For Post-Statist Geographies

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ABSTRACT

This article critically investigates past and contemporary treatments of the state within geographical scholarship. We propose that there is a silent statism within geography that has shaped it in ways that limit geographical imaginations. Statism, herein, refers to a pervasive, historically contingent organisational logic that valourises and naturalises sovereign, coercive, and hierarchical relationships, within and beyond state spaces. We argue that although the explicit, colonial statism that characterised early geography is past, traces of statism nonetheless underpin much of the discipline. While political geography has increasingly critiqued 'state-centrism', we argue that it is essential to move beyond critique alone. Using anarchist state theory to critically build upon perspectives in geography, we argue that statism is intellectually and politically problematic and should be recast as an active constituent of unequal social relations. In turn, we outline five core myths that form its logical foundations. In concluding, three initial areas in which post-statist geographies can make inroads are identified: interrogating intersections between statism and other power relations; constructing post-statist epistemologies and methodologies; and addressing how the state is represented in geographical work.

The way geographers think about the state requires more fundamental critical engagement. In this article, we argue that despite a growing body of work in political geography that problematises the state's taken-for-grantedness, a silent statism remains embedded across the discipline, underpinned by a set of problematic myths that this silence reproduces. Anarchist thought has been innovative in its critiques of state-centric scholarship (Ferretti, 2013; Ince, 2015a; Kropotkin, 1978; MacLaughlin, 1986; Springer, 2014), yet its potential contributions to geography have often been overlooked. We continue in this anarchist tradition, but introduce the possibility of a research and practice agenda, which we call *post-statist geographies*, that offers new ways of thinking across the discipline and different political perspectives. Post-statist geographies challenge statist epistemologies, positioning statism as a pervasive but historically contingent organising logic that intersects with other asymmetric and oppressive social relations. In this regard, statism shapes *both* the world we inhabit *and* our scholarly activities, and we build upon existing critiques of 'state-centrism' to destabilise the state's structuring role in geographical imaginations.

Although states perform various socially useful functions in market-capitalist societies, stat*ism* generates and justifies dynamics that violently position differentially-situated groups in authoritarian power relations, institutionalising hierarchical patterns of relating both within and beyond spaces of the state itself. Yet, most geography has tended to position states as vehicles for governments to variously strengthen or ameliorate other oppressive relations rather than as subjects of political contention in their own right, and have only critiqued state-centrism to the extent of reworking existing ontologies (e.g. Brenner, 1999a; Häkli, 2001). We critically build upon these works rather than reject them wholesale, arguing that the same criticality that many geographers rightly use to address other oppressions should also be applied to statist relations of ruler and ruled. Although we draw from anarchist perspectives, we encourage but do not expect others to do the same; post-statism is intended as an (admittedly normative) analytical tool, with which geographers in general could develop more nuanced readings of the state's role in their work. This distinguishes post-statism

from anarchism itself, which addresses a wider set of issues and relies on a broadly unified worldview.

The article is divided into three main sections. First, we provide an overview of anarchist critiques of the state. This foregrounds the immanence of social relations and absolute contingency of the state, offering a powerful counter-narrative on the originary social bonds on which state societies are formed, and their futures. Second, we interrogate the colonial and statist origins of geography, before considering contemporary geographical treatments of the state. Regarding the latter, although scholars rightly emphasise the socially-produced, contested, and fragmentary nature of the state, traces of geography's statist-colonialist history persist in how geographers write about the state, and in underlying epistemologies. This means contemporary geography ultimately stops short of moving towards other knowledge systems beyond statism.

In the final section, we identify five core myths of the state, which represent the fundamental building blocks of statism. Through a brief discussion of each, we seek to destabilise the logics on which they are based. The paper concludes by outlining three future contributions of post-statist approaches to geography; namely interrogating the intersections between statism and other power relations; constructing new epistemologies and methodologies; and shifting the way the state is represented in geographical work. This article is by no means an exhaustive study; instead, it is an initial exercise in equipping geographers with some of the critical tools to craft post-statist approaches in their own ways.

ANARCHISM AND THE STATE

Anarchism is typically caricatured as a stubborn opposition to all forms of organisation, control, rule, or government. The state, as the epitome of hierarchical order, has become popularly perceived as the primary target of anarchist politics. However, this is at best a simplification; at worst, a deliberate

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mischaracterisation. Rather than an opposition to *all* order, anarchism promotes *certain forms* of order; forms oriented towards participatory, democratic, and horizontal order, and in opposition to orders based on hierarchy, exclusion, coercion, and inequity. Major publications in recent years have reintroduced this more nuanced, articulate vision of anarchism into geographical literatures (e.g. Clough and Blumberg, 2012; Springer et al., 2012).

Anarchism does incorporate a critique of the state, but only insofar as it is the most identifiable object of a broader anarchist critique of authority. However, since the state is a key building-block of the geographical lexicon, anarchist critiques offer important lessons. McKay (2008: 296-298) follows Pierre-Joseph Proudhon by distinguishing between the "irrational", coercive authority of the state and "rational" forms of authority that come with the experiences and knowledges of differentially-skilled equals. The state is emblematic of a particular mode of (violently-maintained) authoritarian relations; part of an interconnected set of power asymmetries (including gender, race, class, dis/ability, etc.) that allows certain groups to dominate others. It is therefore not so much the specific phenomenon of the state that concerns anarchists, but a broader set of asymmetrical social and power relations typified, justified, and institutionalised by the state, forming a pervasive organising logic within society that we call *statism*. What appears to be a critique of discrete oppressions is in fact a critique of the totality of dominant social relations, hence differentiating between the *logic* (statism) and its *manifestation* (the state). In response, anarchists propose the creation of non-hierarchical societies organised through global federations of moneyless, self-governing but interdependent community, workplace, and larger-scale councils and assemblies rooted in free association, participatory forms of democracy, and mutual aid (Kinna 2009).

