

# Media and the Economic Crisis of the EU: The ‘Culturalization’ of a Systemic Crisis and *Bild-Zeitung*’s Framing of Greece

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**Abstract:** This article critically studies the hegemonic discursive construction of the EU's current (2012) economic crisis, as it is articulated by political and economic elites and by mass media. The study focuses on the political economy of the particular crisis and through the critical concept of reification, the study emphasizes the hegemonic naturalization of the economic crisis by the “free market” economicistic ideology. The article problematizes the positioning of Greece as the “crisis epicentre” in Europe, understanding Greece as a scapegoat and as a laboratory where political strategies of capitalist restructuring of the EU are performed. Through the frame analysis of *Bild-Zeitung*'s headlines on the coverage of crisis-struck Greece, the article discusses a) the “culturalization” of the crisis and the diversion from a structural public debate on the global economic crisis b) the disciplinary function of crisis' publicity, related to social control and the production of new, neoliberal social subjectivities c) the alienating effect of the culturalist crisis discourses to transnational publics, resulting to the misrecognition of the ideological and structural reasons of the given crisis, the misrecognition of the effects of the crisis and crisis-politics in people's lives, the misrecognition of popular socio-political struggles in countries worse struck by crisis politics, and the eclipse of transnational solidarity and identification to the common issues that European people in particular are facing.

**Keywords:** Economic Crisis, Exception, Greece, Debt, Stereotypes, Spectacle, Reification, EU, *Bild-Zeitung*, Tabloidization

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## 1. Introduction: The Contemporary Economic Crisis and Its “Cultural” Implications

The economic crisis that broke out in 2008 in the US due to the collapse of subprime markets, developed into a global economic recession crisis of the financial and non-financial sectors of the economy (Kotz 2009, 305). Scholars from the Marxist tradition of economics (Harvey 2005, 2010; Harman 2011/2009; Fumagalli and Mezzadra 2009; Milius and Sotiropoulos 2011), but also Keynesian economists (Krugman 2008; Stiglitz 2009; Varoufakis 2011), emphasized the structural and ideological aspects of the current, ongoing global economic crisis. The ongoing economic crisis that struck Europe in 2010 is another major capitalist crisis (Fuchs, Schafranek, Hakken, and Breen, 2010, 193). Furthermore, the current crisis is a systemic crisis of a particular form of capitalism, neoliberal capitalism (Kotz 2009, 306).

The crisis is related to the decrease in capital profits (Harman 2011/2009), a situation that capitalism has not been able to recover since the previous major economic crisis that occurred in the early 1970s. History (Kotz 2009, 306) shows that each systemic capitalist crisis is followed by a thorough restructuring of capitalism, which always results in a new form of capitalism. The formal management of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, as organized through official policies and discourses, suggests vast socio-political changes that aim towards the production of a new form of capitalism.

Political and economic elites as well as mass media were reluctant to analyse the crisis from a structural perspective that would emphasize issues related to politics and power. As Žižek (2010, 85) noted, “the establishment proposes a de-politicized naturalization of the crisis”. Such a de-politicized explanation presented the crisis to be largely produced by the problems of certain states and certain people, particularly those of the European South. Cultural explanations organized the hegemonic narratives of the crisis in defence of capitalism. The hegemonic crisis narrative tends to take for granted the capitalist character of economic processes and economic relations as “natural” entities that cannot be questioned. Culture in this context concerns the general “essentialist” characteristics of people, categorically produced in national and geographical terms.

In an era characterized by capitalist globalization, culture is increasingly becoming a central denominator of politics. Titley and Lentin (2011, 191) argue that the culturalization of politics is a paradigm to organize people's choices under specific norms, compatible to the neoliberal ideological paradigm. Culturalist politics strive towards the production of transnational conformity to the neoliberal configuration of "Western" identity. Since the free market economy cannot function without political constitution and ideological consensus (Harvey 2005, 23), a new form of political configuration and new forms of social subjectivities are necessary for a capitalist overcoming of the particular economic crisis, restoration of capital profits and also restoration of the political power of economic elites in Europe (Harvey 2010, 48).

Critical theoretical concepts like "state of exception", "hegemony", "reification" and "spectacle" are reflexively deployed to explain the dominant crisis' discourse and its objectives. Critical political economy theory is also deployed in order to analyse the economic crisis and its politics. The publicity of the crisis needs to be thoroughly analysed and critiqued because it is public thought, debate and praxis that will potentially alter the catastrophic crisis, for people, for the sustainability of the social and the physical environment, for the survival and deepening of democratic institutions.

## 2. A Politico-Economic Analysis of the Crisis, and the Position of Greece

The following section aims at explaining the current global economic crisis through critical political economic literature. The section critically discusses the position of Greece as the EU's crisis epicentre. Greece is understood as a "laboratory" (Badiou 2012; Žižek 2012) to develop post-democratic, neoliberal institutions, for the whole of Europe, as well as to construct national-orientated, "cultural" divisions in the transnational contemporary proletariat, the growing majority of people across the world exposed to the violence, destruction and inequalities of the "free market economy" (Žižek 2010, 89).

### 2.1. Crisis and Neoliberal Restructuring

Crises erupt due to contradictions rising in the capitalist processes of reproduction and expansion. Money, labour and consumption are key denominators of a crisis. Money reifies the processes of economic production and distribution in the capitalist framework. Money is central to the capitalist process as a stable point to measure value (Harman 2011/2009). Quoting Marx, "a depreciation of credit money would unsettle all existing relations. Therefore the value of commodities is sacrificed for the purpose of safeguarding the fantastic and independent existence of this value in money" (Harman 2009, 297). The tight fiscal policies that followed from the 1970s crisis and on aimed at expanding money supply through loans, so that profits and prices can increase, and at the same time to foster policies that raise interest rates in order to intensify labour and productivity and to push working people – through the risk of unemployment- to accept lower wages.

Harvey (2010) argues that the particular economic crisis is a crisis of (hyper) accumulation. A crisis of hyper accumulation practically means that not enough profits are being produced and financial capital is withheld from being invested as (social or other) conditions do not provide prosperous investment opportunities. Harvey (2010, 130) argues that the growth required for capital reproduction is 3%. Political tools are therefore necessary to produce the adequate socio-political climate that would guarantee the conditions favoured for capitalist growth.

The impossibility of maintaining high profits can be historically explained in the rise of global economic competition challenging the post war economic predominance of the US in the globe. The decrease in profits gave rise to more speculative and "safe" economic strategies. Harman (2011/2009) explains that surplus value produced by productive sectors of the economy was thus not re-invested to productive sectors because their profit revenues might be low. Surplus value was instead invested to financial activities, particularly to speculative actions that would guarantee high revenues on investments of financial capital. The growth of financial activities was only partially related to productive capital. Financial capital is thus over-accumulated, waiting for the safe moment to be invested and bring economic revenues.

Fuchs, Schafranek, Hakken and Breen (2010, 194) argue that capitalism historically reached its peak point of growth in the early 1970s, where the particular system met the second most serious crisis in its history. All political and structural efforts to sustain a high level of capitalist growth since then have proven unsuccessful. The 2007 mortgage crisis in the US is therefore the beginning of a new serious crisis of capitalism that could be proven to be as important as the one of 1929. O'Hara (2009, 326) argues that major capitalist crises occurred in regimes of economic "deregulation". It is therefore important to critically unfold the structural aspects of the current crisis, related to the political doctrine of neoliberalism, which organized the model of capitalism in the post 1970s years.

Neoliberalism is the political and ideological doctrine developed by political and economic elites to overcome the crisis of the 1970s. Harvey (2005) argues that the capital temporarily succeeded in overcoming the particular crisis of the 1970s, and that the contemporary economic crisis is connected to the crisis of 1970s. Kotz (2009, 307) notes the characteristics of neoliberal capitalism in the US: these include deregulation of economic activity, locally and globally, privatizations, optional fiscal policy, reductions in social spending and reductions in taxation of the wealthier, aggressive competition, flexible labour conditions. These characteristics resulted in three interconnected developments that created economic growth but also helped the development of contradictions that resulted in the crisis. These developments are a) the growth of inequality b) the development of a financial sector focusing on venture, risk and speculative investments c) the production of asset bubbles due to speculator activity of financial "investors".

Transnational economic institutions like the World Trade Organization were created in order to pursue the global expansion of "free market" and to guard the local imposition of social institutions favourable to 'free markets'. Pre-existing economic institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund assumed a new role under the neoliberal ideological configuration, mainly by providing loans to governments unable to economically and politically compete against global economic monopolies or the political power of states keen on supporting free market expansion. Such interventions result in the loss of competitive economic advantages and state sovereignty. State loans and the reforms accompanying them concluded the further weakening of particular countries and chained their people's future to debt redemption.

The aforementioned characteristics of neoliberal capitalism produce contradictions in real world processes (O'Hara 2009, 324). Contradictions concern institutional ambiguities, unequal levels of development between different "spheres of social activity" (Harvey 2010, 122). Contradictions are the sources producing a systemic crisis in the capitalist processes dominating social life.

Post Second World War capitalism developed large surpluses, which further led to increases in wages. The particular model though came into a crisis by the 1970s as surpluses were demanded to be distributed to different stakeholders, while global competition intensified (Resnick and Wolf 2010, 178). Deregulation of labour conditions and the "liberation" of capital from national bonds, minimized the power of organized labour and resulted in the worsening of labour conditions and the suppression of wages. The suppression of wages in order to sustain desired levels in surplus value resulted in an inability to sustain cumulative demand. Neoliberalism surpassed this particular problem by providing loans so that different social groups could spend more than their income allowed (Kotz 2009, 312). Lending became a central vehicle of capitalist accumulation in the post 1970s years, aiming to keep levels of consumption high and wages low (Harvey 2010, 17).

The development of the financial sector in particular, relates to important contradictions concerning the relations of the industrial to the financial sector. The traditional relation between finance and industry for capital expansion and reproduction has been disturbed. As O'Hara (2009, 325) notes, there is a progressive dominance of finance over the industry with a great amount of surplus value allocated to financial sectors, for financial activities related to advice and investment security issues. The post 1970s crisis years - particularly after the abandonment of the gold standard in international economic transactions - saw "the financialization of everything" (Harvey 2005, 33), as a way for the emerging financial markets to produce and to secure more complex global economic interconnections. Industrial-based economic growth depends upon investments in research, technological upgrading of production and distribution units. The financial sector placed emphasis on short-term profit making related to market rates of profit return, which resulted in the decline in profit of highly profitable industrial sectors.

Harvey (2010, 35) argues that crises are moments of radical reconfigurations in capitalist development. Crises serve capitalism to "self-correct" itself, primarily through political means. The overcoming of the crisis in ways favourable to the capital requires political restructuring of labour, commodity production and market policies, as well as ideological hegemony of particular social values that will (possibly) ensure the reproduction of the capitalist process. Naomi Klein (2007) demonstrated the importance of crisis events for late capitalist expansion. Neoliberal political doctrines and institutions use a given crisis as an opportunity to restructure non-capitalist structures according to "free market" principles. A major economic crisis is similar to events described by Naomi Klein, provoked or used to put in effect shock policies of a social restructuring that is favourable to the capitalist classes. An economic crisis can create a situation that no one is prepared for, interrupt the normal time and the normal course of events and affect the foundations of a society as a whole (Kouvelakis 2010, 303).

Capitalist restructuring further aims at the production of forms of social consciousness that naturalize the structure of capitalist process. Governmentality is the Foucaultian term describing the

appropriation and mode of conduct of a particular value system. The development of a neoliberal governmentality relates to the individual internalization of neoliberal social values (such as competition, entrepreneurialism, instrumentalism) and their materialization in modes of self-conduct and self-control (Foucault 2008, 226). The production of post-democratic, or neoliberal governmentality in globalized social conditions requires great levels of abstraction (Dean 2003, 108) of the processes of commodity production, distribution and consumption, as well as of capital flows and value production.

## 2.2. Debt

Mass media and elite discourse often address the capitalist crisis as a debt crisis. As Badiou (2012) notes, the sovereign debt of Greece has been the official reason for its quarantining by crisis politics. Nevertheless, the Greek sovereign debt increased sufficiently after two years of austerity measures that were supposed to make the country's debt "sustainable" (sic). As mentioned, reasons related to Greece's inherent problems were propagated as explanations behind the country's debt. National debt characterizes all countries, "developed" and "underdeveloped". Some countries, like Greece, are more vulnerable to the interests of their debtors, while countries like the US, are able to sustain large external deficits and to borrow externally due to their military and geopolitical advantages (Graeber 2011, 364).

Debt is intrinsic to the capitalist process of production and accumulation. The capitalist process of production and accumulation relies on the monetarization of production as well as on financial investments to be redeemed by the profits that a given capital investment will produce. As far as the state is concerned, it relies on credit to fund its activities and the particular credit is provided by financial institutions. National debt is a form of public credit for the borrowing of financial capital. Banks loan money to states so that states can cover various expenses, and states use public incomes to cover their debts. The close relation of the state to the banking system resulted in the authorization of the banking system to produce national currency and the borrowing of national currency to the given state with an interest rate. Additional loans are also necessary to pay off the system of national debt.

