

Austerity Discourses in “Der Spiegel” Journal, 2009-2014

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Abstract: This article looks at the ways mainstream media discuss austerity and its failure to reach its proclaimed goals, to reduce public debt and to boost productivity in the heavily indebted countries of the Eurozone’s periphery. This study analyzed Der Spiegel’s articles presenting the crisis and austerity in Europe, focusing on the Greek case, from 2009 until 2014. A thematic analysis was developed in the study a broad corpus of articles, focusing on the main ideas they unfold. Deploying critical political economy literature, critical cultural theory and critical media studies literature, the article criticizes the neoliberal hegemony of the EU’s crisis politics and foregrounds the role of mainstream media, including progressivist or objectivist ones such as Spiegel, in the reproduction of neoliberal ideas that expand far beyond the crisis, to produce the institutions, social relations, beliefs and subjectivities for a post-crisis configuration of capitalism. The article concludes that Spiegel, like other mainstream media, produce a biopolitical policing of the crisis’ exceptionalized subjects (the citizens of indebted countries) and the implementation of crisis-politics by creating a public “structure of feeling” related to the hegemonic crisis’ rationales. These rationales are further connected to the development of the new neoliberal subjectivity, which is an objective of the crisis-reforms, such as austerity regimes. In effect, mainstream media discourses reproduce the hegemonic frames of the crisis and austerity, while negating the possibility of new narratives to emerge in the crisis context.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, EU, crisis, reforms, austerity, biopolitics, biopower, governmentality, competition, post-democracy, Der Spiegel, Greece, Germany

1. Introduction: Crisis and Austerity Discourses in the EU

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, 7) argued that there are four main narratives explaining the global economic crisis starting in 2007. These are two broad systemic crisis-explanations: one criticizing capitalism and another one criticizing only the neoliberal version of capitalism. The others are non-systemic ones: the first targets market restrictions posed by the state (e.g. too much state regulation, bureaucracy, business taxation), arguing that free markets will resolve the crisis on their own if they are allowed to; the second one focuses on the moral failures of people (e.g. lazy and corrupt South Europeans).

The economic-political elites in Europe launched hard austerity policies in the crisis-struck countries, as the only solution of the crisis. Liberal, conservative, and “social-democratic”, the leading political powers of the EU adopt non-systemic crisis-explanations, emphasizing people’s moral and cultural faults, while implementing cuts in welfare and wages, intensifying market deregulation strategies, including privatizations and tax “reliefs” for high capital, combined with higher taxation to the lower incomes. Such policies are “rewarded” by loaning strategies towards indebted countries, which are meant to cover the expenses of economic recession. Nevertheless, indebtedness is growing due to the accumulation of loans with the simultaneous “creative destruction” of existing socio-political and economic structures and social relations in crisis-struck countries to “restructure the economy”, while recession is deepening.

In his analysis of austerity, Blyth (2013, 38) argues that austerity emerged as an “objective” logic gaining power during the 1970’s capitalist crisis, taken out of (neoliberal) economy manuals. It is connected to simplistic ideas that perceive the world in mechanistic terms, implying that all one needs to do is to know the rules guiding the individual parts of the economic system, notably the micro-economical scale and apply them. As competition is the key to (capital) growth, austerity is the tool to produce competition. Social reality though is very

complex and the contradictions emerging from the neoliberal social engineering cannot be contained by the simplifications of mainstream economists. Simultaneously, the politico-economic interests supported by austerity are too high to abandon it. As Harvey (2014, xi) demonstrates, crisis and austerity create better terms for capital to emerge stronger out of its periodic crises, and to continue reproducing its processes of accumulation and profit growth.

