Article

Exploring the Relationship Between Social Movement Organizations and the State in Latin America

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Abstract
Under conditions of weak statehood, societal actors are supposed to assume functions usually attributed to the state. Social self-organization is expected to emerge when the state leaves important social problems unattended. Should social self-organization, therefore, be regarded as a reaction to state weakness and as compensation for state failure in the provision of basic services? Does society organize itself on its own in areas where the state is absent or ineffective? By the example of two Latin American social movements, this article aims to show that social self-organization—at least on a larger scale—is not independent of the state, but rather a result of a dynamic interaction with the state. The two examples this article explores are the middle-class Venezuelan neighborhood movement and the Argentine *piquetero* movement of unemployed workers. Both movements emerged as reactions to the state's failure and retreat from essential social functions and both developed into extensive and influential social actors. For that reason, they can be regarded as crucial cases for observing the patterns and conditions of social self-organization and autonomous collective action within the specific Latin American context. Despite their different backgrounds and social bases, the two cases reveal remarkable similarities. They show that the emergence and development of self-organized social groups cannot be conceived simply as a reaction to state weakness, but rather should be viewed as a dynamic interaction with the state.

Keywords
Argentina; neighborhood movement; piquetero movement; social movements; social self-organization; state–society relations; Venezuela

1. Introduction

Should social self-organization be regarded as a reaction to state weakness and as compensation for state failure in the provision of basic services? Does society organize itself on its own in areas where the state is absent or ineffective? This article aims at showing, by the example of two Latin American social movement organizations, that social self-organization—at least on a larger scale—is not independent of the state, but rather a result of a dynamic interaction with the state.

State–society relations can take very different forms, depending on state conceptions, state capacities, and societal resources (Migdal, 1988). Provided that both sides are sufficiently differentiated, a (temporary) balance between state and society (including the economic sphere) is supposed to emerge with a division of labor between both sides concerning basic functions and social regulations (Abbott & Snidal, 2009; Barnes, 1995; Levi, 2002). Changes or disruptions to this balance can occur on different grounds and originate on the level of the state or the level of society. The state may redefine its functions and extend or reduce its reach either on ideological grounds or as a reaction to environmental changes (e.g., Feigenbaum et al., 1998; Snyder, 2001). Societal actors, on the other side, can either fill a void left by the state or challenge the state in some of its functions and domains (Neubert et al., 2022; see also Schild, 1998). Which side prevails in such a process is seen mostly as depending on the distribution of resources, mainly on

the state's part, whose strength or weakness is regarded as the decisive factor defining the boundaries where civil society begins (Migdal, 1988; Rosenblum & Lesch, 2013).

The focus here is on weak states, which can be found mostly (but not exclusively) in developing areas. Weak states maintain a modicum of order and functionality while at the same time leaving important social problems unattended. A range of Latin American states falls into this category. In indexes of state strength, Latin American countries are rarely found at the bottom, but many of them show deficiencies in various areas of social and economic governance (Rice, 2008; Soifer, 2012). It is in these areas where societal self-organization is expected to emerge, the assumption being that "the weaker the state's impact on society is, the more important local self-governance becomes" (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020, p. 4). The same rationale is expressed by Grohmann (1996, p. 1), who assumes that "in those places where the state…is retreating, new social actors try to fill the space left free."

However, the supposition that "a strong state goes together with a weak society and vice versa," as Kriesi (1996, p. 161) puts it, does not hold in every case. It is argued here that social self-organization does not automatically result from state weakness. On the one hand, even weak states can strongly influence and curtail the autonomy of self-organized social groups. The state is not a passive bystander of social action, but an actively intervening player. Weak states in particular try to take advantage of organized civil society for political support and to gain control over social actors (see, e.g., Geddes, 1994). On the other hand, social self-governance cannot be taken for granted. Rather than organizing autonomously in compensation for state weakness, social actors develop broader strategies and repertoires of collective action, including various kinds of claim-making vis-à-vis the state (Lavalle & Bueno, 2011). Thus, the relationship between state and society should not be conceived as a balance, but rather as a dynamic interdependence in which social self-organization is marked by an ambivalent and uneasy relationship with the state, which often oscillates between the modes of contestation and co-optation.