Prefiguration is a pivotal element of anarchism, in which people collectively seek to create the relations, practices, and structures that may serve as the basis of a future society, in the present. While individualist thinkers (e.g. Stirner, 2013) are sometimes associated with anarchism, the 'communist' majority articulates prefiguration as a collective endeavour, differentiating from the

Ghandian articulation "be the change you wish to see," centred on individual action. Through processual, self-managed, prefigurative praxis, anarchists seek to build constellations of non-oppressive relationships and organisations. This does not necessarily eschew revolutionary 'moments', but rejects the idea that hierarchically-organised vanguards (e.g. orthodox Marxist-Leninism) can create free, equal societies. Instead, anarchist prefiguration seeks to minimise the chances that ruptures will lead to new systems of domination. Indeed, long before the Soviet Union, anarchists were already warning against the dangers of authoritarian methods of social change (e.g. Bakunin, 1990: 178; cf. Brinton, 2004: 293-378). Anarchist concerns about parliamentary routes to socialism (Bakunin, 1971a) also proved accurate, as radicals – even some anarchists – became institutionalised within state structures (e.g. Price, 2007: ch. 10). Thus, anarchist understandings of how unequal power relations reproduce, amplify, and become entrenched through statist strategies have proved incisive.

Contemporary anarchist geographers have focused on how authoritarian structures shape our behaviours yet remain vulnerable to prefigurative praxis. Scholars have been attentive to the dynamic spatialities that make both institutional (Springer 2013) and affective (Clough 2012) structures of statist authority crucial points of contention in shaping futures. Anarchist-inspired geographers have been keen to explore how spaces of self-management within and beyond capital and state can point towards other modes and structures of (self-)governance, "in which people… associate to pursue their interests in a manner that combines self-help and mutual aid" (Wilkin and Boudeau, 2015: 15; cf. White and Williams, 2012).

The philosophical basis of anarchist state theory lies partly in a critique of entrenched Hobbesian-inspired notions that life without centralised authority is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes, 1660, in Hoekstra, 2007: 110). Thomas Hobbes' (hypothetical) dystopia of a feral "state of nature" (ibid. 117) justified an unspoken 'social contract' in which individuals rescind some freedoms in exchange for the state's protections. Anarchists, conversely, point to evidence of non-state co-

operation and complex social organisation (e.g. Barclay, 1982; Kropotkin, 2009) where such

conditions can in fact be eroded by the emergence of state structures (Bookchin, 1986; Graeber,

2004). In contrast to post-Hobbesian liberalism, which gave rise to contemporary systems of

individual liberty and its unspoken yet compulsory social contract with the state, anarchists argue

that society must attune itself to other 'laws' that are

> inherent in ourselves […]. [W]e should see in them the real condition and the effective
>
> cause of our liberty – that liberty of each man [sic.] that does not find another man's
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> freedom a boundary but a confirmation and vast extension of his own. (Bakunin,
>
> 1971b: 262)

Liberty, for anarchists, is intersubjective rather than legislative, drawing strength not from the

atomised legal category of 'citizen' but from solidarities with others. Consequently, "the state is, by

its very nature, a breach of this solidarity" (Bakunin, 1971c: 276). Indeed, anarchists argue that the

state of nature, alleged as the dystopian promise of statelessness, is underpinned by precisely the

ruthless egotism that dominates statist-capitalist society (e.g. Bakunin, 1971a: 130). Voluntary co-

operation, care, and mutual aid are, on the contrary, products of non-authoritarian relations that

endure *despite* capital and state (Kropotkin, 2009a; White and Williams, 2012).

Systems of private property sanctioned and enforced by the state (Proudhon, 2004) have fostered a

society in which the state's regulatory and coercive functions undermine what Bakunin identified as

the intersubjective basis of human relations. However, the state's *sole* purpose is not only to stabilise

and facilitate capitalism; according to anarchists, capital and state developed in tandem as a

mutually-reinforcing system of societal organisation. This allows anarchists to identify the mutual

dependency of state and capital on one another: "[t]he two mutually augment one another, and they

are fed from the same source" (Rocker, 2004: 10). Anarchist efforts at pinpointing the common

origins of capitalism and the (modern) state have identified a range of processes, such as the

development of private property rights (Proudhon, 2004), enclosure of common lands (Kropotkin, 2009a), late-feudal urbanisation (Bookchin, 1986), technological change (Zerzan, 2010) and crises in pre-capitalist economic systems (Graeber, 2011), among others. Their common theme is the self-reinforcing polarisation of power relations, driven and seized upon by emergent elites.

Crucially, anarchist perspectives suggest that certain organisational logics corresponding to this polarisation have become naturalised over time. Anarchist approaches to organisation emphasise that we cannot view present organisational rationalities as simply outcomes of capitalist modes of production, but as a continually emergent pattern of human relations, with deeply integrated but independent trajectories to capital (e.g. Malatesta, N.D.; Ward, 2011). For example, neoliberalising relations of govern*ance* have emerged both in contrast to, *and in tandem with*, existing forms of govern*ment*. Thus, the transition is not linear, causing "variegation" as new and old state systems interweave (Brenner et al., 2010).

This chameleon-like state, then, institutes in society not a uniform structure but a toolkit of organisational logics resting on shared principles. These are benchmarks for unified and sovereign systems of minority rule, including vertical*ist* chains of command (although not always manifested wholly vertically), (aspirations to) sovereignty over certain territories and constituencies, and a system for enforcing compliance. The naturalisation of these principles is what we understand to be statism; an integrated set of socially-embedded organisational logics establishing the state as the dominant model of governing society. This naturalisation is necessarily situated, reflecting specific models of statist organisation in particular spatio-temporal contexts. Importantly, statism is embedded (admittedly unevenly) as a benchmark for shaping a much broader set of institutional structures in society, stretching far beyond the state itself.

