Since the outbreak of the economic and financial crisis in 2008 and the deepening of other dimensions of the multiple crisis of capitalism – like climate change and the environmental crisis as well as the crisis of political representation and social cohesion due to increasing polarization and social exclusion within many societies – neoliberalism is losing legitimacy. Now, the contradictions and negative impacts of neoliberalism not only during the current crisis, but also during the years before are more obvious. In Latin America, this crisis of functioning and legitimacy has provoked protests and a search for alternatives since the 1990s and has led to important political and social changes. There, and elsewhere, experiences of anti-neoliberal struggles and criticisms by social movements and NGOs, intellectuals, (social) scientists and critical media have existed since the 1990s.

Within both contexts, contested strategies were developed to deal with the multiple crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Besides business-as-usual strategies, some are more classical Keynesian and neo-developmentalist, others attempt to integrate environmental issues and argue for a Green Economy or Green Growth, and yet others prefer more authoritarian or even openly repressive strategies to overcome the crisis. In Europe, authoritarian ways to deal with the crisis currently predominate. A look at Latin America shows that particular strategies may be successful concerning the economic and financial crisis and also the crisis of inequality; however, those crisis strategies tend to work only in so far as they deepen other crisis dimensions such as those of environment and climate.

This is the broad terrain on which the concept of postneoliberalism emerged. It was introduced by progressive intellectuals and leftist governments in Latin America, especially in Brazil. Their rather political uses of the concept attempt to indicate the end of neoliberalism (Borón 2003; Gutman and Cohen 2007; Sader 2009; Macdonald and Ruckert 2009; Escobar 2010; Springer 2014). By contrast, more analytical uses do not claim the end of neoliberalism but its more or less intense shaping – that is, a break with some characteristics while maintaining others (Brand and Sekler 2009b; Gago and Sztulwark 2009; Candeias 2009; Brenner et al. 2010; Buckel et al. 2010). A common denominator is that ‘postneoliberalism’ is a term that reflects the analytical and political-strategic search for alternatives to neoliberalism. Yates and Bakker (2014: 65) condense their approach to postneoliberalism in stating that it:
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reflects an attempt to conceptualize the multiple and complex ways in which neoliberal orthodoxy is contested by particular actors (ranging from political parties and national regimes to analysts and civil society groups), via a variety of strategies (ranging from concrete legal and political changes to experiments with alternative ideational projects).

In that sense, post neoliberalism is an epistemic terrain, with different approaches dealing with the (negative) impacts of neoliberalism and its growing inability to deal with the emerging contradictions and crises. It is a political and analytical perspective to understand and change realities. And it is recognized that there is no one ideal type of post neoliberalism.

In the next part of this chapter I argue that the different usages of the term 'post neoliberalism' have to do with the very understanding of neoliberalism (of course, in The Handbook of Neoliberalism I do not go into detail). Two broad approaches can be detected: a more political-strategic understanding of neoliberalism as a new phase of (capitalist) development and a more analytical understanding which tries to capture the continuities and discontinuities of neoliberalism or neoliberalization, respectively. I conclude with some reflections on other possible hegemonies and hegemonic projects and, at the very end, with a question which remains open to me.

**Post neoliberalism**

In the last 40 years, neoliberal policies were implemented in many societies across the globe. This took place in different forms, resulting in fairly specific ‘neoliberal’ configurations. Therefore, how to understand post neoliberalism certainly depends on the understanding of neoliberalism. If the latter is understood as policy reforms (as the concept of the neoliberal Washington Consensus suggests, see Williamson 1990), then post neoliberalism means that neoliberalism can be countered by reforming the reforms. Close to this is an understanding of neoliberalism which focuses on regulatory restructurings of the economies (Brenner et al. 2010).