In Capital's Vol. I, chapter 24, Marx emphasizes that an international financial system was created along with the development of the national debt. Marx argues that international financial institutions are speculative organizations of private agents that enjoy benefits from governments due to their ability to provide credit to states. States borrow money and expect to repay it through their revenues mainly from taxation yet different variables related to economic and political competition or to changes in the value of currency exchange rates, often make the redeeming of their debts impossible. To repay their debts, states are forced to take exceptional measures related to the changing of labour policies or to the vending of public property. As Marx (2008/1947) argued, "the only part of the so-called national wealth, which in modern nations truly belongs to the people as a whole, is the nations' public debt".

Debt becomes the reason for political pressure as well as for political changes under the rationale of debt redemption. Graeber (2011) though argues that no debt can ever be fully repaid. In that sense, debt becomes a strategic tool for the advancing of economic but also political and social interests of specific social agents. Debt itself is an important tool in the production of the process that Marx described as primitive accumulation. In simple terms, private accumulation is the process according to which the construction of capitalist social relations occurs. Marx argues that primitive accumulation is the process dividing the producer from the means of production, and masses of people are deprived from their means of survival and pushed into the labour market as proletarians. In times of crisis, economic social relations need to be drastically reconfigured and debt provides the rationale for political strategies to reconfigure the economic social relations in ways that would guarantee capital revenues.

The centrality of debt in capitalist accumulation today concerns the securitization of financial activities (Vasudevan 2009, 291). According to Harvey (2010, 31), capitalism's partial recovery from the 1970s crisis occurred due to a boost in public spending through consumer loans, which substituted loss of wage increases. The capitalist restructuring that occurred after the 1973 crisis resulted in the loosening of restrictions to economic transactions across the globe, giving rise to the financial sector of the economy. Important aspects of restructuring were the withdrawal of the gold standard of financial value in global economic transactions and the withdrawal of state regulations concerning the control of capital processes, towards regulatory policies in favour of private interests rather than public ones. Vasudevan (2009, 300) argues that economically developed, "core" countries were able to partially overcome the 1970s crisis by attracting financial capital from so-called "emerging economies" (sic) of the periphery, that were able to produce economic surpluses. The

particular capital flows were invested in financial assets that in the deregulated economic field, entailed high risk. Failures and collapses of financial investments caused different debt crises since the 1970s across the globe.

The 2008 capitalist crisis signified the end of financial capitalism, as occurred from the 1970s onwards. The 2008 credit crunch made borrowing a difficult process through the increase of interest rates and altered the rules of the game in EU's "common market". The possibility of "easy" borrowing with low interest rates, protected by the global status of the Euro currency, covered the Greek state's loss of productivity due to the advance of monopolies from core Eurozone countries<sup>1</sup>. Borrowing thus helped to boost consumption in the country and helped the further establishment of markets from the core Eurozone states in Greece, taking advantage of the common currency and the minimization of trade restrictions in the EU's so-called "common market". The Greek sovereign debt was devaluated as "unsustainable" in late 2009 by international financial institutions, degrading the country's ability to borrow money on low interest rates. Workers of the Greek Statistic Authority have recently stated publicly that the figures representing the financial debt of Greece in 2009 were augmented so that the debt would be assessed by financial institutions as "unsustainable" and that the country would need to plea for IMF's "assistance" (Ward, 2012).

The unsustainability of the Greek sovereign debt resulted to the country's pursuing of funds to cover its expenses. New funds though were to be accompanied by demands for "structural adjustments" that would lead to a neoliberal configuration of the Greek polity and would result in a radical change in labour conditions, in programs of mass privatizations of public property in favour of powerful private economic agents. The memorandums signed by the Greek governments and the so-called "Troika" (the EU, ECB and IMF) include the particular demands for "necessary" structural adjustment plans. Funds are provided to Greece for the purpose of repaying its private debt to European banks and not to cover its public needs and expenses, like public education and health. Instead, the Troika imposes radical cuts in public expenditure, portraying public expenditure as inefficient and wasteful. The burdening of Greece with further loans - this time with public money from different Eurozone member states – to repay accumulated debts that are connected to unrestrained financial activities as well as to the loss of the country's own economic advantage by global economic monopolies, further ties the country to a debt spiral, reducing its chances of ever repaying the accumulated debt, while triggering the spite of EU citizens for the latter. The use of EU countries' public money to repay debts owned by private institutions is strategically connected to the reconfiguration of European socio-political system, according to the ways that the Greek society and the Greek polity are being drastically restructured under the emergency policies pushed by debt. The further indebtedment of Greece then seems to be serving the creation of "investment opportunities" in the country, and what Harvey (2010) described as "accumulation through dispossession": the process of a new capitalist configuration of social relations and the production of profit through the appropriation of public (and private) assets. As Marx himself argued, national debt is one of the most drastic vehicles of primitive accumulation and an important tool for political restructuring of socio-political and economic institutions for capitalist reproduction. What needs to be clear though is that loans do not have public legitimacy as a series of mass mobilizations throughout the country against policies of indebtedness demonstrates.

### 2.3. The Symbolic Power of Debt

Graber (2011) argues that no debt can ever be fully repaid, as humans are bonded by relations of reciprocity and interdependence. Violent power interventions and ideological constructs objectify rules organising property, exchange and debt in monetary and utilitarian terms. A world where everyone would have repaid all their debts would amount to a world of autistic individuals, idiots (ιδιώτες), in the classical Greek sense of the term. In capitalism though, debt remains infinite. The debt is a fetish object (Diken 2009, 59) and a political tool.

The following excerpt demonstrates the symbolic power of debt: "Those in insolvency have to sell everything they have to pay their creditors," Schlarbmann told Bild newspaper. "Greece owns buildings, companies and uninhabited islands, which could all be used for debt redemption."... Schaeffler told Bild in a story under the headline: "Sell your islands, you bankrupt Greeks! And sell

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<sup>1</sup> Despite EU officials' discourse of the EU's deceit by 'Greek statistics', no sanctions were called for the political and legal responsibility of those creating the political possibilities for the advent of the Euro currency in Greece, in contrary to Greece's social conditions and interests. No critique or sanctions were taken towards global financial institutions –such as the ones consulting the Greek government on how to present its economic figures. On the contrary, the EU was eager to intervene to the economic policies of Greece and supported the banker Lucas Papademos, one of the main local advocates for Greece's entry to the Eurozone, as head of an unelected technocratic government for Greece in order to pursue austerity policies.

the Acropolis too!" "The Greek government has to take radical steps to sell its property – for example its uninhabited islands"." (Inman and Smith, 2010).

The German technocrat's imperative tone –elevated by the celebratory rhetoric of the most popular "newspaper" in Germany, "Bild-Zeitung"- is legitimized by the symbolic and material power of debt. The religious connotations of articulations such as "debt redemption", foregrounds the metaphysical roots of debt, which is further connected to punishment and to guilt (Graeber 2011, 5). Bankruptcy symbolizes ultimate failure and forms the pretext where rights can be exempted (Graeber 2011, 359). In the crisis' publicity, "debt" is used as a basis of legitimization of public "bullying" to symbolically subordinate people. What is more important though is that such legitimacy opens the way to the public acceptance of the physical subordination and oppression of people – something that the majority of Greece's residents (citizens and non-citizens) are currently facing due to austerity and privatization policies. As Graeber (2011) argued, the concept of the debt bears important and powerful symbolic meanings that are materialized in concrete practices of power exercise. The language of debt moralizes relations founded on violence, making the victim to seem guilty (pp. 5). Graeber brings the example of the Mafia's relation to people's infinite indebtedness, along with many historical examples of the usage of debt to exploit and to enslave people, due to the impossibility of a full debt redemption.

#### **2.4. Reification: The "Economy" and the Capitalist Restructuring of Europe through EU's "Weakest Link"**

The reorganization of capitalism requires new political institutions, as well as new social and cultural configurations. Regarding the latter, new constructions of subjectivity are required to legitimize and to reproduce the emerging capitalist process. The case of Greece is exemplary in the latter process. Nicolas Sevastakis (2012), a political theorist from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, compared the shift in hegemonic discourses constructing Greece abroad based on two events that brought Greece to the world's attention. The global celebration of the Olympic games of Athens accompanied by international praises of the "Greek spirit" (sic) along with various "success stories" (Sevastakis 2012, 202), was replaced by spiteful discourses urging for punishment of the corrupt and "idle character" (sic) of the Greeks, only a few years later, when Greece was transformed into the global economic crisis' epicentre.

The cultural-orientated explanations of the crisis, focused on the "ontological" shortcomings of the "Greek character" (Žižek 2010, 86). The vicious attack on Greek people as an objective whole was accompanied by imperatives for a new configuration of the "Greek character" (sic). In the post-crisis context, consumerism appears as an excessive behaviour of (corrupt) people, "living above their abilities" (sic). Excess though is a central characteristic of capitalism (Harman 2011/2009). Bauman (2005b, 84) argues that capitalism is characterized by "excess and profligacy, redundancy and prodigal waste". A configuration of the Greek people as economic villains of the Eurozone provides a scapegoat, where public frustration of EU citizens, related to anti-labour and anti-welfare politics, can be channelled. Cultural racism performs the same task as biological racism with culture functioning the same way as nature, creating closed and bounded cultural groups (Wren 2001, 144).

The complexity of the economic crisis provides opportunity for a capitalist restructuring of liberal democracies, starting with the "weakest" (Kouvelakis 2011, 19) part of the Eurozone, Greece. As Merkel argues: "It is also about not being able to retire earlier in countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal than in Germany, instead everyone should try a little bit to make the same efforts – that is important... We can't have a common currency where some get lots of vacation time and others very little. That won't work in the long term... We cannot simply show solidarity and say these countries should simply continue as before." (EU Observer 2011).

The particular discourse obscures global structural and ideological reasons of the on-going economic crisis. Merkel's discourse also presents exceptional politics as "solidarity" (sic). Furthermore, capitalist restructuring is presented as imperative since the countries of the European South cannot "simply continue as before" (sic). Žižek (2010, 85) argues that the naturalization of the crisis also naturalizes the regulatory measurements proposed as "objective" doctrines organized by "neutral" financial logics. As the article will demonstrate, a reified (Lukacs 2001/1923), simplistic view of particular countries and their state of affairs to date is presented as the reason of the European economic crisis. The objectification of the particular countries as problematic legitimizes the policies of capitalist restructuring.

What is also important is the reification of capitalism. Capitalism has become synonymous to the term "economy" and the economy is presented as a natural entity that does not require thought and critique (Žižek 2010, 90). Žižek argues that the logic of market and competition is a hegemonic

ideology that has penetrated all fields of the social. As such democratic institutions, political thought and political praxis have been seriously eroded, while the oppression and the injustices of the free market practices are concealed as "natural".

Reification is an important critical concept to understand one central aspect of the process of capitalist restructuring, which concerns the reconfiguration of social subjectivities compatible to the needs of the capital to overcome its crisis. Merkel's claim that Southern Europeans cannot "continue as before" implies the imperative of discipline to specific rules that respond to economic needs. In critical terms, one needs to see what the abstract generalizations such as "South Europeans", "Greeks", "continue as before" or "economy" mean, while appearing in official discourses as certainties and physical realities, common sense "facts" that are granted.

Developed by Georg Lukacs in 1923, reification is a concept describing the imaginary objectification of capitalist social relations. Reification derives from different forms of objectifications and rationalizations required for the establishment of the social relations required by the capitalist process. Capitalist social roles are naturalized as normal and rational. The process of reification is connected to the fetish character of the objectified form of the commodity that does not carry inscriptions of the process of its production and circulation.

Reification occurs due to the rationalization and standardization of labour and the objectification of the worker. The division of the commodity from its production process is connected to the configuration of the subject producing and consuming the commodity. The continuous intensification of labour configures the human characteristics and particularities of the worker as sources of possible fault and diversion of the rules and norms organising the production process. The subjective human is mediated by the mechanistic process of production, and is assessed according to the axiomatic laws that the capitalist process imposes, irrespective of the worker's subjective will. The worker is called to conform and to discipline him/herself according to the continuous changing needs of the capitalist process and the technological developments that reproduce capitalism.