The contrast between this pervasive statism and the intersubjectivity of social bonds identified by anarchists gives anarchism a distinct narrative and epistemology that makes a notable shift in

thinking by positioning the state as, essentially, 'artificial'. As we see below, political geographers increasingly recognise the social production of the state, but rarely see the contingency of the state in such absolute terms. By transferring the spaces, skillsets and debates of rule and order from the collectivity of people, into the hands of a specialised elite, anarchists also see the state as simultaneously withdrawing a great pool of creative intellect from the core machinery of societal organisation, and ensuring the reproduction of particular (hierarchical, coercive, sovereign) forms and norms of organisation. Rarely addressed in geographical debates on the state, this places people's capacities to self-organise at the centre of anarchist critiques, thus making them not critiques of the state specifically but of the limiting fallacies of statism's organising principles more generally. In the next section we explore in greater detail the 'silent statism' embedded deep in the roots of geography.

SILENT STATISM

Geography and the Colonial State

Geography's relationship with the state has a long history (e.g. MacLaughlin 1986: 14-23). We begin in the nineteenth century when the discipline first emerged, coinciding with the global spread of the modern state through colonial expeditions and invasions. During this period, geographical research and education were linked to the need to "strengthen and popularise the idea of the nation state" (Castro, 2005: 59). As Santos argues (1990: 32), a key objective for the teaching of geography in the colonial state's educational programme was to conceal the state's role in the organisation of space and society, and justify colonial enterprise, within both the colonial state and its colonies (cf. Anderson, 2006: ch. 6). At the same time, geography consolidated itself as a generalised system of

knowledge that facilitated the legitimation of state territorial control within their borders and towards conquered territories (e.g. Kearns, 2004).

Coupled with geography's statism, an exoticisation of colonial subjects and non-Western ethnicities and cultures was generated in the discipline (Staszak, 2012). This geographical imagination was developed from a geography of otherness generated through hierarchically organised classification. This is heir to a colonial culture that "works by temporal transposition" in which societies and peoples were classified through geographical scholarship into "here-present-developed" and "beyond-past-developing" (Staszak, 2012: 190). The legacy of this early classification by geographers is still felt in the present day through policy and development discourses, representing the Global South as lagging behind the 'advanced' states of the Global North, presented as the apex of social development and stability.

With its institutionalisation, and despite the efforts of some (Fall, 2010; Kearns, 2004), geography became a discipline largely at the service of property and public order; a means of studying the subjects of state control – territory and population – as well as producing state-oriented knowledges and spatial imaginaries for rendering society's complexity "legible" (Scott, 1998). This state-geography relation has been recognised in various contexts, especially colonialism (Driver, 2001). For example in Mexico, where a National Society of Geography and Statistics was established as one of the first in the world, geographers' academic training was conducted and defined by the needs of the state, involving detailed knowledge of the territory and its boundaries, in order to organise it, exploit its resources, etc. (Moncada, 2003). Likewise, in struggles between Siam and France in the Mekong region in the late 19th Century, "the modern [state's] discourse of mapping was the ultimate conqueror" over indigenous knowledges and spatialities (Winichakul (1994: 129).

This links early geography to a particular form of knowledge production oriented towards the goals of the (colonial) state. Lander (2000) argues that the social sciences were formed in a context in

which liberal market society became hegemonic. This led to a "worldview that provides the foundational premises to the whole edifice of modern social knowledge", characterised by four axes (Lander, 2000: 9): 1) a universal, linear view of history associated with the idea of progress; 2) the "naturalisation" of liberal-capitalist society in both social relations and "human nature"; 3) the naturalisation or ontologisation of multiple separations characteristic of that society (e.g. class); and 4) the superiority of knowledge produced by that society ('science') over other knowledges. From this perspective, the modern state became the most complete form of social organisation; its standardisation as a way of "being in society" transformed "other ways of being, other forms of social organisation, other forms of knowledge, [...] not only [into] different, but into lacking, archaic, primitive, traditional, pre-modern" (Lander, 2000: 10). In this manner, geographers developed not only theories of the evolution of states but also materially played a role in their construction (e.g. Friedrich Ratzel; see Bassin, 1987). Within this historical context of the discipline's institutionalisation, the rationale behind the very construction of geographical knowledge was intimately linked to a political and territorial project since the nineteenth century, with the modern state as its main ally.

Cartography is a key mechanism of state-building (Harley 2005) which, given its scientific character in the modern sense (objective, neutral, etc.), facilitated not only appropriation of territories but also the imposition of sovereignty, private property and a Cartesian logic of conceiving "space [as something] which could be measured and mapped, and which could consequently be controlled, apportioned and bordered" (Storey, 2001: 34). Dell'Agnese (2013) notes that cartography as the way to define boundaries, together with statistics, the science of state *par excellence*, allowed elites to connect spaces to the state's agency. So, "the geo-metrification of the world through its cartographical representation sacrificed its fluidity and variety in exchange for the possibility of dividing and dominating it" (2013: 120).

This history of geography illustrates its statist foundations as a discipline, and shows some of the mechanisms for the consolidation of statist imaginaries in geographic thought. It is therefore necessary to investigate more critically the role and position of the state in geography, but also, we would add, to critically examine the fundamentals of geographical science, considering the historical and cultural context in which its epistemology was developed. Bearing in mind this legacy, the next section discusses contemporary geography's understandings of the state, and how we might critically build on a number of recent promising developments.

The State in Contemporary Geography: Emerging Complexities

Contemporary scholarship in political geography takes a healthy interest in the state. A major theme orbits the neoliberalisation of the state (e.g. Brenner, 1999b; MacKinnon and Shaw 2010). State restructuring is linked to global economic and political systems that render the state's archetypal function as a sovereign and bounded territorial entity decidedly reworked (e.g. Agnew, 2009; Mountz, 2013). Geographers of the Marxian regulationist tradition have been influential in foregrounding the ways in which the neoliberal(ising) state adapts itself to ensure the smooth running of capitalism (e.g. Jessop, 1997). Others have not only criticised such perspectives for their failure to recognise how everyday agency shapes state power (see, however, Purcell and Nevins, 2005), but also its ontological categories (Marston et al., 2005). In response, Jessop (2007) argues we must understand the state through a "strategic-relational" approach that foregrounds its shifting parameters and diverse manifestations according to material change. Nonetheless, such approaches tend to maintain their focus on capital as the key driver of the state, thereby representing it as a passive (or, at best, reactive) vessel.