This pattern can be expected to be found in Latin America where in a range of countries both civil society and the state suffer from weaknesses and a lack of resources in various areas. At the same time, the spheres of state and society are often not sufficiently differentiated due to clientelism and particularism (Jarquín & Echevarría, 2007; Roniger et al., 2004). This context has critical implications for the patterns of social self-organization. It means that social actors are in a difficult position because their autonomy is endangered by their lack of resources, on one hand, and by state intervention, on the other. Under these conditions, the emergence of self-organized groups tackling social problems is highly uncertain, and the assumption that social self-governance more or less automatically fills the void left by the state requires further inspection and qualification.

This article aims to look closer at the emergence of self-organized groups and the dynamics of their relationship with the state. For that purpose, two noteworthy cases of social movement mobilization and self-organization are analyzed in their development and their interaction with the state. The two cases are the Venezuelan (mostly middle-class) neighborhood movement and the Argentine *piquetero* movement of unemployed urban workers. These two movements are of interest not just because of their size and political impact, but because they exemplify the uneasy position of social actors between self-organization and claim-making, autonomy, and co-optation by the state.

Methodologically, the comparison follows a most different cases design insofar as the historical contexts, the goals, and the social backgrounds of both movements are quite different. At the same time, the two movements can be regarded as crucial cases of social self-organization due to their size and overall importance. The Venezuelan neighborhood movement was the most extensive movement of the country's democratic era and the *piquetero* movement in Argentina represents, according to Rossi (2017, p. 5), "the largest movement of unemployed people in the contemporary world." If any social actors can be expected to carve out a space of autonomous collective action and self-governance, then these two movements are among the most likely ones to succeed.

The dependent variable in the comparative examination of the two movements is the degree of autonomy and the patterns of interaction between these movements and the state over time. Relying mainly on secondary sources, it will be shown that despite their differences, there are notable parallels in their development and their relationship with the state. This relationship was contestatory at the outset, but it turned more complex and entangled at later stages of development. State actors successfully co-opted parts of the movements and some groups switched from self-governance to clientelism, while others managed to maintain their autonomy. Considering such parallels in patterns and conditions of social self-organization, some preliminary generalizations about state–society relations in Latin America over the past five decades can be attempted. If even these movements failed to maintain their autonomy, an entangled and at least partially dependent relationship to the state can be expected for other self-organized groups in Latin America, too.

In the next section, the role of social movements as primary examples of social self-organization will be explicated. In Section 3, the background of social movements in Latin America and their relationship with the state are characterized in general terms. Sections 4 and 5 are dedicated to the two cases from Venezuela and Argentina. The article concludes with a summary and some tentative generalizations about state–society relations in Latin America.

2. Social Self-Organization and Social Movements: Definitional and Conceptual Preliminaries

There is a broad range of perspectives on social self-organization from different disciplines. In democratic theory, the importance of local self-governance was already recognized by Tocqueville and it has remained an issue of interest ever since. In governance research, interest in social self-organization has perked up more recently. According to Sørensen and Triantafillou (2009), governance was long regarded as a matter of the state. Meanwhile, the perspective has shifted and society is no longer considered a burden to be handled by the state, but rather a resource for effective governance. In the same vein, the negative connotations frequently associated with the informal economy and informal institutions have given way to a more positive view and an increasing appreciation of society's capacity to govern itself autonomously (Jobert, 2008). Yet, recent voices point to the continuing influence of the state and the dependence of civil society organizations on external funding, which brings attention to the relationship between the state and self-organized social groups (e.g., Brandsen et al., 2017; Pousadela & Cruz, 2016).

Social self-organization is treated here as largely synonymous with self-governance, describing not an abstract system property—as in the literature on self-organized criticality (see, e.g., Brunk, 2001)—but manifestations of institutionalized collective action by organized groups, mainly on the local level, aiming at the resolution of community problems (Pfeilschifter et al., 2020). While social self-organization can appear in different forms, it is frequently associated with social movements, which by their very nature seek to organize autonomously in pursuit of a common goal. In this sense, social movements can be defined as:

> Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part. (Snow et al., 2019, p. 10)

In most cases, social movements emerge in opposition to established authorities and seek some kind of social transformation, which necessarily entails the creation of organizational structures (e.g., Tilly, 1978). Social movement organizations usually start as small and informally organized groups with a limited purpose (such as providing services or protecting a protest site from being cleared), but over time, they eventually become more structured and institutionalized (Kriesi, 1996). Moreover, local movement organizations are often regarded by movement activists as testing grounds for alternative visions of governance. Similar to religious communities, social movements try to turn their overarching ideals into practice on the small scale to prove their viability as, for example, the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil has done by building agrarian communities on occupied land (Carter, 2010).

