davies, 2012a). Taking up this theme, Peck’s conjunctural urbanism (2017a,b) diagnoses “late entrepreneurialism” as an urbanized expression of the interregnum in neoliberal globalism.

Peck proposes that the age of the entrepreneurial city announced famously by Harvey (1989) is increasingly subject to diminishing returns, disclosed through his

paradigmatic case study of Atlantic City (Peck, 2017b). Late entrepreneurialism draws attention to distinctively urban contradictions and pathologies co-constituting the larger crisis of neoliberal globalism, marked by a neoliberal hegemonic project that “seems increasingly to have given up on its own future, as the horizons of even nominally free market action and imagination seem to be collapsing” (Peck and Theodore, 2019: 263). The study of Atlantic City reveals a concatenation of pathologies emerging, to a greater or lesser extent across the international urban landscape well before COVID-19.

The logic of late entrepreneurialism is that the more cities copy entrepreneurial blueprints to attract investors (such as the casinos of Atlantic City, or the obligatory “smart-city”, museum, cultural, sporting and tourism projects of urban revitalization), the harder it becomes to achieve competitive gains, particularly in the context of prolonged economic stagnation marked by the failure of the world economy to recover trend growth rates since the GFC (Roberts, 2016). Competitive advantage accruing to early adaptors quickly mutated into fiscal liability as the urban landscape became saturated, returns on investment failed to materialize, demand was exhausted, speculative debt accrued without supporting revenue streams, and cities proclaiming unique characteristics were revealed to be imitative, aesthetically monotone and culturally banal, if not fiscally bankrupt. Like any other market product, the proliferation of entrepreneurial cities created an excess of supply over demand. In the post-GFC climate of growth stagnation, this tendency has been augmented. In a shrunken investment pool, the law of diminishing returns asserts itself, and losers in the entrepreneurial game multiply.

Yet, Harvey noticed many of these pathologies early in the entrepreneurial conjuncture (Merrifield, 2002: 150-1), as did others observing the “monochrome monism” of neoliberal consumerism (Marquand, 2004: 127). The presence of the pathologies and contradictions we see today arguably existed early in the entrepreneurial phase, posing the question of how we recognize what is “late” and how “late” it might be, especially in relation to concepts like “late neoliberalism” (Enwright and Rossi, 2018) and the larger and equally problematic concept of “late capitalism” (Jameson, 1991).

Peck’s conjunctural urbanism is motivated, in part, by his critique of “flat ontologies” animating post-structuralist comparative urban studies (Robinson, 2011). It

entails “spiralling up and down through cases and contexts as a different (but arguably complementary) strategy to that of working laterally, ‘between’ cases”. This mode of analysis is inherently comparative, place and scale-sensitive, seeking to establish “dialogic interconnections between (situated) case studies, (pliable) midlevel concepts and (revisable) theory claims” – that is to say both genetic and generative comparisons. Most importantly, it (tacitly) re-iterates the Marxist principle that studying social phenomena requires movement between levels of abstraction and concreteness, distance and proximity. This is to recognize, for example, that the appearance of mess and disorder at the molecular level does not preclude the existence of “real” orders and patterns at other scales, or indeed vice-versa if the appearance of molecular normality obscures exploding contradictions at a systemic level.

What makes urbanity a fruitful terrain for conjunctural analysis? Gramsci noted (as had Engels nearly 100 years before) that national hegemonies were “complicated by the existence within every State of several structurally diverse territorial sectors, with diverse relations of forces at all levels” (Gramsci, 1971: 182; Q13, §17). He classified Italian urban political economies according to revolutionary potential: industrial Turin was favourably contrasted with bourgeois reformist Milan, Rome the city of parasitic bureaucrats and Florence and Naples as cities dominated by landowners and the agricultural bourgeoisie (Kipfer, 2012: 87). Gramsci’s urban political (dis)orders differed markedly within post-Risorgimento Italy, viewed from the standpoint of economic, social and political development, and revolutionary potential.