Others conceptualize neoliberalism rather as profound societal transformations including the logics of and inscribed in power relations of states, (world) markets and civil society, of class and gender structures, of subjectivities and societal nature relations. The neoliberal counter-revolution since the 1970s, for instance, was a shift not just in economic policies, but also in societal class and power relations, of dominant logics (Gibson-Graham 1996; Hardt and Negri 2000; Harvey 2005; Plehwe et al. 2006). Thus, post neoliberalism needs to be linked to these characteristics. Neoliberalism is also understood as regulatory reform, but its basis is the successful formulation of a class project – class understood in a broad sense: articulated with gender and race – which was implemented by authoritarian state interventions.

Moreover, neoliberalism was never a homogeneous or coherent world view, strategy or practice; it has always been contradictory (Springer 2014). It was articulated with openly violent means (especially through military dictatorships), with conservative or social democratic strategies and social forces. And it changed over time. This is the reason why some scholars prefer the term ‘neoliberalization’ (Castree 2008; Brenner et al. 2010) in order to indicate, according to specific conjunctures, the differentiated forms of implementing neoliberal policies: ‘Neoliberalizing practices are thus understood as necessarily and always overdetermined, contingent, polymorphic, open to intervention, reconstituted, continually negotiated, impure, subject to counter-tendencies, and in a perpetual process of becoming’ (Springer 2014: 7).

It is also an analytical question in which elements of neoliberalism are considered to be in crisis. There is a strong consensus that neoliberalism involved an increase of the power of capital, especially financial capital. The terms ‘finance-led accumulation’ or ‘finance market capitalism’
express this increasing power, which goes hand in hand with the inability to force capital to be distributed, with overaccumulation and debt economies. Other elements of the crisis are the crisis of the world order (the prolonged Pax Americana) due to increasing conflicts and the emergence of new economic and political powers, especially China; the ecological crisis, which is in principle a crisis of fossilist-industrialist and capitalist-imperial societal nature relations – that is, a particular mode of production and living; the crisis of representation and representative democracy; and the obvious inability of neoliberalism to create social compromises and forms of integration. That non-neoliberal countries like China or postneoliberal ones like many in Latin America produce more capitalist dynamics than most countries under neoliberal rule could be considered as a final element.

The concept of postneoliberalism is not very precise (which is criticized by Yates and Bakker 2014). There is no narrow definition,

since the term refers to a host of variegated social practices and discourses that strategically engage with contested forms of neoliberal governance and have not yet crystallized into a clearly definable body of material practices, and thus do not present a coherent alternative to neoliberalism.

(Macdonald and Ruckert 2009: 8)

However, this is less a lack of clarification, but has more to do with the very historical momentum the concept is applied to – that is, it has to do with the fact ‘that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass’ (Gramsci 1996[1930]: 32–3; Candeias 2011).

New phase or focus on (dis-)continuities?

The concept of postneoliberalism emerged in a specific historical conjuncture, namely the struggles against neoliberalism in Latin America and the ascent of leftist governments. Neoliberal strategies faced growing resistance from emancipatory social forces and thus could not be implemented as easily as during the heyday of neoliberal hegemony. Since the middle of the 1990s, and more visibly since the beginning of the new century, governments, parties and social movements in Latin America attracted attention with their explicitly anti-neoliberal discourse (Zibechi 2006; Silva 2009). This led to electoral victories of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998, Ricardo Lagos in Chile in 2000, Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva in Brazil in 2002, Néstor Kirchner in Argentina in 2003, Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay in 2004, Evo Morales in Bolivia in 2005, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua in 2006, Rafael Correa in Ecuador in 2007, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2008 and Ollanta Humala in Peru in 2011. Particularly, the term ‘postneoliberalism’ was introduced at the end of the 1990s by intellectuals close to presidential candidate Lula da Silva. Amid intense anti-neoliberal struggles across Latin America, this term served to indicate that a government of the Workers’ Party (PT) would break with neoliberal policies, its political economy, and related power relations as well as respective discourses and subjectivities. Also, within social scientific debates, some used the term to look for progressive alternatives and as an indicator of a new era. For example, Macdonald and Ruckert (2009: 6–7) argue that ‘the post-neoliberal era is characterized mainly by a search for progressive policy alternatives arising out of the many contradictions of neoliberalism. These progressive alternatives contain remnants of the previous neoliberal model, as neoliberalism does not suddenly disappear.’ Here, the term ‘postneoliberalism’ helps us understand ‘the discontinuities within continuity in the policy practices of many progressive governments’ (ibid.: 2).
However, it is contested whether we are entering into a new, postneoliberal era in general and what might be criteria speaking against and/or for this assessment. We shall see that the usage in the sense of a new phase of (capitalist) development is often employed by progressive forces in Latin America.