Within the broad and diverse range of self-organized groups, social movements are specific in some respects. First, they allow observing processes of self-organization from their inception because they develop much of their activities and organizational structures from scratch. Second, due to their contestatory character, social movements closely reflect the dynamics of state–society relations (see, e.g., Tarrow, 1994, Chapter 4). And, third, ideational and identity-driven reasons for local self-organization are particularly important in these cases. According to Melucci (1995, p. 46), a collective identity "enables social actors to act as unified and delimited subjects and to be in control of their own actions." A strong collective identity means that social movements are more likely to embark on a path of institutionalization than groups with more limited and merely instrumental orientations. Due to these specificities, social movements are well suited for observing patterns of mobilization and social self-organization in Latin America.

3. Social Movements and the State in Latin America

As in Europe and North America, the emergence of new social movements in Latin America started in the 1960s, but their development was shaped by the specific social and economic conditions in the region. Roughly speaking, the cycles of movement mobilization can be split into two distinct periods. The first period is associated with accelerated modernization, economic expansion, and social upheaval during the 1960s and 1970s, which led to an authoritarian reaction in several countries. This period was marked by movements of students, industrial workers, and middle-class sectors, including, for instance, the Venezuelan neighborhood movement. The second period comprises the 1980s and 1990s when economic crisis and neoliberal reforms produced social hardship and growing protests by marginalized groups. During this second period, which is exemplified by the Argentine *piquetero* movement, the focus of mobilization was mainly on material issues like wages and living conditions (Della Porta, 2015; Hellman, 1992; Slater, 1991). In general, Latin American social movements often faced unfavorable conditions of organization and mobilization. As Weyland (1995) shows in the case of the Brazilian health reform movement, scarce resources and widespread clientelism constituted an impediment to gaining mass support. Accordingly, mobilization has proved highly cyclical, and organizational development rarely reached higher levels of institutionalization (e.g., Foweraker, 2001).

The state was a decisive factor in movement development and institutionalization. As Walton (1998, p. 463) puts it, the "state creates both critical problems and opportunity structures." Chalmers (1977) points to the

specific interconnectedness between state and society in Latin America, which is characterized by a peculiar combination of legalism and informality of personal networks and exchange relationships. The state is administratively weak, but dominant in other areas, especially when political or economic resources are at stake. Diamond (2008, p. 43) even speaks of predatory states in which "stark inequalities in power and status create vertical chains of dependency, secured by patronage, coercion, and demagogic electoral appeals to ethnic pride and prejudice….The purpose of government is…to produce private goods for officials, their families, and their cronies." To protect the powers and privileges of the elites, governments tend to apply accommodative and repressive strategies towards social actors, which severely curtails the scope for social self-organization and autonomous collective action (Ortiz, 2015; Trejo, 2012). This does not apply to Latin American states in general, but it describes a more or less pronounced tendency of established actors—government, parties, and unions—to regard social movements and self-organized social groups either as a threat or as a source of support for their partisan ends (Hellman, 1992). The state, therefore, influences social self-governance not just indirectly, through the legal and institutional framework (see, e.g., Smith & Fetner, 2007), but as an actively intervening actor.

Yet, state involvement in societal affairs is not one-sided. Social actors also used to turn to the state to gain access to resources. Despite its weakness in some areas, the state is still perceived as the principal avenue for attaining personal benefits as well as group goals like the supply of running water to a community, the prevention of pollution, or the provision of public security. Moreover, the role of the state is not confined to patronage. Overarching conceptions of social and economic development also rely on the state, to whom comprehensive transformational powers are attributed. Because of these far-reaching projections, Alvarez et al. (1998, p. 10) speak of an outright "cult of the state" observable in the region and Coronil (1997) describes the state (in the Venezuelan case) as "magical," which stands in sharp contrast to its structural deficiencies and its often poor governance capabilities.