In this context, scholars often inspired by Foucault have identified new strategies of policing, disciplining and ordering populations that indicate a diversification of bordering strategies beyond the border itself, through internal spaces of the state (MacKinnon, 2000; Rumford 2008), external

spaces (Silvey, 2004), objects (Meehan et al., 2013) and bodies (Mountz, 2003). The everyday is increasingly central, and Staeheli et al. (2012) have proposed the notion of the "ordinary" – denoting mundane, standardised rhythms lived according to a rule-based order – to describe how we live through the state's matrices and behavioural pathways. This echoes Billig's (1995) seminal treatise on the unconscious impacts of "banal nationalism" on our understandings of the world.

Painter (2006) is among a number of scholars (e.g. Jones 2012; Woodward and Bruzzone, 2015) who argue that the state is not a 'thing'; instead, "state-effects" emerge from "prosaic" social relations through lived practices. This approach suggests that the state functions not as a static institution external to social life but a particular way of being and relating. Painter argues, "we need to move away from many of the structural approaches to the state which continue to dominate political geography" (2006: 771), and instead focus on the discursive, procedural, and material factors that intersect to produce a dynamic "stateness". Crane (2015: 2) agrees, but adds that traditional imaginaries of the state as a discrete institution also limit political imaginations "not only [of] people who would act in its name but also those who would identify against it". This is a key point, leading to the articulation of *post*-statism rather than simply *anti*-statism in this paper.

However, despite important research on the state's fragile, contested nature, geographical work rarely pushes analysis to its logical conclusion; namely, that not only is the modern state a shifting, messy, and *ad hoc* set of relations, but that it is, in fact, *entirely contingent*. In the life-course of human history, it is a decidedly young and turbulent phenomenon, initiated by minority elites to address certain situated challenges and opportunities for consolidating power and wealth. There are two main reasons why even excellent scholarship critical of state-centrism nonetheless tends to bypass this point. First, there is an emphasis on the state as an ontological category of analysis – a question of what exists and how it functions. This can inadvertently obscure how the state also shapes our ways of knowing, which impact materially on a huge range of practices, understandings and ideas in society (Barrera and Ince, 2016). Second, studies of the state tend to focus on its short-

term fluctuations, rather than its *absolute* contingency as socially-produced and time-bound within the totality of complex human societies. When writing in detail about a specific contemporary topic, it is not easy to substantively acknowledge the vast range of non-, pre-, and post-state societies across thousands of years of humanity. Given these challenges, it is not surprising that the state's endurance goes largely unquestioned.

The outcome of these difficulties emerges in various ways. Perhaps the most persistent statism is many scholars' use of the couplet 'nation-state' (Gilmartin 2009). Not only does it wrongly imply geographical congruence between the two, but it also naturalises the state by rooting it in a form of belonging (nationality) that, although problematic, is usually far older and linked to more 'organic' attachments to regions and cultures. Relatedly, when contemporary geographers have critiqued state-centrism, they have tended to focus on somewhat modest questions. In three of the foremost pieces of political geography concerning this issue, authors conclude that we should "sensitise ourselves to the challenges of exploring alternative ways of conceiving society and space" (Häkli, 2001: 418), "[rethink] the meaning of both state territoriality and political space" (Brenner, 1999a: 41), or foreground "the issues of mundane state spaces and policy mobility" (Moisio and Paasi, 2013: 263). These are important questions, but their substantial outcomes rest on somewhat specific areas for development within their particular sub-fields rather than extrapolating 'outward' across the intellectual landscape of geography. Such valuable and important critiques, then, stop short of integrating these nonetheless important questions into more robust debates about overcoming the statism they rightly observe.

Likewise, it is telling that the state is often blurred into the functions of government and vice versa (Robinson, 2013). When state and government are conceptually separated, states tend to be understood as recipients of governmental agency; *passive* structures through which *active* policies are operationalised. Flint and Taylor (2007: 137) offer a standard interpretation, where government is "the major agent of the state [that] exists to carry out the day-to-day business of the state.

Governments are short-term mechanisms for administering the long-term purposes of the state." Among scholars outside certain debates in political geography, this interpretation is very common. Further examples of how silent statism inadvertently shapes geographical endeavour are discussed below and elsewhere (Barrera and Ince, 2016).

Therefore, bearing in mind the intellectual barriers to overcoming statism identified above, we seek to build on existing critiques of state-centrism, and theorisations of the state as an outcome of social relations, by moving towards a framework for post-statist geographies. Statism is somewhat of an absence, not a presence; an implicit acceptance of certain modes of organising society rather than a conscious belief as such (Häkli, 2001: 412). It is not necessarily an explicit support for, or defence of, the state in its myriad forms but a failure to explicitly recognise its contingency, and therefore to question its legitimacy, efficacy, or impact on our imaginaries. If critical political geography seeks to dismantle unequal power relations (e.g. class, patriarchy), then should we not also seek to dismantle the asymmetric power relations between ruler and subject? And if not, why not? Even critical and radical geographies have been heavily shaped by an unarticulated set of barriers to fundamental critique of one of modernity's foremost power inequalities. Despite many critical studies of geography's statist-colonialist past and state-centric present, we have argued in this section that major barriers currently facing geographers ensure that this silence endures. This is not to say that all geographers must adopt an anarchist perspective, but that none should grant the state immunity from the fundamental critique to which many subject other asymmetric power relations.