Taking the above analysis into concern, this study looks at the kind of arguments developed by the German magazine “Der Spiegel”, a mainstream weekly magazine, generally considered progressive and credible. Previous research (Lapavitsas et al 2010; Mylonas 2012, 2014; Douzinas 2013; Mercille 2013; Bickes, Otten and Weymann 2014; Kuttan 2014; Mazzoni and Barbieri 2014; Doukaki 2015) showed that the non-systemic narratives prevail in media crisis-narratives. As infotainment genres (e.g. tabloids) are often “exceptionalized” as non-credible sources of information and their public influence are downplayed—this study focused on the so-called progressive press and analyzed the headlines and summaries of four-hundred-forty articles, published between December 26, 2009 and November 24, 2014 by Spiegel, concentrating on the whole text of some of the articles to exemplify particular crisis-discourses. In line to Fairclough and Fairclough’s (2012, 96) work on political argumentation analysis, this study argues that the rationalization of austerity is a form of public manipulation, because a particular ideological position and political strategy for Europe is being forwarded, excluding alternatives as well as the agency of alternatives in its polymorphous struggles to counter austerity and its unjust effects.

As far as the performance of the German mainstream media in the crisis is concerned, previous studies showed that Spiegel’s “attitude towards Greece in the beginning (of the crisis) did not essentially differ from discourse positions exposed in BILD and FOCUS” (Bickes, Otten and Weymann 2014, 427), with the authors noting that the so-called Greek bashing through the media was softened after 2012, with reporting shifting from the continuous announcement of scandals affirming the “lazy/corrupt Greek” stereotype, to the presentation of more stories referring to the humanitarian and social costs of the crisis in Greece. Nevertheless, the parallel development of representations calling for pity (Boltanski 1999, 4) on the detrimental effects of neoliberal experiments in Greece was not followed by a political critique of the failure of the policies producing them. In that sense, the social effects of the so-called structural reforms implemented in Greece, can be reduced to externalities caused by “necessary” or “unavoidable” (and therefore, correct) policies to a fundamentally problematic country and society. This sort of representation does not produce a political problematisation of social injustices, and therefore solidarities and political mobilizations on internationalist premises, may be harder to emerge.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section will unfold the theoretical premises of this study. In particular I will begin by briefly explaining my approach to the crisis and then discuss the idea of neoliberalism as a biopolitical project that is further developing in the emergency pretext of the economic crisis. I understand neoliberalism as an assemblage of flexible discourses and practices—met across formal and informal social frameworks—lately reconfigured under the key ideas of competition and efficiency. This “assemblage” is transforming states, institutions and individual living, basically all aspects of social life, under the principles of the enterprise, following the pace and the demands of global finance. The role of journalism and the position of the mainstream media as corporate apparatuses working according to the neoliberal grounds, and developing a disciplinary social role, accustoming the public to the knowledge, jargon and stakes of finance and economics, advancing public enthusiasm and support for neoliberal reforms in an organic way, by speaking on behalf of the “taxpayers”, the consumer-citizens, who need to constantly surveil the advance of the austerity reforms, legitimizing them in the people’s name, as being personally involved in the crisis and its management.

2.1 Crisis, Restructuring, European Neoliberalism and Biopolitics

The European aspect of the current capital's crisis is usually framed as the "Eurozone crisis", or the "Greek debt crisis". I maintain that the crisis should be understood as a systemic crisis (Harvey 2010, 2012, 2014), taking into perspective the role of the Eurozone to produce further contradictions in the uneven geopolitical and economic (Hadjimichalis 2011; Wallerstein 1974), as well as in the socio-culturally diverse, context of the EU, and seeing the role of Greece in the EU and in the crisis as that of a peripheral country tied to the interests of the EU's core countries, while further unfolding the role of local elites to the country's economic collapse and subsequent becoming of a laboratory where neoliberal doctrines are implemented for a post-crisis capitalism to emerge.

Bolt (2014, 8), argues that we need to understand the idea of crisis in plural terms, as we are confronted with a financial crisis, an economic crisis, an energy crisis, and a climate crisis. On the bottom line of all these crises lies capitalism, the main structural factor producing them. As Harvey (2005) argues, the main problem has been capitalist growth and its impossibility to be maintained in levels that would constantly augment surpluses and profits. Others (Latouche 2009; Klein 2014; Bauman 2014) convincingly argue that permanent (capital) growth is a catastrophic technocratic-bourgeois illusion, deepening wealth inequalities, creating even more competitive societies, and threatening the very continuation of life on the planet earth. The climate change is a clear proof of this assumption.