These tendencies in state–society relations are also observable in the two countries under consideration, although to different degrees. Both are rentier states, but in Venezuela, the petro-economy has shaped society more profoundly. As noted by Karl (1987, p. 65), the political economy of oil in Venezuela, especially between the 1960s and the economic crisis of the 1990s, affected state–society relations in fundamental aspects:

> The pattern of class formation, the rise and decline of different economic actors, the structural potential for organization and consciousness, the formation and role of the state, the relative importance of various political actors, and finally, the types of socio-political alliances likely to be forged.

These patterns, which in their political dimension are referred to as *puntofijismo* after a transitional pact between the dominant actors, included strong parties, a civil society managed from above, and a centralized state functioning as a broker between elite groups through the distribution of oil rents (Boeckh, 1997; Crisp & Levine, 1998; Kestler, 2012). Until the late 1980s, this model worked well for the middle classes, while the lower social strata gained little from the petroleum cornucopia. Social spending was quite unevenly distributed among the population and social governance was lacking in many respects. The inhabitants of poor neighborhoods depended largely on ad hoc programs, which were reduced in size when oil prices collapsed and the economy slumped in the 1990s (Maingón, 2004). Yet, in the wake of a renewed oil boom starting in 2004, the Venezuelan rentier state reasserted itself under the populist rule of Hugo Chávez. Although this time the elites and the beneficiaries of the bonanza had changed, the basic patterns of state–society relations remained in place: Civil society organization and mobilization were mainly a means of getting access to the revenues generated by the oil economy.

In Argentina, the role of the state was ambivalent and fluctuated over time, too. On the one hand, the state's deficiencies become apparent from high levels of poverty, economic instability, and poor governance quality (e.g., Llamazares, 2005). On the other hand, the bureaucracy was a quite powerful tool used by political actors for mobilization and control as part of a corporatist model established by Juan Domingo Perón in the 1940s. Peronism, the dominant political current in Argentina, was based on the incorporation of relevant social sectors from above and a state-centered economic strategy of import substitution (Collier & Collier, 2002; Little, 1973). As in Venezuela, the Argentine state played a central role in mediating and controlling social conflicts through centralized mass organizations, particularly the unions (Levitsky, 2003). This corporatist state-centered model underwent several periods of strain and modification during economic downturns, authoritarian rule, and liberalizing reforms, especially during the presidency of Carlos Menem in the 1990s, but it was restored after the economic crisis of 2001. Although corporatism was partially substituted by clientelism and patronage, the state again assumed a central role in economic development and social policy (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2007).

Thus, in both countries, state–society relations followed a etatist logic and were managed by clientelist parties and unions. Under these conditions, social self-governance cannot be assumed to emerge naturally when the state fails to take action. Although the state was frequently challenged by new collective actors like the student movement, the workers' movement, feminist movements, or ecological movements, these rarely succeeded in the redefinition of state–society relations more radically and few of them managed to remain unaffected by clientelism (Ellner, 1994; Haber,

1996). The patterns of movement development and the difficulties in maintaining autonomous actorhood on the societal level become evident from a comparative view of the neighborhood movement in Venezuela and the *piquetero* movement of unemployed workers in Argentina. These two movements emerged during different periods of social movement mobilization in different contexts and from different social backgrounds. Nonetheless, they show some striking similarities in their development and their relationship with the state.

4. The Neighborhood Movement in Venezuela

Urban neighborhoods, especially of the middle class, have always been fertile grounds for social mobilization and participation across Latin America (e.g., Baiocchi & Gies, 2019). Spatial closeness, dense networks of communication, and shared experiences provide favorable conditions for collective action (Zhang & Zhao, 2019). Yet, most urban movements proved to be short-lived and few of them lived up to the expectations placed on them. In this regard, the Venezuelan neighborhood movement was an exception to the rule because it persisted for several decades and it scored important successes like the passage of the Organic Law of Municipal Government (LORM) in 1978, which granted legal status to neighborhood associations and a say in municipal councils. In 1987, the movement launched a petition for further political decentralization, which was implemented shortly thereafter with the introduction of direct elections of governors and mayors. Despite these successes, the movement failed to consolidate organizationally, coordinate its goals, and maintain its autonomy from the state and established actors, especially from parties, who dominated political life in Venezuela until the mid-1990s (Crisp & Levine, 1998; Ellner, 1999).