People are thus rationalized as objects that can be quantified and calculated, thoroughly divided from the socio-historical context they belong to. In the current times of intense globalization, different societies from across the globe are defined by the laws guiding "free market economy" as homogenous parts of a complete whole. Rational calculation is based upon the idea that social development occurs according to objective laws where subjective will is irrelevant or "external". The subject is therefore required to acknowledge the rational laws defining social development and to embrace the particular rationality that can produce the desired calculations which in turn affirm the very logics of this rationality, while avoiding contingencies and features which potentially escape and contradict the objectivity of the given laws. As Lukacs noted while observing the advent of Taylorism, the rationalization of the inner aspects of people's "souls", resulted in the further reification and commodification of psychological elements as quantifiable entities that can be organized in productive terms. The "physical legitimacy" of objectified entities is presented as granted, as a fact that cannot be overcome. The physical legitimacy of capitalism is affirmed "organically" by the reproduction of the processes characterizing capitalist society, related to production and consumption as well as the values supporting it, like private property, hard work or antagonism. The reified consciousness of people accepting things "as they are" legitimizes also confirms the immediate form that the capitalist naturalization of the world obtains, lacking the knowledge to deconstruct the discourses and socio-political interventions producing the particular reality. Reification conceals the political interventions and the power inequalities that capitalist societies are structured upon.

### **3. Greece and the European Economic Crisis**

Since late 2009, Greece has received worldwide attention from political and economic elites as the EU's crisis' epicentre. Mass media from across the globe have also paid great attention to developments in Greece. Greece's contribution to the EU's GDP between 2001 and 2010 was 2,5% (Eurostat 2012), while Greece's share to the global GDP was 0,42% in 2010 (Global Finance 2012). The importance of Greece to the productive European and global economy is therefore minimal. The attention that Greece received on the particular crisis is thus dubious. The following section critically discusses the hegemonic frames that produced Greece as the crisis' epicentre.

#### **3.1. A Greek Particularity? Crisis Politics as Politics of Exception**

A peripheral Western country and Euro's weakest link, Greece has been the European economic crisis' epicentre since late 2009. German Chancellor Merkel and former French President Sarkozy, among others, have repeatedly argued that Greece is a "special case" (sic) (BBC 2012), self-

responsible for its crisis, while the Eurozone risks to be “contaminated” (sic) by Greece’s economic crisis. Exceptional measures are therefore required for “therapy”.

The exceptional discourse of Greece as a *sui generis* case in the Eurozone and in the European Union, has been accompanied by metaphysical imperatives of “salvation” of the country from “the crisis”. This discourse has been instrumentalized on a permanent basis by Greek politicians from the neoliberal left, the neoliberal right and the parliamentary far right, as well as from the local capitalist class, in order to legitimize emergency economic and political doctrines to the citizens of Greece. The exceptional state of “Greece in crisis” legitimizes exceptional policies circumventing human, political and social rights, through a series of austerity measures that are meant “to increase competitiveness” (sic). Harsh austerity is proclaimed as “necessary” and inevitable, while its duration is unclear. Exception legitimized the technical subversion of the country’s popular sovereignty in November 2011, with the appointment of a non-elected government of technocrats, appointed by the Troika and the former Greek government of Papandreou. As Agamben (2000) argues, the exceptional state is the “*nomos of modernity*”. The exceptional state is the rule of contemporary societies (Diken 2009b, 584). The prolonged state of exception is compatible to neoliberal governmentality according to Foucault’s (2008) later work, as mobility and competitiveness are more crucial than established regimes based on defined socio-political rights.

The reconfiguration of subjectivity thus emerges as a crucial issue in politics of exception, for the production of a civic governmentality compatible to the continuous changes, crises and needs of capitalism. The exceptional status of Greece is further connected to identity issues concerning its “European-ness” and “Western-ness”. As Douzinas (2010b, 11) argued, the Euro currency seems to provide the symbolic centre of European identity today. In the exceptionalist discourse of the EU, Greece stands at the threshold between the new (economistic) configuration of European identity, and a (new form of) European otherness. Politicians and mass media in crisis-struck countries of the European South, like Spain, Italy and Portugal regularly reassure their citizenries and the world that their countries “are not Greece”, despite the advent of the same austerity politics there as well, concealing the fact that most of the countries across the world are indebted.

The exceptional discourse of Greece produced a paradigm that no one wishes to identify with, a taboo ostracized from public debate. Greece is thus the scapegoat (Haroche & Enriquez 2004/2002) of the EU, the agent of profanations on a particular order (based on hard work, entrepreneurialism, and economic rationality) incarnating configurations of the identity of what (neoliberal) Europeans/Westerners are not. In the capitalist restructuring process, Greece is the experimental laboratory for the new capitalist paradigm to emerge.

### **3.2. A Critical Perspective on the “Greek Crisis”**

Lapavitsas (2010, 294) foregrounds four main reasons to understand why Greece has been the epicentre of the recession crisis in Europe, despite the fact that most European countries have economic deficits in their budgets. The first reason is that the productive structure of Greece suffered severely –due to the loss of competitiveness - from its inclusion to the Eurozone, because of important differences between the centre and the periphery of the Eurozone. The advent of Euro in Greece meant the acceleration of the country’s transformation process towards a service economy that relied on foreign loans to maintain high levels of domestic consumption of imported goods, produced by the core Eurozone countries and export-based economies like Germany (Lapavitsas, 2010). The second reason concerns internal weaknesses of the Greek state relating to corruption and clientelism, the state’s inability to tax the high incomes and other inefficiencies and the lack of a welfare state. The third reason relates to the loss of the country’s international credibility due to a fiddling of economic figures, while the fourth reason is the country’s vulnerability to financial speculation due to the country’s small size and its own structural problems. As Lapavitsas (2010, 295) notes, *“you can’t speculate so easily against Italy’ because Italy is much larger (than Greece)”*.

As Bratsis (2010, 301) argued - in response to Featherstone’s (2010, 298) claim that Greece’s vulnerability concerns its own domestic conditions relating to “a society in which there was no constituency to limit the growth of the state” and an overall culture of corruption leading to state profligacy – the arguments that corruption and clientelism are the sources of the crisis, are completely ideological, concerning a metaphorical understanding of the problem. Such an understanding is connected to the colonialist idea that the cause of poverty is that people are not working hard enough; they are not civilized enough and corrupt in general. Corruption though concerns the ways private interests infiltrate the policymaking process and result to policy decisions based on private good instead of the public good. In that sense, Bratsis (2010, 302) concludes, the Greek corruption is no different to the US, the British, the German or other. Crouch (2004, 83) analysed the penetration through lobbying or through the political work of transnational economic organizations like the

WTO, of specific economic interests to the public arena, as the main feature of the decline of liberal democracies today. Corruption in that sense needs to be considered in political and economic terms, other than cultural ones.

State corruption should be seen in relation to the lack of political will to represent the interests of the Greek people, in expense of broader industrial and geopolitical interests on peripheral states like Greece. The disciplinary function of institutions like the IMF aims in securing that the banks would get their money back and that people would be forced to pay (Harvey 2010, 19). The impossibility of repaying an odious debt though provides the possibility for restructuring societies and spaces in ways that can strengthen capital interests.

The phase of the global capitalist crisis as a European debt crisis (and a Greek debt crisis in particular) follows the bank bailout tactic of 2008, in a more disclosed way. Public money is used to provide loans to Greece in order to repay banks that carelessly provided odious loans to corrupted governments on one hand, and more generally to people worldwide in order to boost consumerism. The loans provided by Eurozone members to the Greek state are used to pay off banks that do not wish to accept any responsibility and loss, via Greece (Douzinas 2010b). The blaming of people as irresponsible is in any case a typical neoliberal strategy to mask the social catastrophes and contradictions produced by the unrestrained pursuing of major private interests. The use of Greece masks the position of the banks and other financial institutions as the main attributors of public money, and again, diverts public discussions on the role of the banking system in the global economic crisis.

A lengthy quote by Badiou (2012), from a text signed also by a number of prominent French intellectuals, provides a thorough description of the reality and the perspectives of crisis politics in Greece: "At a time when one Greek youth out of two is unemployed. Where 25,000 homeless wander the streets of Athens. Where 30% of the population has fallen under the poverty line and where millions of families are forced to place their children in the care of someone else in order for them not to die of hunger or cold, where refugees and the new poor compete for trashcans at the public dump, the "saviors" of Greece, under the pretext that "Greece is not trying hard enough", impose a new aid plan that doubles the lethal administered dose. A plan that abolishes the right to work and reduces the poor to the most extreme misery, at the same time as it makes the middle class disappear. The goal is not about "saving" Greece. All economists worthy of their name agree on this point. It's about gaining time in order to save the creditors at the same time it leads the country into deferred collapse. Above all it's about making a laboratory of social change out of Greece that, in a second generation, will spread throughout all of Europe. The model experimented upon Greece is one where public social services, schools, hospitals, and dispensaries fall into ruin, where health becomes the privilege of the rich, and where vulnerable populations are doomed to a programmed elimination while those who work are condemned to the most extreme conditions of impoverishment and precarity ... in short, it is the widespread looting, characteristic of financial capitalism which here offers itself a really beautiful institutional consecration. To the extent that sellers and buyers sit on the same side of the table, we have no doubt that this enterprise of privatization is a real treat for the buyers. But all the measures taken so far have only dug Greece into deeper sovereign debt. With the help of rescuers who lend at exorbitant rates, it has literally exploded into free fall in approaching 170% of GDP, while in 2009 it represented not more than 120%. It is likely that this cohort of rescuers - whenever presented as "final" - had no other purpose than to weaken further still the position of Greece so that, deprived of any opportunity to propose itself the terms of a restructuring, is reduced to yield to all its creditors under the blackmail of "disaster or austerity."

#### **4. The Role of Mass Media in the Politics of the Economic Crisis**

Contemporary democracies are based upon civic consensus. Consensus is grounded on the provision of information for decision making on issues that usually elites pose as important for society (Ellyl 2011/1977). The role of media is therefore crucial for the mediation of the political intentions and discourses of social elites to the general public and for the construction of social consensus. The complex and remote character of political issues and events across the globe increase the mediated relation of citizens to politics.

Critical scholars stress the relation of mainstream media to social elite interests and elite discourses. As contemporary societies rely on civic consensus, media are important tools for agenda setting as well as for the dissemination of hegemonic discourses in society. The discussion of the mass media's role in the current economic crisis involves the consideration of two interrelated parameters. On one hand, mass media are noted to relate to economic and political elites, to amplify their voices in society, to set the public agenda and the frames defining the public understanding of issues of public concern. On the other hand, mass media are industries themselves and profit from

public spectacles. The interests of media are connected to those of political and economic elites. In that sense, the mass media representation of the particular crisis is politically and economically prosperous.

Mass media perform a central role in informing the general public on what the particular crisis is, how important it is, what its stakes are, who is responsible for it and what should be done about it. Media are important international corporations that have close ties to political and economic elites. Harvey (2010, 134) argues that the aspect concerning meaning making and social beliefs is only one component out of several others relating to the ways that capitalism evolves. The "educational" aspect of the crisis is crucial for the political restructuring that the capitalist and the political class are developing and mass media are central in this "educational" process. Different scholars stress the key social role of media in establishing the cultural, political and social values and facts of neoliberalism among the general public (Freedman 2008, 47). Neoliberalism is not an economic system but a cultural and political system as well (McChesney 2009, 285).

#### **4.1. The Economic Crisis as a Media Spectacle**

In a televised discussion entitled: "what does it mean to live? The crisis of capitalism", for the Greek Parliament's television network in 2008, Alain Badiou (echoing Debord) argued that the ongoing global economic crisis that started in 2008 is –among other things - a public spectacle: "Capitalism becomes spectacularized. Most people watch this current crisis as a spectacle. Most people are not financial economists, they are not merchants and they are not bankers. They can do nothing in reality so they observe the particular crisis with fear, worry, hope; in the end it is a structural spectacle. We have to analyse and explain this spectacle; it is our prime duty to explain it as a crisis of capitalism and a collapse not only of the financial and monetary system but of a particular way of seeing the world. This task is in the scope of our powers and it will have consequences, because according to the dominant propaganda of the last 20 years, this system is the best and no other system exists. But if this system is the best, we need to search at least for something else. Perhaps, we can enter into a new sequence of the process of truth in politics. But clarity is required... the particular spectacle, if anything is educative. In the form of a spectacle, capitalism presents its own nullity." (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUTsPXFUD4&feature=related> accessed on February 29, 2012).

Mainstream mass media of different Western countries succeeded in organizing a crisis discourse by objectifying the crisis as something caused by the supposed reckless, exploitative and sly behaviour of specific people. Such a rationale was organized on the premise of the systematization and instrumentalization of popular, exotic stereotypes of people and localities by media spectacle. A front cover image<sup>2</sup> from the German magazine "Focus" portraying the famous statue of Milos' Aphrodite pointing the finger to the Greek people "for betraying the Euro family" (sic) received worldwide attention and triggered equal spiteful public reactions by Greek mainstream media and Greek publics. British, channel 4's, launched a weekly docusoap in 2011 entitled "go Greek for a week" (sic), simulating the hegemonic Greek crisis discourse, through the production of conditions for "British people and families (sic) to experience the patterns of tax evasion, corruption and mismanagement that have helped to sink (sic) the Greek economy" (Channel 4 2011).