Knowing the Silent State

In light of historical and contemporary silences, we bring anarchist thought back into conversation with geography. Although, later, we critique some examples of statist thinking, we primarily use anarchist ideas to build upon promising developments in political geography, in order to build a new

research and practice agenda. As discussed, geographers have opened up the complexities and contestations of the state in new ways. Such manoeuvres help us to bring the silent, depoliticised state into a more active and repoliticised position. Interestingly, anarchist readings of the state parallel this growing focus on relations. For example, Kropotkin noted that the modern state's emergence produced "new relationships between members of society which did not exist before [its] formation" (2009b: 7), while Landauer (2010: 214) developed this further:

> The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently. […] We… must realise the truth: we are the state! And we will be the state as long as we are nothing different.

Landauer would agree with the likes of Crane (2015), Jones (2012) and Painter (2006) that the state comes into being through certain patterns of human interaction. Yet Landauer pushes this reasoning further, suggesting that if the state is socially produced, then we can imagine and create non-state futures. This contrasts with much of the geography literature, with its relatively ahistorical view of the state as shifting and restructuring but always existent. Given the state's relative youth in the life-course of human history, theorising the state as a pattern of social relations is not only truer to historical reality but also makes it more vulnerable, linked to particular ways of doing things, in particular places, at particular times.

Landauer suggests that if the state is a social relation, it can be transformed, undermined, or destroyed altogether, by patterning social relations differently. There are, nevertheless, debates among anarchists over this superficially naïve understanding of how power manifests materially/corporeally and organisationally (e.g. Price, 2011). It is in this intersection of materiality and organisation where Kropotkin (2009b: 34) distinguishes between "Roman" and "popular" logics of social organisation. Whereas the former represents centralised and enforced 'rational' command

by specialised elites, the latter is composed of a self-organised, granular array of parallel

organisational practices generated through popular intellect. While he recognises interplay and

overlap between these different organising logics in practice, Kropotkin's point is more of a

conceptual exercise to "recapture the spirit" (Kropotkin, 2009b: 34) of the popular within/beyond

outwardly Roman structures, although frustratingly he does not elaborate in great depth. In seeking

this "spirit", Landauer notes that "the state will fulfill a certain function and remain an inevitable

necessity as long as its alternative, the socialist [anarchist] reality, does not exist" (2010: 214). Thus,

it is essential that Landauer's statement quoted above be read not as a naïve belief in the 'magical'

transformative capacity of simply doing things differently, but that by doing things differently – by

prefiguring other worlds – people demonstrate that worlds beyond statism are viable.

We can therefore understand silent statism as instituted as much by the practices of the "ordinary",

in Staeheli *et al*'s (2012) sense, as through the spectacular violence of police and armies. Thus, the

question remains: "The state is only one of the forms assumed by society in the course of history.

Why then make no distinction between what is permanent and what is accidental?" (Kropotkin,

2009b: 6). As anthropological studies of state formation agree, the state is a contingent

phenomenon, and specific spatial and historical conditions have led to its emergence and

stabilisation as the dominant institutional logic, albeit manifested in diverse ways (e.g. Blanton and

Fargher, 2008; Clastres, 1974; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, 2005). This indicates that the state has

been made, and can be unmade, in certain spatial and historical conditions, and through certain

patterns of relations.

In outlining the notion of statism as a spatio-temporally contingent logic representing the dominant

trope of formal societal organisation in the present, our purpose is not to downplay the vast

multitude of other organisational forms that exist within, alongside and despite it, but to foreground

the vulnerability and youth of the modern state in the midst of myriad alternative forms. Our

discussion of contemporary geography indicates that geography has largely stopped short of

substantially engaging with this contingency. Consequently, geography (and no doubt related disciplines) has developed a mode of knowledge production that is premised on a pervasive yet largely silent statism. In light of discussions so far, the next section introduces five core 'myths of the state' that form the basis of statist spatial imaginations.

MYTHS OF THE STATE

> [Myths] are accepted on faith, they are taught to be believed, and they can be cited as authority… [They] account for the origin of the world. (Dundes, 1984: 9)

The power of a myth is its "sacred narrative" (ibid: 1), shaping understandings of reality through a semi-fantasy world. Myths are especially powerful because their worlds share strong similarities with material reality. Embedded in the statism at the roots of geography, we draw from earlier discussions to identify five core myths that are on the whole silently and unconsciously reproduced in geographical scholarship. These refer not specifically to the state itself but *all* statist modes of being and relating; those modes which ultimately follow the same organisational rationality of hierarchical, coercive, sovereign power relations. We do not suggest that the myths are universal – that all geographers reproduce all of these myths – but that they constitute *an implicit but dominant logical framework* of statism woven through geographical imaginations.

1. The state is the outcome of a 'natural' tendency towards hierarchical organisation at a large scale.
2. The state is the only medium through which societies can function efficiently and justly.
3. The state is an eternal, ahistorical and unchangeable fact of life.
4. The state is a neutral, apolitical container of 'good' or 'bad' governments.
5. The state in its regulatory capacity (state socialism) is the only alternative or counter-balance to free-market capitalism.

These myths tend to appear as unconscious, unarticulated, non-explicit structuring factors in spatial imaginaries. We have argued that the state is a social relation, and these (and potentially more) myths function as the dominant logical framework of a statist system of relations. Although not possible to engage with each in depth here, we now briefly discuss them via a series of short interventions to continue unravelling their certainty.

1. The State is the Outcome of a 'Natural' Tendency towards Hierarchical Organisation at a Large Scale

As Lefebvre mentioned, "the nation and the nation-state, as supreme values and truths, are generally accepted without further examination, a critique of the criteria used seems like sacrilege" (2003: 63). The consolidation of the state as 'natural' is linked to its assertion as the final stage of an evolutionary process in a linear trajectory of human progress. The question to ask is "why a political form which developed in one small part of the world has become the dominant system of territorial organisation throughout the world" (Painter and Jeffrey, 2009: 20).