From a Gramscian perspective, then, urban political (dis)orders are fruitfully read as co-determinants – and potentially antagonists - of national, international and global (dis)orders. Tendencies towards late entrepreneurialism, and repeated waves of urban revolt against austerity, maybe constituent elements in the interregnum of neoliberal globalism. Accordingly, subsequent chapters explore dynamics of continuity and change, crisis and upheaval, propinquity and distancing as they play out through eight cities grappling with differing dimensions of the neoliberalism-crisis-austerity problematic. The final chapter then reflects on the character of the interregnum and the concepts of “late entrepreneurialism” and “late neoliberalism” (Enwright and Rossi, 2018).

### Neoliberalism

Like “crisis”, the messy concept of neoliberalism has often generated more heat than light. However, in essence “the ascendancy of the neoliberal paradigm entailed the

wholesale discrediting of Keynesian-era managerial urban policies and the concomitant valorization of market-oriented forms of urban governance” (Theodore, 2020: 1). Neoliberalism differs from classical liberalism by construing alternatives as enemies and aggressively confecting market mechanisms through state action in civil society, and within the state apparatus itself (Le Gales, 2016: 161-2). It is possible retrospectively to detect decisive conjunctural tipping points in its evolution, such as Augusto Pinochet’s coup, James Callaghan’s declaration that Britain could not spend its way out of a crisis or Ronald Reagan’s defeat of the Air Traffic Controllers union in 1981, but like all phases of capitalist development neoliberalism is iterative. Cities are “strategic targets and proving grounds for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiments, institutional innovations, and political projects” (Theodore et al, 2011: 24). Theodore (2020: 1) continues, “in large part, it has been through the politico-institutional reorganization of urban economies that the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism has been achieved”. Within the compass of this definition, few if any cities with roots in Fordism and welfarism have escaped some kind of neoliberalisation. One common denominator is the spread of market rationalities (Henderson, Sullivan and Gleeson, 2020). These make “economics the model of everything” (Peck and Theodore, 2019: 251), and lead to the “disenchantment of politics by economics” (Davies, 2017), engendered through myriad political struggles, defeat, and the proliferation of mechanisms cultivating market rationalities and enforcing market behaviours.

Yet, the literature discloses enormous and much-debated complexity in varieties and hybrids of urban neoliberalism, and the recuperative capacities of neo-liberalising agents as they re-purpose ostensibly antagonistic concepts like community, empowerment, equality, innovation and good governance. The concepts of “rollback” and “rollout” describe different modalities of neoliberalism. They can be read as phases, but also as intersecting currents. Rollback refers to “the active destruction or discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions” (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 37), and the concomitant employment of force characteristic of what Bruff (2014) called “authoritarian neoliberalism”. Rollout neoliberalism refers to the construction of institutions to enrol citizens into the dispositions, cultures and practices of a marketized and responsabilized way of life infused with economic rationalism. It is a term often used in discussing urban revitalization and social inclusion programmes in the 1990s and 2000s during the neoliberal boom (such as Head Start or Sure Start). The related term “social neoliberalism” (Cerny, 2008) further captures the rollout idea



of an investment state superseding Keynesian institutions, seeking to instil entrepreneurialism in citizen consumers, particularly working-class communities previously schooled in Fordist labour practices that required little in the way of personal entrepreneurship.

Neoliberal policy regimes are closely associated with the tactics and strategies of austerity, but not inherently austere. Rollback has more immediate affinity with austerity than rollout, because the latter is investment dependent. Callinicos (2012) observed that neoliberal policy regimes oscillate between episodes of austerity and fiscal stimulus, encouraging asset price bubbles to under-write consumption financed through household debt; the policy regime of “privatized Keynesianism” (Crouch, 2009). Like rollout and rollback neoliberalism, these practices can overlap with austerity occurring in one sphere and stimulus, or investment, in another depending on which agencies are run by which tiers of government.

Beyond variations within neoliberalism itself, hybridisation occurs when neoliberalisation conjoins with other traditions, like welfarism or clientelism (Ferguson, 2010; Davies and Blanco, 2017). Hybridity poses boundary questions explored by Le Gales (2016), for whom “variegated neoliberalism” stretches the concept too far. This critique might also apply to the notion of “ambivalence” developed by Enwright and Rossi (2018) to capture periods of uncertainty in which re-emerging and reconstituting urban solidarities become enmeshed with and implicated in radicalising neoliberalism (also Taylor, 2013).