For Debord (1986/1967), the spectacle is a process of mediation affirming the existing state of social affairs, which does not allow possibilities for political intervention. The spectacle provides a simplistic and illusionary unity of an increasingly fragmented, late modern world whose sense making becomes increasingly complex and a difficult process. Kellner (2003) expands Debord's ideas and uses them to analyse contemporary developments of the spectacle and its socio-political implications. Kellner (2005, 23) argues that "the cultural industries have multiplied media spectacles in novel spaces and sites and that the spectacle itself has become one of the organising principles of the economy, polity, society and everyday life".

Kellner (2003, 21) notes that spectacularization occurs through the mass production of media content. Reports, shows, documentaries, articles, videos, all produced from both professionals and amateurs, are continuously channeled in the global mediascape, focusing on the crisis. Although important critical content has also emerged, mainstream economic crisis frames, stressing culturalist explanations of the particular crisis, dominate the public understanding and the public discussion of the economic crisis.

The role of the spectacle is economic but also political. The media are important industries today (Hesmondhalgh 2007), producing virtual commodities for new markets related to symbolic

<sup>2</sup> A copy of which can be found here: <http://neoskosmos.com/news/en/German-magazines-offend> (accessed on July 5, 2012).

consumption. The role of the spectacle is to “dazzle” consumers into particular forms of realities, behaviours, mentalities, ideas, truths and social relations. On the political side, the spectacle is establishing particular ways of seeing the world, which are highly ideological. Kellner (2005, 31) mentions the “terror war spectacle” to stress the different forms of information and cultural products produced by media and cultural industries, like films, news coverage, documentaries, books, television series among others.

The economic aspect intersects with the political in different ways. On one hand media industries – and in general economic elites - are connected to political elites. On the other hand, the social identities and subjectivities produced by consumerist culture are threats to citizenship (Dean 2003; Bauman 2005, 126). Media spectacles reproduce socio-political ignorance and indifference to social affairs. “In such a landscape” writes Bauman (2005, 127), “it is easy to feel lost and hapless and easier still to be lost and hapless without feeling it”.

Kellner (2003: 22) reminds us that the Euro currency was launched in the Eurozone countries through its celebration by massive public spectacles back in 2001-2, at the expense of critical public dialogue. In countries like Greece, no referendum was done for the introduction of the Euro currency. Instead the Euro was launched in the country through different media and public spectacles supported by the time’s Greek government and the European Union<sup>3</sup>. Critique instead rose ten years after the realization of the Eurozone. Critique was organized in offensive terms, due to the fraud that particular people committed, despite the fact that the Euro had disastrous consequences to the Greek macro and micro economy and weakened the country’s economic and political position towards Northern European and other monopolistic interests, with everyday life consumer goods’ prices doubling while wages remained practically the same.

Again, despite the critique of corrupt Greek politicians and undemocratic Greek people, most European governments were against a referendum or elections that would allow Greek people to decide for important issues for their present and their future. In the face of growing internal dissent over the extreme austerity that is enforced on the country’s lower and middle classes, the EU governments and the Troika favoured the construction of a government of experts, headed by the former Vice President of the European Central Bank, Lucas Papademos, the head of the Bank of Greece during the time of the county’s inclusion in the Eurozone.

#### 4.2. The Tabloidization of the Crisis

The commercial character of media industries had important effects on media content. Information on political issues has assumed an entertaining character. Political analyses and extensive coverage of political and social issues have been replaced by “lighter” forms of media content production (McChesney 2009, 265). Tabloidization of politics is a term that describes the spectacularized mediation of politics by mainstream media organizations. Tabloidization refers to the genre of tabloid press, mass consumed publications across the world that blend information with entertainment, producing personified and spectacle orientated publicity.

A great deal of asymmetry can be noted in the ways that different crisis-struck countries are treated by international media. Greece in particular was the country concentrating international media’s focus. Greece was also the crisis-struck country that concentrated the most negative media coverage.

The primacy of German economic interests and German politics in the Eurozone marks the German popular media as crucial in any critical study of the European economic crisis. German political and economic elites as well as German mass media organized the hegemonic frames of the particular crisis that were also reproduced by mass media in other parts of the world. The critical study of a popular daily tabloid like “Bild-Zeitung” – described as “the prototype of tabloid journalism in Germany” (Klein 1998, 81) - is crucial due to the increasing “tabloidization of politics” that scholars (Klein 1998, 79) have seen emerging, in the progressive advent of spectacle in all aspects of social life. “Bild-Zeitung” is a publication of the Axel-Springer- Verlag House, a publishing company that had once concentrated mass protests by the social movements of 1960’s and 1970’s in Germany (Berardi 2009, 66). Bild-Zeitung is Germany’s most popular daily publication and the largest daily in Europe (Klein 1998, 81) according to its sales. Bild-Zeitung focused on extensive

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<sup>3</sup> An image that can be found at <http://www.occupiedlondon.org/blog/2011/11/10/lucas-papademos-is-the-new-prime-minister-in-greece-the-bank-detat-is-now-complete/> provides a hint of the spectacular introduction of the Euro currency in Greece. The picture shows the 2002's head of the Bank of Greece Lucas Papademos, together with then-Prime Minister Simitis, at the moment when the latter drew the first Euro notes from an ATM machine in the New Year's Eve of 2002, celebrating the advent of the Euro in Greece and in the EU as well as the inclusion of Greece to the ‘hard economic core’ (sic) of the EU.

reports and commentaries on the “Greek crisis”, as soon as the crisis was publicly announced by political and economic technocrats.

Bild-Zeitung’s coverage of political issues follows conservative ideological discourses (Klein 1998, 84). The article studies the representation of Greece as it appears in the headlines and sub-headlines of articles from Bild-Zeitung, focusing on Europe’s financial crisis. The frames come from articles’ headlines published in the period between December 10, 2009 and May 31, 2012, with particular focus on main events concerning the politics of the crisis related to the negotiation of austerity politics and the growth of popular resistance against austerity, while Greece’s social conditions deteriorated. Selected articles are also studied in order to further unfold the discourse presenting Greece to the German public.

In Bild-Zeitung’s online search engine at [www.bild.de](http://www.bild.de), under the search title “Griechen Pleite” (Greek Bankruptcy) - a categorical title frequently used in Bild-Zeitung’s articles on crisis-struck Greece (<http://www.bild.de/suche.bild.html?type=article&query=griechen+pleite&resultsStart=440&resultsPerPage=10> Accessed on June 20, 2012) - one finds 486 related articles. A search using “Griechenland krise” as key words (<http://www.bild.de/suche.bild.html?type=article&query=Griechenland-Krise> Accessed on June 20, 2012) results in 942 related articles. One can notice that regular articles on Greek-related issues, linked to the economic crisis, started to appear frequently from the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2009 and onwards up until the present, while articles related to Greece appeared quite more rarely before the particular date. The generation of popular information on the particular issue seems to be erupting in a form of a “shock”, a case that confirms Naomi Klein’s (2006, 427) thesis on the role of media in the strategic establishment of particular “facts” in public opinion, which relate to economic and political interests and in the spread of social panic over particular events in order to advance politics of “no alternative”.

Research on the articles appearing in Bild’s online search engine under the headline “Griechen pleite” selected 57 headlines and their sub-headlines focused on articles written in particular events that were central to the course of the crisis politics in Greece since late 2009. Such events concern the degrading of Greece by financial institutions during early 2010, the recourse of the Greek government to the EU for financial support in April 2010, the negotiations between the Troika and the Greek government concerning loans and austerity politics, economic crisis related EU summits, popular protests in Greece against austerity, the passing of a second referendum on a second wave of austerity in October 2011, the appointment of the technocratic government of Lucas Papademos and the May 2012 national elections in Greece. The headlines are analysed with frame analysis.

Frames are cognitive settings to organize and understand events and issues. Frames provide the conceptual foundations for people to perceive social realities. Different topics of public interest relate to different social functions of framing. In the context of politics, ideological positions related to the social agents producing public frames, organize the semantics of frames. Mainstream media are noted to reinforce existing forms of knowledge and reproduce discursive frameworks and existing outlines of interpretation of social certainties. Klein (1998, 83) cites Entman to address the communicative importance of framing: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendations for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe”. (Entman 1993, 52).

#### 4.3. Analysis and Findings

The analysis of Bild-Zeitung’s crisis-related headlines, discloses five, broad, interrelated categories that organize the hegemonic meaning making of the European economic crisis and the position of Greece in this crisis. These categories are the following: 1) the economicistic one, concerning the imperative of austerity policies 2) the eschatological-drama frame, stressing catastrophic crisis-scenarios, mystifying the economic crisis as a phenomenon operating according to natural principles 3) the “narcissist” frame presenting austerity and enforced loans as “help” and “fight” against the crisis, stressing national unity between German people and German businesses, while both are framed as “victims” 4) the culturalist frame, producing “Greece” as a “natural wonder”, naturalising the discursive mystification of the country and its people by elite and commodity culture discourses, blaming Greeks as responsible for the local, European and global extensions of the capitalist crisis 5) the spiteful frame where Bild speaks as a representative of German tax payers, expressing fury and anger over the financial burden they have to face for the “salvation” of bankrupt others. The concept of reification is the main analytical category in the analysis and critique of Bild’s crisis-frames. The critical discourse analysis’ (Fairclough 2003, 98) four categories of discursive legitima-

tion are used to critically analyse the discursive constructions of the particular frames. Social theory is used to critically discuss the political importance of the particular semantic frames.

#### 4.3.1. The Economic Frame

The “economic frame” concerns the politico-economic “biases” of Bild-Zeitung. Couldry (2010, 73) argues that media amplify neoliberal values and thus normalize mechanisms important to neoliberalism. Bild’s crisis reports and analyses reproduce elite discourses that reify the economic crisis as a palpable, objective entity. As such they publicly establish the economic crisis as an objective reality, and legitimize its hegemonic diagnosis as well as the “solutions” proposed by political and economic elites.

10.03.2010. GREECE-VIRUS: WHICH COUNTRIES ARE NEXT? GREEK PRIME MINISTER PAPANDREOU WARNS AGAINST A GREEK VIRUS. OTHER COUNTRIES COULD BE AFFECTED. A NEW ECONOMIC CRISIS.

15.03.2010. EU FINANCIAL EMERGENCY PLAN FOR BANKRUPT GREEKS. THE FINANCE MINISTERS OF THE 16 EURO COUNTRIES HAVE AGREED IN THE PRINCIPLES OF A BAILOUT PLAN FOR THE HIGHLY INDEBTED GREECE.

25.03.2010. EU SUMMIT IN BRUSSELS. VICTORY FOR ANGELA MERKEL! FATEFUL DAY FOR THE BANKRUPT GREEKS AT THE EU SUMMIT: THEY HOPE FOR SALVATION. AND ANGELA MERKEL WAS ABLE TO PREVAIL WITH THE IMF PROPOSAL!

11.04.2010. UP TO A 30 BILLION EMERGENCY LOAN FROM THE EU IS BEING PREPARED FOR THE GREEKS. TO SAVE THE GREEKS FROM BANKRUPTCY, THE EU AND THE IMF HAVE PUT TOGETHER A RESCUE PACKAGE. THE BANKRUPT GREEKS GET THE NECESSARY BILLIONS OF CREDIT.

28.04.2010. CRISIS SUMMIT; IS GREECE A BOTTOMLESS PIT? WOLFGANG SCHÄUBLE SEES EUROPE'S FINANCIAL STABILITY AT RISK BY THE BANKRUPTCY OF GREECE. MERKEL EVEN WARNS AGAINST A WORLD-WIDE CRISIS.

28.04.2010. GREECE AND SPAIN THREATENS TO BUST. NEW SHOCK-MESSAGE: THE RATING AGENCIES HAVE NOW DOWNGRADED SPAIN'S CREDIT.

02.05.2010. DECIDED! 110 BILLION RESCUE PACKAGE FOR GREECE! THE AID PACKAGE FOR THE BANKRUPT GREEKS DECIDED BY THE FINANCE MINISTERS OF THE EURO-GROUP IS 110 BILLION EUROS OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

21.06.2011. CRISIS IN GREECE; PAPANDREOU WINS CONFIDENCE VOTE. WE DID IT! GEORGIOS PAPANDREOU IS PRIME MINISTER OF GREECE! RAZOR-THIN VICTORY IN THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE.

29.06.2011. EURO CRISIS AVERTED; GREEKS SAY YES TO SAVE MONEY! THE GREEK PARLIAMENT SAYS YES TO SAVE! THE POPULATION WILL FACE TOUGH CUTS. VIOLENT RIOTS IN ATHENS AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

27.09.2011. GREEK PRIME MINISTER GEORGE PAPANDREOU IN BERLIN: "YES WE CAN!" A FIERY SPEECH! IN BERLIN, GREEK PRIME MINISTER GEORGE PAPANDREOU FIGHTING TO SAVE HIS COUNTRY...