To begin answering that question, as we have discussed, this is a distinctly modern worldview, whereby history involves linear progress in which certain dichotomies have become naturalised in relation to state formation (e.g. primitive versus developed). A classic example of this is Michael Mann's text:

> The only stateless societies have been *primitive*. There are no *complex*, *civilised* societies without any centre of binding rule-making *authority* (…) Thus societies with states have had *superior* survival value to those without them. We have no examples of stateless societies long enduring past a *primitive* level of *development*, and many

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examples of state societies absorbing or eliminating stateless ones. (1984: 67, our

italics)

The idea of the state and hierarchical organisation as a natural outcome of big societies thus affirms

a connection between large, complex societies of the West and their 'civilised' superiority. Crucially,

Mann's statement incorrectly implies that rule-making and order can only ever be centralised and

authoritarian. Similarly, Diamond (2013: 26) considers that the state is necessary when the

population reaches such great numbers that the possibility of recognising each other is reduced.

Diamond considers that after exceeding 10,000 inhabitants it is impossible to maintain debates in

which all citizens participate, so the transfer of power to a few becomes necessary. Thus, Diamond

justifies the inevitability of the state, its bureaucracies and, moreover, its inequalities, on a 'natural'

dynamic in growing populations.

This perspective argues that people are incapable of organising when they reach large numbers;

thus, the state represents a natural 'end of history'. With few genuinely stateless cultures remaining

in the contemporary world, the victory of the liberal capitalist state seems assured. Yet, just as

Marxist thinkers remind us that despite capitalism's hegemony, it is a historically contingent ideology

that can be undone, so do anarchist thinkers insist on the contingency of the state and statism as the

primary example of authority. It is necessary to reconsider the idea of the state not only as a

naturalised social construction but also as a justification of hierarchical, coercive relations as if they

were also natural or universal. We propose more thoughtful analysis of the cultivation of a "banal"

(Billig 1995) or "ordinary" (Staeheli et al. 2012) state presence: by using stat*ism* (a logic of social

organisation), in addition to *the* state (a social phenomenon or relation), we can reframe the

temporality of the state's contingency – its multiple past, future and contemporary absences and

presences – as a persistent "spectre" in the present (Hill 2015: 422-423). In doing so, following Craib

(2004: 259), scholars may avoid "convert[ing] contingency into inevitability," presenting "a specific social and spatial order [a]s natural and the future, hence, inevitable".

2. The State is the Only Medium through which Societies can Function Efficiently and Justly

The state has not only been associated with the idea of progress and development but also as the optimal stage of political organisation; a perspective that does not take into account the great diversity of social-organisational forms that exist beyond statist ones (Barclay 1982). Hence, the developed/primitive dichotomy has encouraged descriptions of stateless societies as deficient or elemental in comparison to state societies, which are presented as developed and efficient. The problematic notion of 'failed states' is indicative of this assumed stability and efficiency of the (Eurocentric) state form (Hill, 2005).

This is evocative of strategies for psychological control used in the United States during the 20th century, which justified hierarchical authority by employing Freud's principle that people are driven by irrational thoughts (Bernays, 2005). Important here is the back-to-front logic that underpins this justification of the state's accepted efficiency: if humans are inherently irrational, then in order to maintain social wellbeing they must be led by a tiny minority of those *same inherently irrational humans*. As Painter and Jeffrey (2009) mention, the state is a cultural formation, employing symbolic and discursive processes, hence the production of meanings is central to its configuration (Marston 2004). Cultural codes that are far from universal are integrated into it; hence, "the state is not a set of institutions, but also a set of understandings" (Painter and Jeffrey, 2009: 37-38), where myths and official history play a significant role in constructing material conditions to maintain and justify state power.

The development of the modern state has considerable influence from colonialism, whose 'efficiency' was drawn from militaristic expansionism rather than stability. Likewise, colonialism's

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legacy continues to define unjust policies for the consolidation or annihilation of peoples and organisational forms (Nogué and Rufí, 2001; Gilmartin, 2009). Moreover, state formation is far from a collective decision and many – if not most – have been born from violence (Lefebvre, 2003): not only has the state wielded spectacular violence but also the ordinary violences of ordering and 'rationalising' production, planning, and bureaucracy in the pursuit of state power at the expense of social justice and social, ecological, and organisational resilience (e.g. Scott, 1998). The state's attempted rationalisation – even in contemporary 'smart' governance (Vanolo, 2014) – creates a false veneer of neutrality and efficiency (Chouinard, 2004: 237; Crane, 2015).

In sum, it is important to revoke the privileged position of the state as the only means to reach a coherent and just organisation, and to explore possibilities that incorporate other ways of organising society – including those that may not be explicitly pro- or anti-state (e.g. Öcalan 2011). The state presents itself as a coherent and stable entity in order to project an image of inevitability, but as we have examined, this is a convenient smokescreen.

3. The State is an Eternal, Ahistorical and Unchangeable Fact of Life

As already mentioned, the emergence of states is largely accepted as inevitable and irreversible, as is the present-day division of the world by borders (Storey, 2001). However, although state formation is manifested in codified laws and structures, it is a *social* process with geographical, historical and cultural specificity, whereby judicial development "play[s] a significant part in unifying the state" as a social unit (Jeffrey and Jakala, 2015: 44). Given its fluidity, the idea of the state as a final, ideal stage in social development is therefore questionable, not least according to the critique of modernity already discussed. In this sense, Lefebvre (2003: 63) affirms that "the figure of the nation-state dominates historical narratives (history), as a 'state of right'…, and presents itself as the direction, decisive phase and finality of historical time".