Another use of the concept, which will be the focus of this entry, is more analytical and more context-sensitive. It is proposed to consider postneoliberalism as a perspective on social, political and/or economic transformations, on shifting terrains of social struggles and compromises, taking place on different scales, in various contexts and by different actors.

This has a systematic reason: capitalist development is not one-dimensional. It should rather be seen as a dialectical process of the unifying forces of the societies under the dominance of the capitalist mode of production and, at the same time, continuous territorially differentiating and fragmenting dynamics. Hence, the analysis of societies with similar economic structures does not prevent ‘due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances’ (Marx 1968b[1875]: 331).

In this sense, the term ‘postneoliberalism’ allows a closer look at the continuities and discontinuities of spatially and temporally uneven capitalist development. Different postneoliberal approaches have in common that they break with some specific aspects of ‘neoliberalism’, covering in its alternative approaches different aspects of a possible postneoliberalism; they vary in depth, complexity, scope etc. and everyday practices and comprehensive concepts.

The existence of two different perspectives – that is, understanding postneoliberalism more in the sense of a new phase or to discern the (dis-)continuities – is not surprising. Political actors or intellectuals close to them wish to change the real world more directly and need to formulate, besides concrete political aims, also alternative imaginaries. To open political space for Keynesian or neo-developmentalist policies and a respective role of the state requires an opposite to neoliberal ‘free market capitalism’. Of course, the danger lies in a treatment of neoliberalism as a more or less homogeneous system and, implicitly, as a set of economic policies which, in principle, can be reversed by other policies.

Therefore, one important aspect of a critical analysis is precisely to understand current dynamics and to reflect on possible structural obstacles of real historical attempts to change societies. In that sense, critical analysis stands in a necessary and hopefully productive tension with real-world politics. Therefore, in using the term ‘postneoliberalism’ analytically, most contributions refer to the challenge of understanding elements or characteristics which persist and others which are, at least, intended to be changed or are, in fact, changed.

Of course, the working of specific (dis-)continuities often has to do with conditions which are external to the social and political forces within the countries. Therefore, postneoliberal strategies need to be distinguished from post neoliberal effects. For instance, in Latin America more or less postneoliberal strategies and historical dynamics have to do with high demand of commodities on the world market and high prices. I will return to this point.

In summary, the presented analytical approaches to postneoliberalism – which cannot be detached completely from political-strategic and normative perspectives – make social enquiry more precise. When the term ’post neoliberalism’ is used, the task is mainly to detect which characteristics of neoliberalism change and which persist. This task is even more difficult since the neoliberal project and related practices themselves change and are articulated with other elements. Therefore, I concentrate on the region where the concept was used for the first time and where the debate is still most vivid: Latin America. However, many dimensions apply to capitalist societies in general.
Postneoliberalism

Corridors of postneoliberalism: structural problems in moving beyond neoliberal capitalism

The political and analytical driving force of the debate about postneoliberalism is to stop neoliberalism and to overcome the manifold processes of neoliberalization. As we saw, creating barriers and promoting alternatives occurs in highly uneven ways. And respective strategies and perspectives must be developed under historically concrete conditions. 'The post-neoliberal project does not – and cannot – entail a wholesale break from neoliberalism or produce its binary other, since the concrete possibilities for such are filtered out by historically constituted institutional conditions' (Taylor 2009; Yates and Bakker 2014: 65). As Marx prominently put it at the beginning of his ‘Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’ (1968a[1852]: 96), human beings ‘make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’.