Objectivity is constructed according to main strategies of discursive legitimization (Fairclough 2003, 98), such as authorization and rationalization. Authorization concerns references to discourses of authority such as politicians, technocrats, financial agents and economic experts. Bild’s frames “echo” such discourses, while enthusiastically reproducing formal economic crisis politics. References to institutional knowledge and action rationalizes the crisis and its politics, publicly legitimising emergency policies that by-pass democratic rules, popular sovereignty, social injustice as well as the key position of non-elected technocrats in political decision making.

The crisis is thus objectified as a measurable entity that even allows predictions. Likewise, the economy is also reproduced in simplistic terms, as something that anyone can understand through everyday life experiences and domestic housekeeping. The positive spinning of crisis politics is also evident in Bild-Zeitung’s frames. Emergency economic policies are enthusiastically promoted by Bild-Zeitung. Austerity is presented as “saving money” implying “the wasteful lifestyle of the Greeks” (sic). Loans that are provided to the Greek government are introduced as “help”, despite the fact that the particular money return to various banks and thus replace the private character of the Greek debt to a public one, owned by the public funds of Eurozone member states. Finally, the restructuring of the political institutions of Greece through emergency politics and the lowering of living conditions for the majority of the country’s population are presented in heroic terms, as a “fight” (sic) “against the debt”.

#### 4.3.2. The Eschatological Frame: Crisis as the “Armageddon”

Elite discourses presented the economic crisis in eschatological terms. Eschatology is a discursive, imaginary construction of the future that implies existential threat. The objectification of an eschatological threat legitimizes unprecedented, emergency measurements that bypass institutionalized procedures and rights. The no-alternative doctrine of continuous austerity politics, announced by politicians and technocrats in the EU, is reinforced by Bild-Zeitung, legitimized by authoritarian discourses as well as by eschatological myths of the crisis.

11.02.2010. GREECE: WHAT DOES THE EURO- CRISIS MEAN FOR US GERMANS? THE EURO COUNTRIES ARE FIGHTING FOR OUR CURRENCY! BUT WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE CRISIS? WHAT DOES THE CRISIS MEAN FOR THE EURO?

04.03.2010. SHOCKED GREEKS: "GOD, HELP US". THE GREEKS ARE IN A COLLECTIVE STATE OF SHOCK. THE SAVINGS PLANS HAVE CAUSED PURE TERROR. NEWSPAPERS TITLES: "GOD, HELP US!"

24.03.2010. THE CRISIS IN GREECE. EURO-BOMB IS TICKING! EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE IN THE FINANCIAL MARKETS! BEFORE THE EU SUMMIT THEY ARE ALL WAITING FOR A SIGNAL TO RESCUE THE BANKRUPT GREEKS. THE EURO EXCHANGE RATE AT RISK.

30.04.2010. ECONOMY GREEK CRISIS, "IT'S ABOUT SURVIVAL" WITH A DRAMATIC SPEECH, PRIME MINISTER PAPANDREOU HAS PREPARED THE GREEKS FOR A HORROR-SAVING PACKAGE. EU AND IMF AIM TO TINKER WITH A SHOCK LIST.

21.04.2011. BANKRUPTCY-FRUSTRATED PAPANDREOU THRUSTS TO GREEKS LIVING ABROAD. NEW BANKRUPTCY ANXIETY: EXPERTS FEAR THAT GREECE IS NOT OVER THE SUMMER. PREMIER PAPANDREOU INFLATED GREEKS LIVING ABROAD.

10.05.2011. GREECE THREATENS TO COLLAPSE LIKE DDR? THE EURO IS IN FREE FALL. THE GREEKS ARE GUILTY. ECONOMISTS AND POLITICIANS DEBATE THE CONSEQUENCES.

16.06.2011. GREEK CRISIS FROM BANKRUPTCY: WHAT NOW COSTAS? GREECE-HORROR WITH NO END! BILD.DE EXPLAINS HOW MUCH MONEY WE HAVE ALREADY GIVEN TO THE GREEKS AND WHAT THE COLLAPSE OF THAT STATE WOULD COST US.

16.06.2011. EURO CRISIS TEARING THE GREEKS INTO THE ABYSS? NATIONAL CRISIS IN GREECE. THE GOVERNMENT IS TOTTERING. THE PEOPLE REBELLED. CRASH WARNINGS FROM THE U.S.

21.09.2011. DEBT CRISIS' LAST CHANCE FOR THE GREEKS. GREECE AND ITS MAJOR CREDITORS HAVE CONVERGED AGAIN. BANKRUPTCY EXAMINER WILL RETURN TO ATHENS NEXT WEEK.

06.09.2011. HOW DEEP IS THE CRISIS IN GREECE AND HOW DEEP ARE WE STUCK IN THE DRACHMA-MUD? GREECE PROCEEDS TOWARD THE ABYSS: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE GREEKS ACTUALLY GO BANKRUPT - HOW DEEP ARE THE GERMAN BANKS STUCK WITH DRACHMA?

03.11.2011. DEADLINE WITH THE GREEK CHAOS. CHAOS DAYS IN GREECE. HELLAS MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD ASTRAY! HERE ARE THE HEADS OF 20 MAJOR INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD WHO HAVE ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY.

Drama narratives of the economic crisis and its impact legitimate the imperative rationales of emergency politics. Mythopoesis (Fairclough 2003, 99) is the legitimization strategy used to objectify the capitalist crisis as a natural catastrophe of eschatological proportions and unknown consequences. Existential threats (survival, chaos and abyss) and metaphysical references (God) organize the magnitude of the crisis. An incomplete picture suggesting the certainties of catastrophic scenarios that are nevertheless unpredictable legitimizes exceptional policies. The constant updating of the catastrophic scenario urges “fast” solutions of the problem. Austerity politics, loss of social, political and even human rights are legitimized by the ontological imperative of eschatology. “TINA”, the neoliberal “no alternative” doctrine is recontextualized in the supposedly unprecedented context of another capitalist crisis. The time of crisis is organized as shock; deliberation or thought are downplayed as time consuming and excessive due to the velocity of the crisis. Berardi (2009, 107) argues that communication overload, particularly in the digital era, produces constant mobilization that prohibits critical thinking and autonomous decision-making. Crisis narratives produce ontological fears, which organize the consensus towards economic imperatives. As we will further see, fear combined with narcissism, further triggers public spite against the Greek people, por-

trayed as the perpetrators of the global economic crisis. Shock politics of the economic crisis augment chasms among European people living in similar precarious conditions (Berardi 2009, 194).

#### 4.3.3. The Narcissist Frame

Narcissism is a socio-psychological state characterising late modern subjectivities. Different scholars (Lasch 2001/1979; Bauman 2005; Berardi 2009) stress the influence of commodity culture in the development of introvert, infantilized social characters that do not assume social responsibility and are reluctant to perform political praxes. The lack of political thought further asserts the common-sensual versions of the world, where things are "what they are" (Lukacs 2001/1923).

The Greek people are presented as responsible for the effects of the capitalist crisis on the German people. EU's political decision to provide German public funds for the redemption of privately owned debt, largely caused by the unrestrained and speculative economic strategies of private banks, is presented as altruistic sacrifices that the German people are forced to make for the ungrateful others who were not economically responsible. The effects of crisis politics on the Greek people are trivialized. Moral and material superiority is advanced in nationalist terms, while the effects of crisis politics are legitimized in moral terms (Fairclough 2003, 98).

**04.03.2010. GREEK CRISIS: BANKRUPT GREEKS WON'T GET A CENT FROM US! GREEK CRISIS: BANKRUPT GREEKS WON'T GET A CENT FROM US! GREEK PRIME MINISTER PAPANDREOU COMES TO GERMANY TODAY, INVITED BY CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL. SOLE THEME: THE DRAMATIC FINANCIAL CONDITION OF GREECE!**

**21.04.2010. GERMANY IS TO PAY € 18 BILLION! GREECE IS FOR THE GERMAN TAXPAYER A FINANCIAL NIGHTMARE! 18 BILLION EUROS FROM GERMANY FOR THE BANKRUPT GREEKS.**

**23.04.2010. LOAN ASSISTANCE OF THE EU. WHAT DO THE BANKRUPT GREEKS COST US? THE GREEKS HAVE OFFICIALLY ASKED FOR AN EU ASSISTANCE LOAN. BUT, WHAT DO THE BANKRUPT GREEKS COST US?**

**24.04.2010. GREECE-HELP. EXPERT MIND: WE WILL NOT SEE OUR MONEY AGAIN. ALL OF EUROPE IS TALKING ABOUT GREECE! BILD.DE SPOKE WITH IFO CHIEF HANS-WERNER SINN ON THE FINANCIAL AID FOR THE GREEKS. HE WARNS US!**

**27.04.2010. GREEKS' BANKRUPTCY: FEAR FOR OUR MONEY! ARE THE BANKRUPT GREEKS TEARING DOWN ALL OF EUROPE? GREEK GOVERNMENT BONDS ARE REGARD-ED AS TRASH FROM YESTERDAY.**

**01.05.2010. 25 BILLION FOR THE GREEKS. AND WHAT ABOUT US? GERMANY LENDS THE HIGHLY INDEBTED GREECE ABOUT 25 BILLION €. WHAT IF THE GREEKS GO BANKRUPT? AND WE JUST HAVE TO SUPPORT THIS.**

**04.05.2010. GREEK PRESS HATE-SPEECH AGAINST OUR CHANCELLOR. YOU GET MONEY FROM US. A LOT OF MONEY! AND WHAT DO THE BANKRUPT GREEKS DO: THEY SWEAR AGAINST OUR CHANCELLOR. THERE ARE EVEN STASI-NAZI COMPARISONS!**

**11.06.2011. EXPENSIVE EUROPE: WE PAY THE MOST! THE NEW BILLION DOLLAR AID TO GREECE AND HAVE DECIDED TO CHARGE THE CONTAINER OF THE EU. BILD.DE EX-PLAINS: WHO PAYS FOR EUROPE REALLY ... FOR HOW MUCH LONGER?**

**27.10.2011. EURO-RESUCE: WHAT DOES IT COST - WHO PAYS? THE EURO-POLITICIANS HAVE SPOKEN: DEBT RELIEF FOR THE GREEKS, MORE MONEY INTO THE BAILOUT FUND. BUT: HOW MUCH MORE IS IT TO ME AS A WHOLE?**

**27.10.2011. THE GOOD GODMOTHER OF EUROPE, MERKEL WAS ABLE TO REJECT ANY OFFER. AT EU SUMMITS, THE ONE WHO HOLDS OUT LONGEST WINS. AND THE ONE WHO IN THE END MAKES THE "OFFER" THAT ONE CAN NOT REFUSE. LIKE DONNA ANGELA, EUROPE'S ...**

**03.11.2011. GREEK DRAMA: MRS. MERKEL, WE WANT TO VOTE! PRESENT IT TO US NOW! WE PROVIDE HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS OF EUROS TO SAVE THE BANKRUPT GREEKS - THIS SHOULD BE CLARIFIED WITH A REFERENDUM.**

The German people are presented as a homogenous nation suffering from irresponsible others. Indignation is produced in un-political terms, where systemic critique and even difference of opinion are ostracized by (supposedly) overwhelming facts, expert voices and by the moralization of austerity and emergency politics of dispossession as "help" that should even be appreciated. Political leaders as Chancellor Merkel are presented as symbolic centres (Merkel as the "godmother of Europe") unifying the nation. The calls for "referendum" on the provision of "help" (to the banking system rather than the Greek people) are rallies that aim to the boosting of nationalism rather than

to express any sense of democratic will. Indignation is in every case controversial as the alternatives organized by the German, the Greek and the European Left are discredited as “populist” and dangerous. Bild-Zeitung’s legitimization of economic austerity as the only “realistic” political option, along with the manifestation of un-political indignation, aim at mobilising public opinion against the resisting parts of the Greek society. On a further extend, indignation and nationalist narcissism aim at disciplining the German public to the socio-political restructuring that the capitalist crisis is advancing in European societies.

An excerpt from one of Bild-Zeitung’s article on Greece serves to clarify tabloid politics of nationalism in the midst of the economic crisis, further. On a visit to Germany from the former Prime Minister of Greece, Giorgos Papandreu – the neoliberal politician, Head of the “Socialist Party” (PASOK), who consented to the quarantining of Greece by the IMF, the EBC and the EU for reasons of “national salvation” (sic) – Bild-Zeitung published an open letter to him:

“Dear prime minister,

If you’re reading this, you’ve entered a country different from yours. You’re in Germany. Here, people work until they are 67 and there is no 14th-month salary for civil servants. Here, nobody needs to pay a €1,000 bribe to get a hospital bed in time. Our petrol stations have cash registers, taxi drivers give receipts and farmers don’t swindle EU subsidies with millions of non-existent olive trees. Germany also has high debts but we can settle them. That’s because we get up early and work all day. We want to be friends with the Greeks. That’s why since joining the euro, Germany has given your country €50bn.” (Guardian 2010).