The state's imagined permanence emerges from an understanding of it as the pinnacle of development, an 'Omega point' beyond which progress is not possible. This is related to myth 1; a chronology thought to be universal which divides societies by means of natural history (evolution), history of civilisation (progress) and economic history (growth). The latter, in particular, has allowed the contrasting of different 'stages' of humanisation, civilisation and development (Staszak, 2012: 190). Although belief in these chronologies has diminished, it cannot be said that their traces do not endure, especially in capitalist economic and developmental doctrine and popular imaginaries. Thus, "the economic and demographical opposition between developed countries and developing or underdeveloped countries leads us perfectly to a succession or a waiting line, which allows us to think the precedence of the first over the second and the otherness of North and South" (Staszak, 2012: 90). Thus, it is not surprising that those space-times after a state has disappeared (e.g. 'failed states') are disquieting for many, disrupting teleologies of progress towards shifting but ultimately eternal and unshakeable state structures. Such absences embody the contingency and insecurity of the state. Making this connection would not be a significant intellectual leap for political geographers, given the long-standing critiques of "the absolute and indivisible political authority implicit in [the notion of] state sovereignty" (Agnew, 2005: 440).

To overcome the perceived ahistoricity of the state which prevails in geography, it is again essential to define the state as a product of particular circumstances. In this way, Craib (2004) for example describes how maps have worked to form an idea of a unified, coherent state in Mexico, and the construction of modern Mexico as an eternal state-space (cf. Winichakul 1994). Having traced the construction of the state as a universal norm, we follow Craib (2004: 259) in suggesting that "dismantling the fixed traces of the state space, by emphasising the historical and social processes that conditioned its creation, may constitute a procedure to recuperate and imagine other possibilities, other ways of being in the world, and other opportunities that were figuratively and literally foreclosed".

4. The State is a Neutral, Apolitical Container of 'Good' or 'Bad' Governments

As discussed previously, geographers' distinctions between the state and government are often either vague or problematically assert agency to governments but not to states. Thus, Hannah (2015) argues that critics of the state do not appreciate the diversity of state forms. However, his defence of 'good' states (but not 'bad' ones) orbits two problematic generalisations. First is a generalisation of state-critical voices, lumping progressive critiques together with paranoid, far-right 'libertarians' (2015: 14). Second, ironically, Hannah generalises the multiplicity of governance-forms that are, or have been, present in human societies, choosing the modern (European) liberal-democratic state as the apex of good governance.

Explicitly or implicitly positioning the state as a politically neutral vessel into which the politicised actions of governments are inserted fails to grasp the geographical and historical situatedness of the state in the life-course of human societies, and denies its political and behavioural "effects" (Painter, 2006). Other disciplines present extensive supporting evidence. There is considerable anthropological and archaeological research that foregrounds how the state emerges, solidifies and generalises itself through the co-evolution of *deeply* politicised processes, "including competition and war, high resource concentration in circumscribed environments, interregional exchange, [and] the materialisation of elite ideologies" (Stanish, 2001: 59; cf. Anderson, 2006; Rogers, 2007; Thurston, 2002). In the present, the political agency of, and conflicts within, state bureaucracies is well documented in critical management studies (e.g. Harney, 2002). Of course, there is governmental influence over the style and composition of state institutions, but this does not preclude such institutional frameworks from shaping political spaces within (and beyond) their remit. Considering, for example, the strong traces of Soviet-style state administration that endure within 'post-socialist'

states (e.g. Meyer-Sahling, 2009), it is clear that government policy or ideology is only one factor in the state's retention or shedding of different elements of past modes of operating.

Such a large body of evidence is a powerful challenge to the myth that states are apolitical, and geographical scholarship presenting the state as an outcome of social relations further strengthens this challenge. Crane's reading of Rancière is a case in point: the statist 'police' order is ultimately co-produced with non-state logics and geographies, such that "a potential to disrupt the exercise of state power is endemic to processes of police ordering" (2015: 3). Thus, the state effect is a politicised reflection of a multitude of institutional and interpersonal practices, relationships and struggles. From early state formation to the present, the state is undeniably political and politicised. Yet, by bringing the state's political nature into focus *from its very inception*, we can also see how statism in wider society functions partly as a disavowal of the political nature of its originary "Roman" logics of power.

5. The State in its Regulatory Form is the Only Alternative or Counter-Balance to Free-Market Capitalism

Given the intersecting power of the above myths, it is understandable that radical and critical perspectives in geography usually posit a polarity between two statist paradigms – market-capitalist neoliberalism and state-capitalist socialism (Springer, 2014). On one hand lies the current neoliberal-dominated world order, rooted in market-driven, state-enforced economic growth. On the other is the radical milieu that often supports participatory forms of democracy but which ultimately asserts that state-led redistribution of wealth is the only viable alternative.

Regarding the latter, Andrew Cumbers' (2012; 2014; 2015) thoughtful work on reinventing the state is relevant. Recognising the limitations of both neoliberal small states and 20th Century Keynesianism, Cumbers (2014: 2) asserts that nevertheless "[a]ll societies across the world have some kind of state

– the question is not whether the state should play a role in society, but what sort of role that should be". Here, it would be all too easy to list various examples of complex non-state societies that exist today in regions such as Kurdistan/Rojava and Chiapas, let alone in the recent past. Cumbers recognises the re-scaling of Global North state power as an opportunity to strengthen the state's normative role in shaping the 'common good', in contrast to what he calls the "fuzziness" (2012: 217) of non-state alternatives. The assumption is that *any form* of "central coordination" (ibid.) requires a state, even if this involves drawing non-state forms (e.g. commons) into state apparatuses (Cumbers, 2015). While his boldness in explicitly justifying state intervention in contrast to the silence of many others should be applauded, Cumbers' inventive and thought-provoking 'shoe-horning' of non-state organisational forms into his reconceptualisation of the state is nonetheless indicative of the bipolar statist imaginary within critical geography.