For clarity, neoliberalism here references an initially potent hegemonic project, described by Perry Anderson (2000) as the most successful in world history. “Neoliberalisation” better captures the diversity, processual character and forward-momentum of combined rollback-rollout approaches, whose unity lies in Theodore’s “valorization of market-oriented forms of urban governance” (also Whitham, 2018). Variegated neoliberalisation captures the interplay of rollback and rollout or “authoritarian neoliberal” and “social neoliberal” approaches and cycles of austerity-stimulus that follow pro-market principles. Hybridized neoliberalisation is about the sometimes-conflictual entanglements of neoliberalisation with non- or anti-neoliberal traditions (Davies and Blanco, 2017). It also encompasses the encounter between neoliberalisation dynamics and forces seeking to resist them. These forces sometimes halt or reverse it, fall before it, or become enmeshed with it, as Enwright and Rossi’s concept of “ambivalence” implies, and as the

research revealed in liminal practices of urban governance at the cusp of assistance and resistance, discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

Ogman (2020: 838) defined “progressive post-neoliberalisation” as calling for “market-constraint and potentially transcendence” involving “neo-Keynesianism, a Green New Deal, expanded social protections, the increased employee share of profits, and the de-commodification of social goods”. This concept, as baggy as neoliberalism itself, can be extended to include the array of more-or-less insurgent political economies espousing decommodification, solidarity, democracy and equality. These too may be hybridized in the double sense of deriving from radically different but overlapping political traditions across the Keynesian, Polanyian, communist, socialist, anarchist, feminist, LGBTQ+, black liberation and intersectional traditions and also operating in, with and against neoliberalism. They include ostensibly non-adversarial everyday urban governance encounters, cooperative endeavours and community wealth building programmes (Guinan and O’Neill, 2020) to counter the impact of austere neoliberalism without direct conflict, as well as uprisings and insurgencies.

Conjunctural thinking about neoliberalism may be explicit as it is in the work of Hall, Hay, Clarke, Jessop or Peck, or implicit as it is in the looser diagnosis of “late neoliberalism” by Enwright and Rossi (2018: 7). They define “late neoliberalism” as

the critical period leading up to and following from the financial crisis, in which the political economic underpinnings of late capitalism are in upheaval. While this era most obviously features a deepening of financial capital’s institutional architecture and intensified forms of austerity and retrenchment, the late neoliberal condition also entails the strengthening of countermobilizations and power struggles pursuing alternative non-market agendas and politics.

They argue that diagnosing “late neoliberalism” is not “a definitive statement of regime consolidation but a heuristic device to signal the distinctive reformations in rule regimes governing urbanisation as well as the shifts in political discourses, institutional formations, subjectivities and organisational dynamics that have been occurring in diverse urban contexts” (2018: 8). Whereas Peck’s “late entrepreneurialism” focuses on the tendential exhaustion of entrepreneurialism as a vehicle for neoliberalised urban development, Enright and Rossi relate “late neoliberalism” in terms of politicisations and contradictions between deepening neoliberalism and rising opposition. Both approaches are

useful foils for investigating urban political (dis)orders and reflecting on how we might know “lateness” when we see it. The discussion returns to this issue, particularly in chapters 2 and 8. The problematic addressed in this volume is that of “governability” in a Gramscian sense; how durable urban political orders turn out to be in post-GFC conditions? How resonant are concepts that emphasise “lateness”, and its austerian determinations? Under what conditions do alternatives incubate and fail? The focus on crisis construals in chapter 2, casts further light on these issues.

### Austerity

Like crisis and neoliberalism, finally, the concept of austerity is also heterodox and contested. It has become indelibly associated with the intensification and radicalisation of neoliberalism since the GFC. However, David Cameron was not the first British politician to talk about an “age of austerity”. It was also common parlance for the privations endured in the post-war period (Sissons and French, 1963). Kynaston (2007: 298) quoted a British schoolteacher speaking in 1948. Capturing the oppressive spirit of austerity three years after WWII she observed, “Dreariness is everywhere. Streets are deserted, lighting is dim, people’s clothes are shabby and their tables bare”. Yet, this post-war age of austerity coincided with the construction of the welfare state, channelling the WWII ethos of collective sacrifice into the creation of public goods (Hill, 2015: 51), a fundamentally different *dispositif* than the post GFC preoccupation with balanced budgets, marketisation, individual responsibility and entrepreneurship of the self.