All claims made by Bild-Zeitung in the excerpt above are vulgar generalizations, attempting to produce a homogenous and “squared” narrative in defence of Bild-Zeitung’s crisis discourse. Bild’s accusations against Greece, the Greek state and the Greek people have been answered in the critical discussion of the crisis and Greece’s position, in previous sections of this article. The complexity of such issues however makes tabloid press’ straightforward statements to sound “true”, grounded on everyday-life, common sense, empirical forms of knowledge and morality. Practical knowledge though fails to explain the multiple, interrelated layers of transnational economic, political and social relations, problems and contradictions. The analysis will focus on the production of nationalism instead as nationalism sets the foundations for the legitimacy of such claims. In the excerpt above, the German nation is celebrated through the production of the Other as failure. The standards to assess failure are everyday life banalities, such as functional assets of consumer society (e.g. cash registers in petrol stations), set by the tabloid as symbols of success. The “exposition” of the Other’s failure is fabricated by the systematic allocation of moments proving his/her backwardness and failure. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1996/1947) argue, the trajectory of success is fabricated through the accumulation and exposure of (banal) features and “facts” that are made to appear as success components. Everyday life banalities (Billig 1995, 61) symbolize the narcissistic pleasures of the nation, that are threatened by the Other and his/her corrupt and potentially contagious ways.

The Other (who is also responsible for not wanting to be “our” friend) is objectified as inferior and as guilty, through an arbitrary narrative of nationalist “common sense”, that deploys “facts” and overemphasizes “small differences”. Differences are propagated in order to be inscribed into the audience’s memory (Adorno and Horkheimer 1996/1947). The “German people” are thus invited by Bild-Zeitung to commune to the pleasures of “their” nation, excluding critique on internal social problems that the country’s middle and lower classes –the main consumers of Bild-Zeitung - face, related to labour precarity and constancy of wages. Following Adorno and Horkheimer (1996/1947), the celebration of the nation cultivates an illusion of success that reinforces social conformity to the ideology obscuring contemporary social inequalities. Again, the call for national homogeneity has a disciplinary purpose, aiming to ostracize critique to the nation’s class inequalities and to dissociate the public from its identification to the suffering Other in the face of multiple, global crises humanity as a whole is facing. In short, the nationalistic emphasis aims in distracting the public to seek a holistic approach to the systemic crisis the globe is facing, as we all live in what Badiou (2008) describes as “one world”. By diverting the public discussion from a critique of global capitalism, the culturalist explanations of the crisis legitimize neoliberal emergency politics (There-Is-No-Alternative doctrines introduced by neoliberal technocrats) for the restructuring of social institutions in different localities in expense of democracy and in favour of the capital.

#### 4.3.4. The Culturalist Frame

The culturalist frame produces “what Greece is” and aims at grounding the capitalist crisis as a crisis that concerns a particular nation state and as a crisis that is caused by the particularities and the shortcomings of the Greek society. Greece is defined according to popular stereotypes stressing the idle, carefree, and comfortable lifestyle of countries with “warm climate”. Stereotypes are the crisis’ explanatory foundations.

28.02.2010. GREECE- BANKRUPTCY: THIS IS HOW THE GREEKS BURN THE EURO. GREECE IS ON THE VERGE OF BANKRUPTCY AND HOPES FOR BILLIONS IN AID FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION. HERE, THE GREEKS ARE LIVING FAR BEYOND THEIR ABILITIES.

02.03.2010. CRISIS IN GREECE: THIS IS HOW CORRUPT THE BANKRUPT GREEKS ARE. USURIOUS CORRUPTION IN GREECE: WHOEVER NEEDS A LICENSE OR A HOSPITAL ROOM TO PAY, MUST BRIBE. 1300 € PER YEAR!

04.03.2010. BILD-TEST; GERMAN BEGS FOR THE BANKRUPT GREEKS. THE GOVERNMENT ASKS FOR DONATIONS (TO SAVE) GREECE FROM BANKRUPTCY. BUT HOW HAPPY ARE THE GREEKS WHILE SPENDING? A BILD REPORTER TOOK THE TEST!

12.03.2010. MASS UPRISING STRIKES: THE GREEKS LOST THEIR DREAMLAND? THE MASS UPRISING AGAINST THE SHOCK-SAVING PROGRAM OF THE GOVERNMENT THREATENS TO DESTROY THE IMAGE OF THE GREEKS. ARE THEY STRIKING THEIR DESTROYED COUNTRY?

26.04.2010. CLIQUE AND CORRUPTION IS HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS IN GREECE. ONE COUNTRY, TWO FAMILIES AND THE QUESTION: IS GREECE DEMOCRACY OR DYNASTY?

27.04.2010. STRIKE IN ATHENS, BANKRUPT GREEKS DO NOT WANT TO SAVE. HEATED ATMOSPHERE IN MASS PROTESTS IN ATHENS. BILD.DE ASKS DEMONSTRATORS WHY THEY SAY NO TO SAVING. TO FOLLOW: MOB ATTACKS!

29.04.2010. YET BANKRUPT GREEKS CELEBRATE AND CELEBRATE AND CELEBRATE ... GREECE ON THE BRINK OF BANKRUPTCY. WHAT NOW? PANIC ON THE TITANIC? THE GREEKS CELEBRATE AS IF THERE WAS NO TOMORROW.

03.05.2010. CRISIS IN GREECE, THE EURO DECEIVED. SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS BY THE EU AGAINST GREECE: INTERNAL REPORTS OF THE EU COMMISSION WILL NOW SHOW THE FULL EXTENT OF THE GREEK OFFENSE CRIME.

19.05.2011. MERKEL ESCALATES PRESSURE: GREEKS SHOULD TAKE LESS HOLIDAYS. THE PRESSURE ON EUROPE'S GROWING DEBT SINNERS: CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL WANTS THE PEOPLE TO WORK LONGER IN THE INDEBTED STATES AND TO HAVE LESS VACATION.

06.06.2011. WHERE ARE THEY GIVING OUR BILLIONS? HOW CAN THIS EVEN BE POSSIBLE? DESPITE THE CRISIS, GREEKS PAY RETIREMENT PENSIONS TO THE DEAD. HOW CAN THIS EVEN BE POSSIBLE? FOR THE FIRST TIME THE GREEK GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY ADMITTED THAT MILLIONS OF EUROS WERE PAID TO DEAD PENSIONERS.

27.10.2011. ARE DEBT-SECTION GREEKS SAVED NOW REALLY? WHO IS TO UNDERSTAND THE GREEKS? EUROPE DECIDES TO CUT DEBT, AND YET THERE IS DOOM AND GLOOM.

03.11.2011. DEADLINE WITH THE GREEK CHAOS. CHAOS DAYS IN GREECE. HELLAS MAKES THE WHOLE WORLD ASTRAY! HERE ARE THE HEADS OF 20 MAJOR INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD WHO HAVE ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY.

The “knowledge” that Bild-Zeitung produces on the reasons behind the economic crisis, is based upon the “knowledge of Greece”. The knowledge reifying “Greece” into a “common sense”, “known” object, departs from touristic stereotypes. As discussed earlier, the mainstream media’s visualization of Greece is full of tourist semiotics. References to the corrupting attributes of sunlight are indicative of the touristic gaze of Bild-Zeitung towards Greece. Stereotypes are not questioned but taken for granted. Greece and the people inhabiting there are produced in homogenous terms. Greece and Greeks are reified through Mediterranean and Middle Eastern folkloric stereotypes, banal historical references to “Greek antiquity”, or references to popular culture constructions of Greece, Greek culture and Greeks (like “Zorba the Greek” or the blockbuster film “my big fat Greek wedding”, which built its success by concentrating and selling all widely “known” prejudices and stereotypes on Greece).

Stereotypes of the Greek people relate to exotic myths cultivated by the tourist industry that is further developed by the identity of the tourist. As Urry (2002, 132) argued, the tourist focuses on

particular objects that are produced as unique through the fantasy and the narratives producing the tourist experience and need. The tourist gaze seeks the specific character of particular people and places. Tourism is a highly individualized activity, practiced by citizens of economically advanced countries of the global North, and the tourist experiences travelling to remote places as a labour and consumer right (Urry, 2002). The sites of mass tourist consumption of Greece do not allow much space for one to explore the internal social and spatial diversity and contradictions of the particular locus. The tourist industry does not allow identification with the local but focuses on the activities of touristic consumption. The sense of the touristic space is mediated by consumerist frames, reifying places and people as palpable entities for consumption. Experience is a great product "sold" by the tourist industry, with knowledge being central in the economy of the tourist experience. Knowledge however is commodified, destined to serve the pleasures of tourist consumption. The experience of mass tourism by German citizens in Greece provides the common frames that produce Greece as a known object. *Bild-Zeitung* departs from this knowledge by reproducing semantic and aesthetic, verbal and visual features of the tourist industry, in order to produce and to indeed verify the (already known) "Greek particularity" behind the economic crisis reifying Greece as exotic and kitsch.

The tourist discourse of Greece is publicly instrumentalized in order to produce a crisis publicity that would divert public discussion from ideological and structural analysis of the role of financial institutions, geopolitics, economic antagonisms, international monopolies and contradictions of capitalism for the particular economic crisis. A re-configuration of the "West", or a reification of the "Eurozone" as an identity configuration emerges through different crises constructions by hegemonic discourses in the globe, re-enforced by dominant political and economic structures. Since the on-going crisis proves the contingency of different dominant structures and social imaginaries (e.g. capitalism as the best and only system for human societies), the hegemonic construction of the West (e.g. secular, capitalist, Protestant Christian) itself becomes a highly contingent symbolic entity, which requires constant affirmation and constitution. The struggle over codes, symbols and images is central in the on-going production of imagined communities and key site for the prolongation and elaboration of social crises (Lentin and Titley 2011, 125). Racism as argued (Wren 2001, 143) is linked to different stages of capitalist development. Different groups of people are classified according to the needs of particular economies.

Although data from the OECD (table 1) prove that the Greek lower and middle classes work much longer than other Europeans do and both data and literature indicate that Southern Europe has a much less developed public sector than the North, mainstream crisis discourses such as those of *Bild-Zeitung* conceal them from public light and do not even attempt to challenge them. "Big state" and large public spending were noted as important reasons for the debt crisis of the European South, when according to OECD data (image 1), countries from the European South have much less developed public services and generally much smaller public sectors than those from the countries of the European North (Crouch 2004, 9). Public discussion is instead focused on spectacularized re-productions of common sense, on what was supposedly known over the under-developed, uncivil, corrupt, idle and deceitful ontology of a Greek character, along with abysmal myths of Greek state's "huge public spending" and "huge unproductive public sector".

### Average annual hours actually worked per worker <sup>i</sup>

Change data selection: [Country \[36 / 37\]](#) [Time & Frequency \[11\]](#) [Employment status \[2 / 2\]](#)



Data extracted on 17 Mar 2012 22:25 UTC (GMT) from [OECD.Stat](#)

Employment status	Total employment											
	Frequency		Annual									
	Time	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Country												
Australia <sup>i</sup>		1 780	1 739	1 732	1 737	1 732	1 727	1 719	1 712	1 717	1 690	1 686
Austria <sup>i</sup>		1 658	1 657	1 652	1 658	1 663	1 652	1 642	1 632	1 620	1 581	1 587
Belgium <sup>i</sup>		1 545	1 577	1 580	1 575	1 549	1 565	1 566	1 560	1 568	1 550	1 551
Canada <sup>i</sup>		1 775	1 768	1 747	1 736	1 754	1 739	1 738	1 738	1 728	1 700	1 702
Chile <sup>i</sup>		2 263	2 242	2 250	2 235	2 232	2 157	2 165	2 128	2 095	2 074	2 068
Czech Republic <sup>i</sup>		2 092	2 000	1 980	1 972	1 986	2 002	1 997	1 985	1 992	1 942	1 947
Denmark <sup>i</sup>		1 581	1 587	1 579	1 577	1 579	1 579	1 586	1 570	1 570	1 559	..
Estonia		1 987	1 978	1 983	1 985	1 996	2 010	2 001	1 999	1 969	1 831	1 879
Finland <sup>i</sup>		1 751	1 733	1 726	1 719	1 723	1 716	1 709	1 706	1 704	1 673	1 697
France <sup>i</sup>		1 591	1 579	1 537	1 533	1 561	1 557	1 536	1 556	1 560	1 554	..
Germany <sup>i</sup>		1 473	1 458	1 445	1 439	1 442	1 434	1 430	1 430	1 426	1 390	1 419
Greece <sup>i</sup>		2 121	2 121	2 109	2 103	2 082	2 086	2 148	2 115	2 116	2 119	2 109
Hungary <sup>i</sup>		2 057	2 011	2 019	1 990	1 993	1 993	1 989	1 985	1 986	1 968	1 961
Iceland <sup>i</sup>		1 885	1 847	1 812	1 807	1 810	1 794	1 795	1 807	1 807	1 716	1 897
Ireland <sup>i</sup>		1 719	1 713	1 698	1 671	1 668	1 654	1 645	1 634	1 601	1 549	1 664
Israel <sup>i</sup>		..	..	..	..	1 905	1 989	1 887	1 921	1 898	1 889	..
Italy <sup>i</sup>		1 861	1 843	1 831	1 826	1 826	1 819	1 815	1 816	1 803	1 772	1 778
Japan <sup>i</sup>		1 821	1 809	1 798	1 799	1 787	1 775	1 784	1 785	1 771	1 714	1 733

Table 1: The reality behind the propagandistic myths of “lazy” Greeks and Southern Europeans, reproduced by tabloid press, popular television programs, economists and politicians throughout the world. OECD data state that Greeks work almost twice as much as Northern Europeans do. The table does not include information on the difference in labour conditions between the European North and the European South (OECD 2010).