Neighborhood associations started to emerge after a period of rapid, largely uncontrolled urbanization in the 1950s, initially in Caracas, from where they spread to other cities, reaching a total number of roughly 10,000 associations by the early 1990s (Santos, 1995). The movement was highly heterogeneous, with groups from middle-class neighborhoods as well as from poor *barrios*. From the start, the relationship between these groups and the state was ambivalent. Some of them turned to the state to resolve local problems like health care, insecurity, or water supply, while others explicitly rejected government interference and pushed for self-determination in local affairs. In the early 1970s, neighborhood groups started to coordinate their activities and establish larger federations to represent their interests more effectively vis-à-vis the state. These interests included financial assistance for sustaining their local activities as well as a broader agenda of state reform and decentralization.

In 1971, 14 Caracas-based associations founded the Federation of Associations of Urban Communities (FACUR) to demand legal recognition by the state and separate elections of mayors and municipal councils, which was finally achieved in 1978. Shortly after, however, Congress passed an amendment to the LORM that imposed regulations and state controls on neighborhood associations, which meant that the movement's struggle for self-governance continued throughout the 1980s (Ellner, 1999; Santana, 1983; Santos, 1995). In that period, the movement gained considerable strength, with other federations springing up in various parts of the country, and a diversification of its activities. In 1980, the Escuela de Vecinos, another organization of neighborhood activists under the umbrella of FACUR, was founded to foster democratic citizenship through education, information, and training on the grassroots level (Fernandes, 2015). FACUR was mainly of middle-class origin and it belonged to the most vocal critics of the centralized, clientelist Venezuelan party-state (Lander, 1996). This critical stance, however, did not prevent the movement from becoming a battleground for competing clientelist party machines, as most of Venezuelan civil society did during the era of *puntofijismo*. Based on the amended LORM, the dominant parties created their own associations to gain influence within the movement and they encouraged party members to seek seats on the executive boards of neighborhood associations and federations. Due to their links to the government, party activists had easy access to the state, which put the associations under their control in an advantageous position (Ellner, 1999).

Party interference aggravated the movement's dilemma between autonomy, on the one hand, and the need for state resources as well as the advancement of a broader political agenda, including decentralization and electoral reform, on the other. As Grohmann (1996, p. 9) puts it: "The paternalist state presents itself as a dilemmatic entity: the government is both enemy and benefactor at the same time." Self-organized groups on the local level not only faced financial and organizational limitations, but they also came to realize that their purposes could not be pursued independently of more encompassing political reforms. This dilemma led to internal tensions, especially between FACUR and the Escuela de Vecinos. The former accepted party representatives on its executive board and sought political influence through public office, especially on the local level, while the latter took a purist approach and refused to play the "political game" (Ellner, 1999). The ambivalent relation with the state also contributed to a differentiation at the level of grassroots activism, which varied between claim-making, segregation, and the arrogation of certain state functions. Ramos Rollón (1995) observes that in residential areas of middle and high social strata, the demands of neighborhood groups were defensive, regarding mainly regulatory issues, while citizens from lower social strata tended towards claim-making. Middle-class *urbanizaciones* acted more autonomously but in a quite self-serving way. Ellner (1999) points to cases of middle-class neighborhoods that created armed

brigades and closed their area to external traffic, thereby defying not only the state but also imperiling the interests of other communities. In other cases, state functions were assumed by neighborhood associations in their official representative role defined in the LORM where municipal councils failed to function orderly.

Thus, the neighborhood movement in Venezuela presents a highly diverse picture, but its emergence and development cannot be conceived in isolation from the state and its role in Venezuelan society. Undoubtedly, there were numerous instances of self-organization and self-governance in areas like housing, electricity, potable water, sewage systems, and security (Santos, 1995). However, to overcome their financial, organizational, and legal limitations, state involvement was inevitable. The conception of local self-governance as a way of compensating for state weakness hardly fits the reality of movement activism in this case. Even in cases where neighborhood activists assumed state functions, they did so based on rights granted to them by the state. Moreover, state actors actively intervened in the movement, particularly political parties, who tried to use neighborhood groups as a substitute for their decreasing support from unions and professional associations. Ultimately, these tensions and ambivalences contributed to the movement's lack of consolidation and pointed to the limitations of social self-governance in the Venezuelan political context.