A further distinction between modes of austerity occurs in Keynesian economics. Where neoliberal economists argue for pro-cyclical austerity to reduce the tax burden on business, Keynesians argue for austerity “at the top of the business cycle, to prevent the economy from over-heating and causing inflation” and to fill the state’s coffers for difficult times. “From this perspective, austerity is the counterpart to stimulus, which is the preferred strategy during the slump, when the problem is unemployment” (Konzelmann, 2012: 723). Even the newly fashionable Modern Monetary Theory has its putative phase of austerity, exercised through tax-raising to control inflationary effects of money created by the state. As a government policy for public spending restraint, austerity can – in principle - be implemented in pursuit of competing individualist or collectivist goals and at the opposite ends of economic boom-bust cycles. As an ethos, austerity is yet more widespread, found also in the secular idea of the “revolutionary ascetic” (Mazlish, 2017), who repudiates lavish

consumption, favours frugality and employs the latter as a weapon against the gluttony and ostentation of the ruling classes in the manner of Spanish Communist leader, Julio Anguita (2008) who described austerity as “a revolutionary lever”. Virtually all political traditions see episodic belt-tightening as a necessity if not as morally and politically righteous, motivated by virtues of sacrifice and self-mastery also familiar in religious traditions like Lent and Ramadan.

Like other key terms in this discussion, “neoliberalism” and “crisis”, “austerity” is heterodox, but it too has a common analytical core. Whereas neoliberalism is anchored by the valorisation of marketized economies, states and polities, and crisis by notions of upheaval and amplified contingency emerging from structural contradictions, austerity is anchored by the politics of enforced or purposeful frugality, justified by politically wide-ranging ideas about the nature of scarcity and the necessity or virtue of restraint.

## Conclusion

The chapter proposes a Gramscian-regime analytical framework, in order to pivot between the perspectives of governance, resistance and transformation in exploring the question of governability through the age of austerity and to contribute to exploring urban characteristics of the putative interregnum. Furthermore, distinguishing three key terms in the analytical lexicon, crisis, neoliberalism and austerity, sensitises the research to historical continuity and change, and to significant nuances within and across the eight cities. Subsequent chapters discuss key themes emerging from the study. Chapter 2 explores the inter-relationships between neoliberalisation, crisis and austerity, before considering collaborative governance through the Gramscian-regime theoretical lens in several steps. Chapter 3 explores spatial, scalar and jurisdictional relations of austerity governance through state rescaling, while chapters 4 and 5 look at the character of the governing coalitions co-constituting the urban political (dis)orders constituted within each city. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the constitution and impact of resistance to austerity, both on regime dynamics and co-optive power, and the incubation of alternative political economies and potential hegemonic apparatuses in civil society. Chapter 8 reflects on what the research reveals about the nature and extent of the interregnum of neoliberal globalism and the primary mechanisms of stabilisation and disruption constituting today’s urban political (dis)orders.

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- <sup>i</sup> Six case study reports available at <https://transgob.wordpress.com>.
- <sup>ii</sup> A full record of Cameron's speech on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2009 can be read at <https://conservative-speeches.sayit.mysociety.org/speech/601367>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Then Chancellor Sajid Javid declared an end to austerity in the UK in September 2019.
- <sup>iv</sup> Citations from Gramsci are drawn from anthologies and referenced to the original Prison Notebooks through the International Gramsci Society's Concordance Tables at [http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/concordance\\_table/](http://www.internationalgramscisociety.org/resources/concordance_table/).
- <sup>v</sup> Available at <https://juablog.com/2020/01/28/special-issue-worlds-of-austerity-governance-and-resistance-in-eight-cities/>.
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk/category/austerity-governance/>.
- <sup>vii</sup> See <https://salvage.zone>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2001. Full text available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tony-blairs-speech-full-text-9269196.html>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Lenin's report to the Second Congress of the Communist International, On The International Situation and the Fundamental Tasks Of The Communist International republished at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm>.