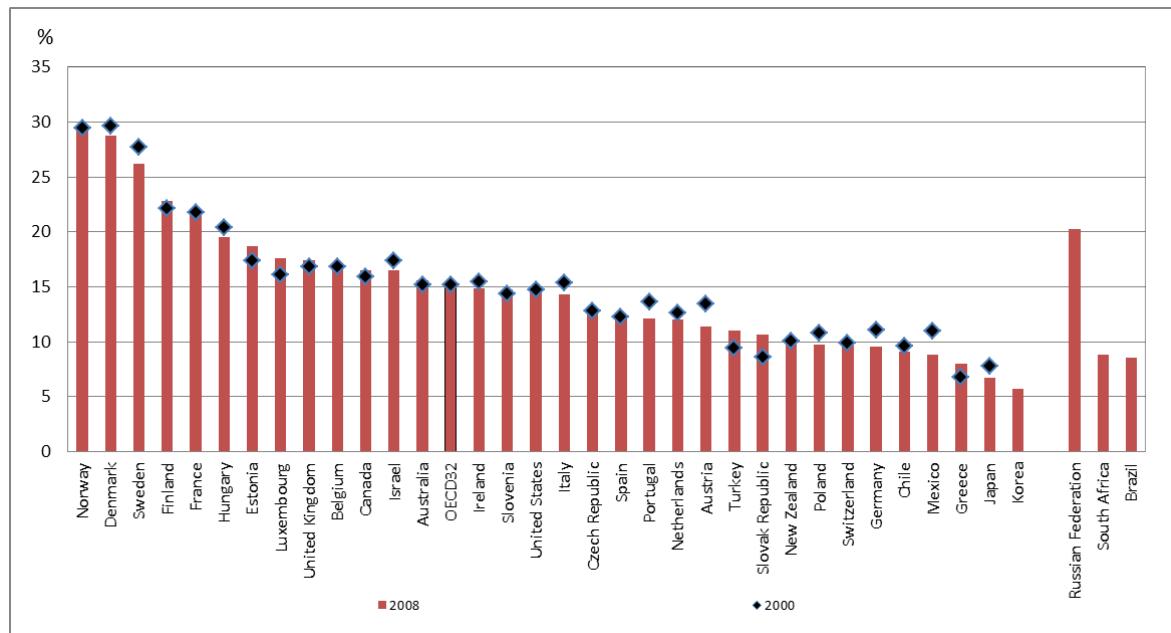


Figure 1: A graph taken from OECD’s “Government at a Glance 2011” publication (Chapter 21 – Data) showing the percentage of public employment in countries across the globe. For Greece, the percentage of employment in the general government and in public corporations was 7,9 for 2008.

Likewise, problems related to minimalist democratic institutions and public accountability, are instrumentalized by neoliberal technocrats to attack the notion of the public. Reification of the “public” further serves to mystify it publicly and to further discredit it. For instance, in an LSE public lecture on 28/3/2012 framed with the title “can Greece get out of the crisis?” (sic), Poul Thomsen, IMF mission chief to Greece stated that: “Greece must deal with its own taboos... so far there has been a taboo to let staff go in a mandatory manner from what is a highly overstaffed public sector. There has also been a taboo to close entities that are no longer needed.” (Reuters 2012)

Thomsen does not specify “what is needed” for people, or who decides for that. The public sector of Greece is thus a “taboo” for the country (possibly part of Greece’s “inherent particularities”) that needs to “break” while promulgating the violent imposition of mass privatizations in Greece, the further suppression of lower and middle incomes, the forced redundancy of people with no provisions for economic and social inclusion. Likewise, the crisis has also been attributed to the people’s “habit” of not paying taxes, an oxymoron argument when in fact free market ideologues are strong opponents of taxation and through lobbying and political pressure, they did succeed in reducing taxation to the higher incomes around the world (Harvey 2010, 45) or to create tax-free “paradises” (sic) in remote spaces across the globe.

#### **4.3.5. The Spiteful Frame**

25.02.2010. TO BAN CASH FOR BANKRUPT GREEKS. THE GOVERNMENT - WITH EXTRAORDINARY SAVINGS - WANTS TO HAVE THE GREEKS, TO LOSE BY ALL MEANS THEIR HABIT OF RIOTOUS LIVING AND TAX-BACK PULL.

08.03.2010. PRESIDENT OF THE BUNDESTAG APOLOGIZED TO THE BANKRUPT GREEKS. WHAT'S THAT? BUNDESTAG PRESIDENT LAMMERT HAS APOLOGIZED FOR THE "MALICIOUS" ARTICLES ON BANKRUPT GREEKS.

19.03.2010. PAPANDREOU THREATENED: GREEKS WANT MONEY FOR NAZI ATROCITIES. GREECE WANTS COMPENSATION FOR NAZI ATROCITIES. SO FAR, PRIME MINISTER PAPANDREOU ON THIS ISSUE WAS CAUTIOUS: HE NOW SUDDENLY THREATENS.

04.05.2010. GREEKS IN EURO CRASH MAKE OUR BREAD MORE EXPENSIVE! THE GREEKS WEAKEN THE EURO. THAT WE DO TODAY: PRICES ARE RISING. EVEN BREAD IS MORE EXPENSIVE. THE RECOVERY IS IN DANGER!

10.09.2011. EVERY SECOND SURVEY IN GERMANY WANTS TO GO BANKRUPT GREEKS. A MAJORITY OF GERMANS AGREE THAT WE SHOULD LET GREECE GO BUST. ONLY 43 PERCENT, ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY ARE IN FAVOUR OF MORE FINANCIAL AID

...  
20.09.2011. EURO CRISIS: GREEKS BURN TAX BILLS! [WHAT HAPPENS] WHEN THE GREEKS FINALLY SEE THAT THEY HAVE TO SAVE? YESTERDAY, THERE WERE ALREADY RIOTS IN ATHENS!

20.09.2011. FIGHT AGAINST BANKRUPT GREECE: 150 000 OFFICIALS KICKED OUT. THE GREEKS ARE BANKRUPT IN OCTOBER - IF THEY DO NOT SAVE AT LAST! ATHENS WANTS TO TAKE DRASTIC MEASURES.

21.09.2011. NEW SAVINGS PLAN MUST NOW BLEED THE GREEKS PROPERLY. THE GREEK GOVERNMENT IS SERIOUS AND STRIKES EVEN MORE PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS THAN PREVIOUSLY PLANNED.

22.09.2011. FIRST I PAY NO TAX REBEL CENTS FOR BANKRUPT GREEKS! ONE MAN AGAINST DEBT-EUROPE! MARKUS BAUER GORE, ACCOUNTANT, DOES NOT WANT TO PAY MORE TAXES FOR INDEBTED COUNTRIES LIKE GREECE.

06.09.2011. SCHÄUBLE: GREEKS SAVE AT LAST, OTHERWISE NO EUROS! BASTA'S SPEECH IN PARLIAMENT - OUR EURO- MINISTER AT HIS BEST! WOLFGANG SCHÄUBLE HAS URGED GREECE TO MEET THE SAVINGS GOALS.

06.06.2011. DESPITE THE CRISIS, GREEKS PAY RETIREMENT PENSIONS TO THE DEAD. HOW CAN THIS EVEN BE POSSIBLE? FOR THE FIRST TIME THE GREEK GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY ADMITTED THAT MILLIONS OF EUROS WERE PAID TO DEAD PENSIONERS.

05.06.2011. WITH A SWASTIKA! GREEKS RIDICULE EUROPE. NEVERTHELESS, THEY GET BILLIONS! WHAT IS THE WILLINGNESS OF EUROPEANS TO HATE SPEECH AND SWASTIKA POSTERS BY THE PLAYFUL, BANKRUPT COUNTRY OF GREECE?

The “spiteful” frame, expresses the indignation of “the Germans” towards “the Greeks” that is produced and mediated by Bild-Zeitung. According to Bild’s discourse, the Greeks are responsible for their own suffering. The Greeks are also responsible for the dangers that the crisis poses to

other Europeans. Bild-Zeitung offers its public a purposefully confused version of the facts related to Greece's position in the global economic crisis. Bild's version of the crisis discredits people's resistances against the degrading of their lives, as something irrational and even ungrateful, while celebrating the loss of jobs in the particular country and the closing down of Greece's minimal social provisions. The culturalist frames of Greek people and the crisis legitimize the particular spiteful claims. Any hint to Bild-Zeitung's public or journalist responsibility is silenced or confronted with indignation. Simultaneously, historical disputes related to the war crimes and atrocities of Nazi Germany to the Greek people (Mazower, 1995) that are connected to Germany's unpaid war reparations to Greece –included the "forced occupation loans" that the German and Italian occupying forces imposed to the time's Greek collaborationist government (Keep Talking Greece 2012) - are silenced as historical taboos or as issues that Germany, Greece, Europe, or humanity itself, have (supposedly) resolved, belonging to a (fictional) deep historical past. Max Horkheimer in his 1939 article entitled "the Jews and Europe" critically discussed the connections of capitalism, crisis and fascism. Fascism in that sense is a historical possibility that can rise from different capitalist crises and in particular from the instrumental and antagonistic rationalities and values that capitalist society produces.

The expression of public spite and not identification and solidarity to the suffering others, is connected to political disempowerment and to consumerist alienation. A society of spite rises according to Diken (2009), due to the destruction of sociality, praxis and action. Political disempowerment is connected to the diminishing of political praxis by late capitalist governance. Alienation is connected to the inability to live happily with others and also with the self, caused by extreme conditions of uncertainty and individualism imposed by the late capitalist processes of value production (Berardi 2009, 109).

In his book on "nihilism", Diken (2009: 5) argues -as Bauman (1998) and Sennett (2006) do - that contemporary society "systematically produces losers, while at the same time depicting this condition as fate, as one's own fault". A society of spite relates to widespread class and existential worries, inflicted by precarious social contexts, narcissist anxiety evoked by consumer society and by the broadening of the scope of uselessness (Sennett, 2006). Berardi argues that the predominance of work in individual life and the prevalence of economic rationales in social life diminish pleasure in life. "Eros" the element of pleasure is distorted by social relations of antagonism. The failure of the Greeks serves to boost the narcissistic confidence of the German lower and middle classes which is challenged by the anxieties of the extreme antagonistic and precarious rules posed by contemporary capitalism (Berardi 2009, 99). The Other is perceived according to the rules of competition, as danger, risk and limitation and not as a source of experience and enrichment (Berardi 2009, 80).

The Greek people are being accused as responsible for the crisis that struck their country but also for the crisis striking Europe. The Greek people are being accused for being deceitful in order to enjoy the pleasures of consumerism. The Greek people are also guilty of "tolerating" their corrupt governments. The particular discourse that places responsibility on people and not on systems relates to neoliberal-consumer society principles, where it is up to the people not to support unethical or corrupt governments, business, or individual habits (Crouch 2011, 26). The power of the "consumers" is thus elevated to its highest degree, while the power of structure and ideology remains unchallenged.

New media affordances are also used by individual users to expand the (pseudo-) knowledge disseminated by hegemonic social institutions. New media users get active to express their spite against the failed Greeks in particular, prompting the unpolitical spirit that characterizes contemporary societies (Dean 2009, 39). People do express a genuine interest in informing themselves on the crisis, yet the lack of political perspective diminishes the criteria to assess information and events. Journalists of mainstream media, bloggers, vloggers and amateur producers, commentators in websites and different media uses in general are producing forms of (pseudo-) knowledge on Greece and the crisis, departing from the mainstream frames of the economic crisis and the role of Greece. Such "knowledge" seems to verify what is already "known" by common sense fetishism. Articles on "open" topics framed as "are Greeks European?" (<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/246127/20111109/> accessed on March 8, 2012) are produced through an "eclectic" use of fragments and dispersed 'facts' compiled from genetic, historical and cultural arguments –often supported by "expert" voices - verifying 'European-ness' in terms reminiscent to Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, with Greeks being positioned to his "Eastern Orthodox" tectonic plate of the "world's civilizations" that Huntington mapped. One can also find topics like "are Greeks white?" (<http://www.topix.com/forum/world/greece/T3JH3BBB31QO6QG6L> accessed on March 9, 2012) in online discussion forums, with a couple of thousand posted replies, while virtual "wars" occur on

You Tube, Facebook, online platforms and social media, on related topics. Finally, it is important to note that the fetishized discourse of “Greece”, creates abject identities in real life situations: as a friend recently mentioned, a Danish colleague told him (in the usual form of a “joke”) “not to Greek his chair”; in a different context, he was presented to a third person by his colleagues –while physically present- as “although he is Greek, we still let him be here”. The issue of media representation and public perception of the economic crisis requires a thorough study. The particular article only provides certain hints on the production of the European public opinion on the economic crisis by mass media and politico-economic elite discourses.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In the paper’s final section, I will refer to the main findings of this study and I will also refer to the current political situation in Greece and to the prospects of European citizens through a different understanding of the economic crisis.