Sheppard and Leitner (2010: 192) see a ‘developmentalist socio-spatial imaginary’ at work – that is, a thinking which sees Northern development as the highest form, a one-size-fits-all perspective of development and commodification as the major means of capitalist development (see also Webber 2010).

At a more general level, the state remains oriented between, on the one hand, the creation of favourable conditions for capital accumulation – now under conditions of transnationalized and partly financialized capital – and, on the other hand, its need to be legitimate (Offe 1974). State policies are formulated and performed,

in the framework set by a post-neoliberal society characterised by the predominance of a wider domination of capitalist relations and transnational capital. This limits the character of the state’s intervention and makes it very difficult to reintroduce traditional developmentalism. In fact, while the state appears to have more clout in the economy than before, the boundaries for welfare-policies and for directing the general orientation of capitalist development have been strictly narrowed.

(Féliz 2012: 120)

A partially shaped power bloc creates a postneoliberal discursive and institutional field, which itself represents a novel social context for all actors. In that sense, in Latin America the attempts to overcome the functional and legitimation crisis of neoliberalism can be called a ‘passive revolution’ which was enabled by more radical forces, discourses and strategies and now manages to contain them. One does not have to go as far as Taylor (2009: 35–6), who sees current postneoliberal developments as the culmination of the neoliberal project. However, we saw that the concrete analysis of (dis-)continuities is a key to understanding current constellations.

Postneoliberalism per se is not an anti-capitalist project. However, the question remains whether these continuous and discontinuous dynamics might lead to a non-neoliberal or even post-capitalist mode of production and living (Altvater 2009; Gago-Sztulwark 2009; Katz 2016). Or, as Sheppard and Leitner (2010: 193) put it: ‘Challenging the developmentalist sociospatial imaginary, however, will require not just probing the limits of neoliberalism, but exploring imaginaries that exceed capitalism’ (see also Springer 2014).

Therefore, we could distinguish more reformist and technocratic approaches to postneoliberalism from more transformative ones. It remains historically open – and an object of research and political debates – whether existing postneoliberalist strategies and policies have the potential to
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transform the very conditions of actually existing capitalism. And it is up to concrete analysis whether particular political actions cause rather progressive or regressive results (Brand and Sekler 2009a; Modonesco 2015), whether there is a postneoliberalism of capital or a postneoliberalism of the people (Ceceña 2009). Strong social movements and trade unions, as well as critique, are not envisaged in more technocratic approaches; the actually existing state is considered as the central site of change.

A broader look at current transformations emphasizes the question whether the neoliberal mode of production and living, related world views, dispositives, power relations, forms of politics and the state can be shaped (political-strategic perspective) or is – in whatever direction – beyond main neoliberal characteristics (analytical perspective). How can neoliberal policies be changed but also neoliberal societal relations – neoliberalism’s main characteristics such as the enormous and rising power of (transnational) capital, the orientation towards competitiveness at all levels of society, individualism and egoism – as accepted forms of social action? How can existing or desired principles like solidarity, social responsibility, equity and democracy (including economic democracy) be strengthened?

A transformative perspective helps to overcome an assumed dichotomy of state and market (highlighted in reformist and technocratic approaches to postneoliberalism) and asks which dominant logics and power relations are inscribed within the state, the markets and other social spheres.

Conclusion, outlook and an open question

So far, three broad arguments have been developed. First, there is no clear-cut definition of postneoliberalism, which has to do with the quite open historical situation. Second, social transformation needs to be thought of as power-driven processes which imply struggles and strategies as well as changing practices and dispositives in very different arenas. This means that moves towards neoliberalism or variegated processes of neoliberalization, as well as the shaping or overcoming of particular characteristics, have to be taken into account. And, third, transformations of any kind take place against the background of the existing historically concrete conditions.