In this crisis-context, neoliberalism is a (bio) politico-ideological construction organizing the reproduction of capital's economy. The success of neoliberalism has to do with a variety of institutional as well as subjective issues. The volatile and fast changing world driven by late capitalism—with the exceptional condition of the crisis becoming a norm—has neoliberalism as its discursive/institutional and moral framework to organize the necessary reforms for adjustment, reproduction and effective acceleration of capital's dynamics in the present and the future. As Harvey (2007, 22; 2005, 2010) has convincingly argued, neoliberalism is a political project that strives towards class restoration and a distribution of wealth from the bottom to the top. Taking under consideration the vast and growing global inequalities of wealth today, the neoliberal project seems to be very successful. Dardot and Laval (2013, 338) see four main important transformations to be occurring today, suggesting that we are entering a new and more intense phase of neoliberalism: a) the market arises not as a "natural" entity but as something constituted and surveilled by formal state institutions and international treaties b) the market order is defined by competition and not by exchange c) the function of the state is defined by competition, gradually reformed under the norms of the enterprise, according to market norms d) the idea of competition enters individual life, and individuals are supposed to function as entrepreneurs of their self, as private enterprises, with individuals self-organizing their conduct beyond its strict implementation by the state apparatuses.

Neoliberalism though is an odd term. Neoliberals do not identify with it, as they prefer to be in a position of mastering the knowledge and the right to define things. Most importantly, the negation of the term aims at naturalizing the logics and the practices behind it. Furthermore, neoliberalism is a set of policies, logics, practices, collective identities and subjectivities. They relate to the core bourgeois ideology, as it emerged in the 18th century, and they also distance themselves from their 18th century origins, to meet the productive requirements of globalized and deregulated capitalism of the 21st century. Its need for unrestricted market activity across the globe, minimal taxation or state regulation (e.g. environmental or labor) of business, competition, efficiency, innovation, flexibility, entrepreneurialism and individual responsibility, and mobility, in contexts where the standard militarized form of mass production, factory work, seems displaced and with limited political power. According to Stuart Hall (2012, 11) "neoliberalism is not one thing. It evolves and diversifies. Nevertheless, geopolitically, neoliberal ideas, policies and strategies are incrementally gaining ground, re-defining the political, social and economic model, governing the strategies and setting the pace". Ong (2006, 4) states that neoliberalism is an assemblage of logics and practices, flexible enough to adjust in various settings. Neoliberalism can thus situate itself in nationalist, religious (e.g.

Christian, Muslim or other), subcultural, even “social democratic” contexts (Hall 2012, 20), as long as these can be productive for capital. The often incompatibility of neoliberalism to conservatives or to some branches of the left, is thus only superficial, as neoliberalism has colonized all discourses that fail to recognize its flexible nature and to problematize capitalism itself.

Dardot and Laval (2013, 216) note (as Foucault [2008], also did) a European variation of neoliberalism, based on German *ordo-liberal* thought. This politico-economic doctrine is based on a market-orientated idea of freedom, where freedom is understood in economic terms, “with competitiveness to replace liberalism”, and best materialized in the field of the market, as well as in a strong state intervention to guarantee market freedom. The highly interventionist neoliberal policies, bypassing popular and national sovereignty in the name of fiscal discipline, privatizations and the serving of national debt, should be understood as deriving from the German *ordo-liberal* tradition. The authors note the construction of the EU’s so-called “common market”, is an example of the *ordoliberal* policy attempting to develop and protect “competitivism”, with competition being a central value of neoliberalism, “to be placed above political influences” (Amable 2010, 5). Further, Dardot and Laval (2013, 218) argue that the EU’s neoliberalism is based upon four premises: a) the flexibilisation of wages b) the reform of pensions with the prioritization of individual saving c) the promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit d) “the defense of civilization against nihilism”, with “nihilism” referring to socialism in particular. The individual and its self-reliance are placed above all attempts of collective organization or the institutionalization of collective interests (Amable 2010, 6). Public intervention is only supposed to serve “fairness” of competition.