5. The *Piquetero* Movement in Argentina

Similar observations can be made in the case of the Argentine *piquetero* movement, which differs from the Venezuelan case by the context of its emergence, its social roots, and its repertoire of collective action. The name *piquetero* refers to its principal tool of protest: pickets that blocked major traffic connections, particularly in the Buenos Aires area. What both the Venezuelan and the Argentine movements have in common is their ideological and social heterogeneity as well as their uneasy relationship with the state.

The development of the *piquetero* movement is often described as cyclical, starting in the mid-1990s as a reaction to rising unemployment, reaching its peak during the economic collapse of 2001–2002, and entering a path of fragmentation and declining mobilization in the years thereafter, especially during the Kirchner governments, which successfully co-opted the movement's leaders (Campione & Rajland, 2006; Escudé, 2007; Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2007; Pereyra et al., 2008). Other authors, however, point to the surprising persistence of *piquetero* organizations and call for a more differentiated view, considering also aspects of autonomous collective agency (Cortés, 2010; Rossi, 2015).

The *piqueteros* emerged in 1996 in the Patagonian province of Neuquén as a protest movement against the social consequences of privatization that soon spilled over to Buenos Aires. The movement's aim was, accord-

ing to Rossi (2017, p. 18), to reconnect the working population with the state "as a provider of some benefits and rights" like unemployment subsidies and housing. It reached a national scale in 2001 with the outburst of social protests after the collapse of the Argentine economy. This period also saw the emergence of broader mechanisms of coordination among the various regional and sectoral groups within the movement. At the same time, strategic and ideological differences became more pronounced. While the autonomist currents of the movement—mainly left-wing organizations of unemployed workers with roots in the union sector and the radical left—wanted to keep their distance from the state, other groups sought strategic alliances with the established actors receptive to their demands (Rossi, 2017; Svampa & Pereyra, 2009). This receptivity was enhanced by the political and economic turmoil of the years 2001 and 2002 when the *piqueteros* came to be regarded as a political resource.

During the governments of Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Christina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015), both from a leftist Peronist faction, the ties between the movement and the government became successively closer and more formalized. Movement leaders assumed executive posts and parts of the movement became formally incorporated into the government (Kaese & Wolff, 2016; Natalucci, 2011). In that way, the movement acted on two levels, on the grassroots and in the political-electoral arena, which mutually sustained each other. Grassroots work, like workers' cooperatives, was facilitated by state subsidies, while the movement's activist base was used to mobilize voters for the Kirchners' electoral coalition. Yet, the autonomist wing of the movement rejected these kinds of bargains and insisted on its independence from the government. This wing included a broad spectrum of local groups who saw themselves as political counter-projects in the vein of left-wing radical vanguard movements (Rossi, 2017). They emphasized their independence from established political actors like parties and unions as well as their opposition to the clientelist practices these actors stood for. For that reason, they also rejected government programs that, in their view, rendered workers dependent on the state.

Although these autonomist groups were increasingly marginalized and side-lined by the government, some of them managed to sustain independent community work for some time. For example, in 2001, a group of unemployed workers (Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados [MTD]) founded a community center in the Buenos Aires district of Matanzas to implement its vision of solidarity and community. During the economic crisis of 2001, when the state failed to contain the social impact of the economic collapse, the center provided basic services for unemployed people and served as a contact point for swapping goods and staples. Later, the MTD also established a bakery, a sewing shop, and an editorial as part of its effort to re-establish social links and to counteract the "culture of individualism"

it attributed to the government (Flores, 2006). Other grassroots initiatives of *piquetero* organizations included popular kitchens and education facilities. As Kaese and Wolff (2016) note, the autonomist *piquetero* groups have managed to maintain these activities and retain their independence.