The emphasis on state regulation (broadly defined) as the only alternative to neoliberalism is not surprising, given how Marxist thought has dominated geographical political economy. Moreover, ambiguity between anarchistic voluntarism (collective self-management), and neoliberal voluntarism (dismantling 'big' welfare states) raises concerns about the vulnerability of self-organisation to appropriation by capital. Consequently, it is easier, and more accepted, to draw from European social democratic traditions of state-regulated capitalism than to explore the possibilities of transition to another social order beyond capital *and* state.

However, this becomes problematic when stateless solutions do not register as valid. A 'straw person' jibe by David Harvey is a case in point, quipping that "I wouldn't want my anarchist friends to be in charge of a nuclear power station" (2012: n.p.). Robust responses from an anarchist perspective were swiftly forthcoming (Schulze, 2013), and explicit negative stereotyping of anarchism, thankfully, remains a minority attitude in critical geography. More interesting is that many critical geographers generally do not explore in detail the state's role (or lack thereof) in alternative futures. Cumbers' treatises on state ownership indicate that this need not be so. A detailed case in favour of a stateless

society is, nevertheless, not the purpose of this paper; more importantly, in this section we have foregrounded some ways that statism's hegemonic position can structure scholarly imaginations, and offered short critical remarks on its foundational myths. In doing so, we hope that these discussions will support geographers to identify and explore alternatives to statism in our discipline.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: TOWARDS POST-STATIST GEOGRAPHIES

In this article, we have framed silent statism as anything but silent – as a rather 'noisy' set of myths that require attention. Despite important state-critical scholarship, geography, reflecting broader statist trends in society, has hitherto inadvertently maintained an uncritical acceptance of statist imaginaries and epistemologies, which we position as the dominant (but certainly not the only) organisational logic in present society. This is problematic, and scholars face significant intellectual barriers to interrogating the state with the same critical rigour as other oppressive social relations. This, we contend, is partly due to a mythology of the state in society and the academy that presents it as natural, necessary, ahistorical, apolitical, and the only alternative to free-market capitalism. Although we draw heavily from the anarchist tradition, this is of concern to political geographers of all perspectives, since it has a structuring effect on our epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies and pedagogies.

It is therefore important to decentre statism, and explore perspectives beyond its limits (see Barrera and Ince, 2016). This first exercise should not be seen as an (accurate or not) critique of the state, because it is embedded in the construction of knowledge itself. A necessary first step will be to "decolonise our mind" (Nogué, 2006), since statist mythology has constructed a spatial imaginary explicitly or implicitly influenced by coloniality – indeed, the state is itself a colonisation of space.

The key question is what can a post-statist geography achieve, and how can we translate critique into an active research agenda? We have discussed hints of such an agenda in political geography;

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similarly, Woodward (2014) uses the term "statist" to differentiate the state from its affects, while Coleman (2015) exposes how state-oriented knowledges and methodologies obscure racial justice. More broadly, feminist epistemologies indicate how it is possible to not simply critique existing (patriarchal) knowledges but to establish new frames of reference altogether (e.g. Fricker 2007). It is the latter task that a post-statist geography might engage in, which we have already begun exploring in depth (Barrera and Ince, 2016).

In this spirit, we now identify three initial avenues where post-statist geographies can make important contributions. First, attention to anarchist thought in particular can provide insight into how statism intersects with other oppressive relations. In turn, the state becomes a fraction of the meshwork of unequal power relations that political geographers are already grappling with in innovative ways. However, this is not a call to ignore or circumvent the state – and most anarchists recognise this as problematic – but to reconfigure geographical imaginations to actively decentre and undermine its certainty by exploring the intersections and interdependencies of the state's violent power asymmetry with other oppressions.

Second, post-statist perspectives lead us to address the related epistemological question of how we can know the world in non-statist ways. The point for reflection is how statism shapes geographical epistemologies, producing structures of knowing that can generate epistemic distance between representations of the world and immanent experiences of it. We are not suggesting that there is an 'objective' reality awaiting discovery but that statism shapes the way we investigate, analyse, and understand the world, and we need to develop epistemologies that decentre the state from its privileged position. Hence, it is conceivable for any geographer to adopt a post-statist epistemology: it might encourage more explicit, direct engagements, bringing silent statism into a more active position in their work. An epistemological shift will also have implications for methodology, since not only are data sources (e.g. statistics, laws, archives) generally defined and managed by states (Häkli, 2001), but also research practice is heavily shaped by state funding, resources and regulations.

Third, post-statist geographies call for us to reflect on our scholarly representations – words, figures, maps, etc. New or modified lexicons and terms, for example, may prove important for highlighting or undermining statist assumptions. We have already mentioned 'nation-state'; another example is 'country', used as an ill-defined alternative to 'state' or 'nation'. It is derived from the Latin words *terra* and *contrata*, combined to mean land (terra) standing against or opposite (contrata), implying a bounded, territorial entity that exists in opposition to its 'others'. Etymology is only one component of a word's meaning, yet attention to the terms we use to describe phenomena is important in re-focusing representations of space in a more reflexive way. Lexical issues for critical exploration may also include, for example, the insistence of journals and conferences to list the state in which an author is located, and uses of pronouns (e.g. we/they) to differentiate between different states, territories and audiences. Visually, we might usefully learn from Ferretti's (2009) explorations of early anarchist geographers' critiques of, and alternatives to, 'state's-eye view' maps.

In this short call for post-statist geographies, we have sought to open up new opportunities for geographical scholarship by foregrounding the active role that the state – as a concept, discourse, and material effect of social relations – plays in shaping imaginations. Bringing together anarchist and geographical thought is fruitful for critically building upon emerging state-critical work in political geography and interrogating traces of geography's past and present statisms. Post-statist perspectives could especially help shape debates in political geography at the boundaries of state and non-state forms, such as citizenship, sovereignty and nation. In this context, it could shift the terms of debate towards seeing statism as a contingent and politicised set of logics producing multiple material, discursive and affective interfaces with other equally-present logics of organisation and belonging. This article may provide groundwork for developing similar lines of thinking further.

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