From an analytical perspective, we are able to ask questions such as: where are the stabilities of neoliberal configurations? Where does active consent or at least passive consent remain because there are no viable alternatives or because alternatives are silenced? How and in which (historical, political, cultural, social, economic) contexts have postneoliberal practices, strategies and concepts emerged? What are their main objectives and how do they try to achieve them? What are the main obstacles, limitations and contradictions they have to deal with? Which aspects are questioned and tend to be solved in a postneoliberal manner? What tends to remain ‘neoliberal’ or unquestioned and why?

To conclude, I am going to highlight some broader and possibly post neoliberal ‘hegemony’ projects and modes of development to overcome the crisis. Then I mention one question that remains open to me.

A perspective informed by critical social theory can go a step further and detect various hegemony projects which – implicitly or even explicitly – claim to be able to deal with the crisis. One such hegemony project which turned into a more or less socioeconomically and politically viable and accepted hegemonic project (on the terminology, Kannankulam and Georgi 2014) was just outlined: neo-extractivism in Latin America – that is, a mode of production and living embedded in a strong dispositive of ‘progress’ and ‘development’.
The question of the emergence and viability of such hegemony projects can be put into a wider framework: in which directions – through struggles, technological innovations, competition and compromises, inclusion and exclusion, violence and wars, etc. – are the contradictions of capitalism being pushed (Brie 2009; Brand/Wissen 2015)? What are the concrete forms of postneoliberalism? (Springer 2014: 7 argues that even neoliberalization, given its broad character, always includes forms of postneoliberalization.)

The debate about postneoliberalism sharpens the question which ways out of the multiple crisis of neoliberal capitalism are probable. Brie (2009: 16) refers here to Hannah Arendt's diagnosis. According to her, liberal capitalism:

thus fell into crisis because liberalism found no civilizing answers to the central questions of its time and thus set free tendencies that offered solutions through decivilization, promised certain groups advancement and power or at least a good income, appeared to have clear simple answers in the face of growing uncertainty and, instead of a demoralizing degeneration of the social and political situation, proclaimed a great glorious uprising.

In that sense, the crisis of neoliberalism:

can be transformed into an opportunity to stop the menacing accumulation of elements of a new catastrophe of global civilization and thus to make sure that it does not become the origins of an unleashed barbarism. The probability of 21st century barbarism is now much greater than that of a 21st century society based on solidarity.

(Ibid.)

What follows at the very end is one question that remains open to me but needs to be dealt with from a critical analytical and politically emancipatory perspective.

Neoliberalism was not only a strategy across nation states and national economies; it deepened the tendency of capital to create the world market (cf. Marx 1973[1857–61]: 408). Highly interdependent socio-economic relations and the power of capital, especially financial capital, make it difficult – albeit not impossible – to exit those relations. Additionally, as Poulantzas (2001[1973]) has shown, the ‘international’ is present within national social formations.

When we bring political-strategic and analytical perspectives together, it might be asked: how do we deal politically with those spheres which are beyond steering and control? That is, the world market and its volatility of demand and prices, in our time especially the role of China, neo-imperial and neo-colonial politics. What are emancipatory postneoliberal ‘politics of scale’? Probably, projects of regional integration are important. While the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is clearly a neoliberal and US-driven lock-in process at the international level, the Bolivian Alliance for the Peoples of our Americas (ALBA) attempts to formulate an alternative. Mercosur needs to be considered. The European Union is quite ‘locked in’ with a neoliberal constituency, but this cannot prevent us from asking how this can be changed.

International constellations point at another aspect: in what sense is the room for postneoliberal policies in countries of the global South an expression of the weakening of influence and dominance of countries of the global North? This is quite obvious in Latin America with respect to US influence. In which way is China promoting certain ways of postneoliberalism in the world? There will be a certain variety of postneoliberalisms and, necessarily, a competition among them (Candeias 2009). Which form is this going to take?
These and many other questions are on the agenda, and their precise analysis will be important within social scientific debates, as well as for real-world development.

References