Yet, the larger share of *piquetero* grassroots activities was either directly sponsored or at least subsidized by the state, especially under the Kirchner governments. Already during the interim presidency of Eduardo Duhalde (2002–2003), the movement was involved in the supervision of a large-scale social assistance program that reached around two million people and, according to Rossi (2017), represented the most massive unemployment subsidy of Latin America. *Piquetero* representatives were invited by the government to join a broad-based supervising council, which implied social and political recognition, but also a way of pacifying the movement (Golbert, 2004). According to Grugel and Riggirozzi (2007, p. 97), the program created a degree of "state control over the unemployed, including the *piqueteros*." Under the first Kirchner government, the program was replaced by another one, the Plan Argentina Trabaja (PAT), that entailed even stronger involvement of *piquetero* organizations. Grassroots activities now focused mainly on the administration of government-founded cooperatives and even groups critical of state interference based their claims on the PAT (Kaese & Wolff, 2016). Thus, the institutionalization of the movement and its capacity for collective action depended largely on the state. It would certainly be going too far to say that the *piqueteros* have simply succumbed to a clientelist logic. The social programs initiated under Duhalde and Kirchner not only served as patronage tools for demobilizing the movement, but they also responded to its central demands like state assistance for unemployed workers. Moreover, the decline in protest activities after 2003 cannot be attributed to co-optation alone, but it was also a result of an improved economic situation. Still, the movement's development was largely conditioned by state involvement and it unfolded in continuous interaction with state actors. This even applies to the autonomist currents within the movement, which did not just try to fill the voids left by the state, but whose efforts at self-organization at the grassroots level, ultimately, also took the state as a point of reference.

6. Conclusion

State–society relations are not a zero-sum game in which social actors assume the functions unattended by the state. Even weak states do not just retreat from society. As the two examples from Venezuela and Argentina have shown, there is rather a dynamic interaction between social actors and the state. Social self-organization frequently turns into claim-making and its continuity over time often depends on state resources and legal recognition.

Both movements emerged in response to state weakness or, more precisely, to its failure in certain areas of social governance. Their goals ranged from the solution of local problems to a broader agenda of political reform and social change. In Venezuela, urban development suffered from multiple flaws, which led to the formation of a multi-faceted neighborhood movement that took issues like the provision of security or street lighting into its own hands. On other occasions, however, social self-organization gave way to claim-making vis-à-vis the state, while established actors tried to take advantage of the movement as a resource of support and electoral mobilization. In that way, social self-organization turned into an entangled relationship with the state, in which cooperation and co-optation went along with contestatory patterns of interaction. These patterns were quite similar in the case of the Argentine *piqueteros*, despite notable differences from the Venezuelan case. In Argentina, macroeconomic adjustments under the presidency of Carlos Menem implied a comprehensive withdrawal of the state from social affairs. The *piquetero* movement acted as a pressure group demanding work opportunities and unemployment assistance, but it also worked on the grassroots level to address social needs on its own. Its relationship with the state was ambivalent from the start because, on the one hand, it called for more state engagement, but, on the other hand, it was concerned about maintaining its autonomy.

This ambivalence characterized both movements and led to internal differentiations between groups open to cooperation with the government and those skeptical of state interference. According to Ellner (1999), tensions between autonomy and political engagement are typical for social movements in general. In the Venezuelan and Argentine cases, these tensions were aggravated by corporatist and statist legacies. State actors actively sought to demobilize and co-opt the movements through patronage and legal constraints. Although not all parts of the movements succumbed to state control and clientelism, their space for autonomy and self-organization was seriously curtailed. It is striking to observe that many activities of social self-organization in both cases resulted from state intervention. Where movement groups assumed state functions on the local level, they did so based on formal recognition and licensing by the state. Neighborhood groups in Venezuela acted as substitutes for municipal councils due to the legal status granted to them in the LORM. In Argentina, the management of cooperatives under the PAT by *piquetero* organizations required certification by a government entity (Kaese & Wolff, 2016).

Thus, given the fact that even these two movements only reached limited levels of autonomous actorhood, the capacity of Latin American societies for compensating state weakness through forms of self-governance has to be viewed with reservation. Surely, generalizing inferences have to be treated with caution as Venezuela and Argentina hardly represent the entirety of conditions

affecting state–society relations in the region and observations from the two cases are far from covering the whole spectrum of organized civil society. Still, given the significance of the two movements and the similarities between them, the observed patterns in state–society relations point beyond the two countries to the role of the state in Latin America in general. What can be stated with some certainty is the fact that this role is not a passive one. Rather, the state is a continuous factor of influence and the main point of reference for social self-organization.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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