The analysis shows that the hegemonic discourses that produce public explanations of the European economic crisis reproduce the neoliberal social values and express the interests of the capitalist class. The German tabloid “Bild-Zeitung” amplifies political and economic elite discourses to the general public. As such its discourses are highly ideological. The critical analyses of the frames of Bild-Zeitung disclose a systematic concealment and distortion of information explaining the structural issues relating to the crisis. Bild-Zeitung’s frames conceal facts (e.g. the OECD data of table 1) that relate to the actual effects of the crisis politics to people. The lack of any structural understanding of the crisis constructs people, the Greek people in particular as the scapegoats for the destruction that capitalism produces globally. The vilification and racialization of the Greek people augments nationalism and triggers spite, due to the anxiety that the global effects of the capitalist crisis triggers to German people as well as to people all over the world. Furthermore, Bild-Zeitung facilitates a discourse that is sensational and spectacular, un-political and un-democratic. Such passionate and depoliticized discourses are noted (Mouffe 2004) to turn people towards the extreme right. Bild-Zeitung’s manifested position against the enforced loaning policies that the German government and the EU follows towards Greece –in defence of the German taxpayer’s public funds - is also controversial as simultaneously it refuses to recognize that alternatives suggested by the political Left are possible. Bild-Zeitung’s, along other German as well as Greek and non-Greek mainstream media’s continuous attacks on the Greek Left and its leadership are also notable<sup>4</sup>. The main current of the Greek Left, the party of Syriza, is against the continuation of EU loaning to Greece in order to serve a debt that is largely odious, and it is particularly against loans coming from public funds. Bild-Zeitung, along other mainstream media, are identifying the interests of the average German people to those of the German and international capital that is profiting by the further indebtedness of Greece. Bild-Zeitung’s politics is therefore a class politics that express unpolitical indignation as a public spectacle that is meant to comfort its audience - the German middle and lower classes – and to support German capitalists.

Media are central tools for the cultivation of a neoliberal subjectivity and social ethos. The spectacle of the crisis normalizes, reifies the capitalist crisis as a natural, taken for granted, object and produces public discipline to the new work ethics that the emerging form of capitalism requires. On a further extend, the publicity of the crisis produces surplus value for cultural industries. As Debord (1986/1967) argued, the spectacle legitimizes divisions: divisions of people with common interests, the division of labour itself, but also divisions of consciousness and an abolishment of critique by the cultivation of fantasies. The result of this process is for Debord, the proletarianization of the world. The restructuring occurring in Greece, celebrated by mass media spectacles, aims towards the proletarianization of the Greek people and the creation of conditions of primitive accumulation. A successful proletarianization of Greece would also mean the export of the particular ‘model’ of social governance in further indebted countries, attacked by the speculative activity of the financial “markets”.

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<sup>4</sup> On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 2012, three days before the Greek national elections, the “Financial Times of Germany” published a provocative and disdainful article entitled “resist to the demagogue” (sic) in Greek language (<http://www.ftd.de/politik/europa/:wahlempfehlung-antistattheite-sto-dimagogos-widersteht-den-demagogen/70050480.html>, July 10, 2012), asking Greek citizens not to vote for the Coalition of the Radical Left Party, Syriza, by performing a personal attack to the party’s leader Alexis Tsipras, thus concealing the political and social background of the rise in left politics. The particular initiative was one of the many propagandistic interventions in the internal affairs of Greece, disregarding and attempting to manipulate and to patronize the free will of the particular country’s citizenry, in an anxious defense of the failed austerity politics that take place in a country foreign to the particular publication and its public. The sole difference of the supposed “serious” press from tabloids like “Bild-Zeitung” seems to be a stylistic one; mainstream media use the same hegemonic discourses as “Bild” that reify capitalism and discredit people in class and culturalist frames.

Cultural norms and belief systems play an active part in the reproduction and evolution of capitalism and consist of one out of several “spheres of activity” (Harvey 2010, 123) within the trajectories of capitalist development. Neoliberalism shapes mental conceptions of the world, embedding particular forms of knowledge under the framework of its core social values, relating to competition, flexible hard work, entrepreneurialism, free market activity, free trade. Bauman (2009/2000, 291) argues that the finite basis of the exceptional status of consumer Western societies, may trigger popular anxieties that could require particular forms of social engineering that lie on the “well-tested, racist perspective” drawn from the experience of the not too distant past. Recent and distant history of Europe has many examples of violent scapegoating to demonstrate. The fetishization of “Greece” and “Greeks” seems convenient to neoliberal social engineering, as it obscures the systemic and ideological foundations of the particular crisis and blocks public critique towards the economic objectives and policies managing the crisis.

As Graeber (2011, 321) argues, money is a political instrument, which has the potential to become a moral imperative to itself, according to which, every sort of human relation can become a matter of a cost-benefit calculation (Graeber 2011, 319), with all aspects of life dominated by the impersonal power of the market. Cash was initially deployed for relations between strangers or authority and subordinates. The story of capitalism, Graeber (2011, 332) argues, is the story where a credit economy (with credit meaning reputation for honesty) was turned into an economy of interest, with the conversion of moral networks by impersonal ones. Money reduces quality to quantity and extinguishes value differences (Diken 2009, 67). Money incites a cynical view on things, reducing everything as purchasable and distinction of things as utterly meaningless. In that sense, anything - from islands to people- can be seen and desired as commodities that can be sold and owned. The logic of money, market rationality, and economic politics, commoditizes new entities of the world. Diken notes the rise of two variants of nihilism by such a tedious understanding of the world. On one hand, Diken discusses a commodity fetish passivism, as things are somehow taken for granted and cannot change; in this context, infantilized consumers have nothing to fight for besides the pursuing of narcissistic fantasies, and thus oscillate from one desire to the next, with the promise of fulfilment being constantly deferred by consumer society. On the other hand, a self-destructive, ecstatic impulse also rises from the same mind frame. The environmental crisis due to capitalist accumulation and consumerist lifestyle is a clear sign of such nihilism (Diken 2009, 69).

An acceleration of (pseudo-) knowledge on Greece and the (native) people of Greece, seems to advance in the mediascape, departing from the elite construction of Greece's exceptional status in Europe. In the crisis context, Greece is constructed as a problem. The problematization of a given social entity is followed by its rational explanation and the production of solutions. The “Greek problem” is explained through the fetishist discourses of Greece and Greeks produced by the cultural industries. Foucault (1989/1975) demonstrated that truth regimes are being established through the systematization of dispersed and largely arbitrary statements on particular issues that appear important at specific time-spaces. Stereotypes and nationalistic sentiments existing before the particular crisis are recontextualized in the crisis context. They form new beliefs, generating new social relations between different people. The objectification of a given population under particular characteristics is connected to technologies of governance, based on the knowledge invented, denying the Other's autonomy. Production of knowledge on the essence of the Other establishes an archive of information and a set of guiding, practical ideas on the Other (Goldberg 2009/2000, 227). As Bauman (2009/2000) notes, stereotypes and racial knowledge are used as instruments for social engineering by the state or other authorities.

Perhaps though Greek people are not so different than other Europeans; they believe in consumerism as much as others do, they are as susceptible to government or market manipulation as other people across the globe are. Furthermore, the Greek people are also as capable of challenging their government as other people in other parts of the world are. Could different European people whose government decided to follow the G.W.Bush administration's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq stop such decisions despite their opposition? Many Greek people have been struggling against the Greek government's choices and power structures in their country fiercely, long before the announcement of the particular crisis, possibly since the beginning of the Greek state.

Furthermore, the fetishization of Greece obscures the most obvious point: Greek society is a class society, full of divisions, conflicts of interest and contradictions like all societies. One needs to consider the December 2008 revolt throughout the country, sparked by the murder of a teenager by a policeman. The revolt occurred not only due to the particular incident of cold-blood murder by the police, but also due to different injustices experienced by great segments of the country's population (Dalakoglou and Vardis 2011; Kouvelakis 2011). The December events were an event (Badiou 2003) created by a local expression of the transnational multitude of people living precari-

ous lives today. The pseudo-event (Badiou 2003) of the economic crisis was the reaction to events created by people across the globe. The struggles of many Greek people against the degradation of their lives, their institutions and their country occurring for more than two years, is another example of popular reflexes in Greece against oppression and the irrationality of authority's rationality. Possibly, the resistance of Greek people towards the structural adjustment programs imposed by the "Troikans" – which have been rather passively accepted in Portugal and Ireland, despite their failure even by their planners' standards – is a central reason behind the on-going attacks towards the identity of the particular people. The EU is already producing policy changes that compromise democratic and social rights, while further introducing into governance neoliberal agents who lack democratic credibility and are even hostile to any sense of democracy.

What also needs to be understood is that the majority of the Greek people opposed to the loaning politics of the Greek government, Eurozone governments and the Troika. The mass political mobilisations of the last two years as well as the electoral results of the May 6, 2012 national elections of Greece, demonstrated that. The accumulation of defeat of popular struggles, along with the enormous and sustained political, economic and psychological pressure posed on the Greek people by local and global elites and mass media, to accept austerity as something they deserve and also as a "responsible" strategy with no alternatives, also produced regressive results. An expression of regressive attitudes was the (thin) 17<sup>th</sup> of June electoral victory of the - largely publicly discredited, along with the Social Democrats (PASOK), as responsible for the failed governing of the country over the past thirty years- Conservative Party of "Nea Dimokratia" that is devoted to serve a neoliberal political agenda, favouring privatizations of public assets and prolonged austerity policies. Further expressions of social regression concern the election of the neo-nazi band of "Chrysi Avgi" to the Greek Parliament, as well as the escalation of street violence, racism, high suicide rates and depression in the country.

Global and local mass media, along with politico-economic elites stress that austerity policies and the continuation of Greece's indebtedness from funds coming from the IMF, the EU and the ECB are the only way to "salvation". Alternatives do exist though. They are just in expense of bank interests and threaten corporate welfare. Alternatives can progressively lead to victories for the struggles of the new proletariat, something that neoliberal hegemony detests as it would challenge its fundamentalist orthodoxy of "no alternative" and the social imaginary of "capitalist realism". Perhaps, instead of passively blaming Greek people, European citizens should begin to think critically and politically, using the contradictions and paradoxes of contemporary system as opportunities for thought and political praxis in Arendt's (1986/1958) terms, as well as to challenge their governments' policies that dismantle welfare provisions, while recklessly bailing out the banking system through the provision of loans to Greek governments. Greece is caught in a vicious circle of debt and loans. The problem of debt will not be resolved by further indebtedness as debt accumulation is only worsening the situation of Greece and its people. Voices in different countries (yet minoritarian) express alternative discourses to the socially catastrophic crisis-policies and express their solidarity to the struggles of the Greek people.

To conclude, I deploy Deleuze's metaphor, "desert islands" in order to defend desert islands against their commodification and generally, against the privatization of everything. Desert islands were assets (Hartman 2009) that economic and political technocrats had their eye on, in the chained by debt politics 21<sup>st</sup> century's Greece, possibly speculating on profitable investments for (more) tourist infrastructure in the country, or for the construction of private and secured paradises, private Disney-resorts of gated communities (Davis 2006) in the face of possible environmental and social collapse in the near future.

For Deleuze, desert islands symbolize potentialities for new identities, worlds, social relations. More particularly, desert islands symbolize the possibility to imagine and to actualize a different future, liberated from the passive/radical nihilist complexes of late capitalist societies. According to Deleuze (2004, 10): "To dream of islands, whether with joy or in fear, is to dream of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone, or to dream of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew."

A close and holistic analysis of political events, drawing on political economy and cultural critique, shows that societies are transforming towards the worst (Chicchi 2009, 142). Žižek (2010, 91) argues that the crisis should be turned into an opportunity to produce a better Europe, a Europe that is the bearer of Enlightened values, liberty, equality, fraternity, other than a Europe that is based on the formula of "lower costs, higher efficiency". Balibar (2010, 309) noted that the implementation of IMF plans in Greece will result in the Eurozone becoming "*a zone of fierce and wide competition among its members*". For Balibar, the results of such a trajectory can prove to be catastrophic, unless an alternative understanding and vision for the European economic policy and for

the European social model is found. Perhaps, as a Sonia Mitrilia - a member of the Greek Committee Against the Debt and the Women's Initiative Against the Debt and Austerity - claimed, Greece of 2012 is what Spain of 1936 was for the people of Europe.

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