In conclusion, it is important to open the discussion on the kind of society, polity and human subjectivity developed by neoliberalism. As noted, both the state and individual subjectivity are subjected to changes based on the principle of competition. Such emerging state institutions are to be organically developed by individuals and the tasks and morals that they should assume. The idea of “post-democracy” (Crouch 2004) (or, “de-democratisation” for Laval and Dardot) is an important critical conceptualization to understand these changes advanced by neoliberalism, particularly in the economic crisis context. ‘Post-democracy’ is an analytical category used to highlight the kind of polity and also civic morality, neoliberalism advances, and the meaning of that to society’s economically and politically weaker, given that competition and all other foundational ideas and establishments of capitalism create deep social inequalities. Crouch (2004, 5) notes the rise of corporate power and technocratic lobbying defending corporate interests in the globalized and pro-business regulated world, with the subsequent weakening of the demos. Crouch notes the beginning of this decline in the early 1970’s, with the crisis of growth of post Second World War welfare capitalism in the West. This moment also marks the advance of neoliberal ideas in policy-making. Amable (2010, 15) also argues that, “liberty according to Hayek (1960) should be placed above all others, including democratic values. What matters for neo-liberalism is the equality of everyone before the law, not equality in the determination of the law”. Dardot and Laval (2013, 343) explain Hayek’s anti-democratic thought further, by stating that for Hayek, “an individual can be oppressed in a democratic system, just as he can be free in a dictatorial system. The highest value is therefore precisely individual liberty, understood as a faculty left to individuals to create a protected domain for themselves (their ‘property’), and not political liberty, as people’s direct participation in selecting their rulers”. In that sense, the foundations and the principles organizing the rules of the enterprise-society and enterprise-individual, both driven by competition in a global market advanced by neoliberalism, cannot be politically challenged by official means, and any kind of majority-based decision making process, departs from them and becomes irrelevant.

1.1. Neoliberalism and Journalism

The study also draws on critical accounts on the state of journalism today and the critical political economy to the media industries approach (Mosco 2009; Fuchs 2014). Scholars

(Dahlgren 2009, 45; Couldry 2010, 74; Deuze 2007) diagnose a crisis of journalism. The main reasons that produce this crisis have to do with the flexibilization of the journalist profession, due to institutional, cultural and technological factors. The so-called "liberalisation" of media from state control, primarily meant the advent of privately owned, media industries working according to the premises of commercial success, popularity and marketing, undermined the critical potential of the media, for the civic and other forms of public education. Competition for funds and advertising paved the way for lighter programs to prevail, and made the journalists' work position quite uncertain. Media content was accustomed to the rationales of selling and popularity, and thus "fun" and light forms of content became more preferable, to sustain audience consumption and popularity. Simultaneously, the continuous flow of information enabled by new digital technologies and ICTs undermined the possibilities of investigative journalism and critical reflection on the news. Journalists often reiterate what experts, authorities, and major channels or agencies of communication prioritize.

A further issue however in the critique of journalist practices today, as ever, has to do with the hegemonic ideologies of a given society and their reproduction through media apparatuses. In an influential article, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) spoke of the prevalence of a neoliberal kind of "newspeak" speaking in society through media discourses. Chakravarty and Schiller (2010, 677) write that from the 1980's and on, news production shift attention from the broader economy to business and finance. Simultaneously, the political distinctions between the left and the right begun to vanish from mainstream media discourse, which began appearing more "centrist", increasingly relying on the supposedly neutral terms of technocracy and "experts". The aforementioned trends that make journalism a precarious profession with a compromised role in the public sphere are connected to the rationales and the practices of neoliberalism: late capitalism's ideological and political doctrine. Therefore, despite its (sometimes) honest efforts to be imbalanced, or "fair", I argue that even quality journalism is succumbed to the logics and rationales of neoliberalism. In the crisis context where social affairs take an urgent turn with national and social antagonisms escalating, neoliberalism is further allied to nationalism. I argue then that Spiegel reproduces the main understanding of the capitalist crisis, offering partial, nationalist, bourgeois, moralistic and often racial arguments (presented in culturalist forms [Ahmed 2000; Lentin and Titley 2011]), refusing a critical approach to crisis, emphasizing on its systemic nature and its globality.

The importance of studying media representations has to do with their public appeal. According to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, 86), representations are premises of political argumentation and connect to people's actions through practical reasoning. Without suggesting that these discourses are fully and unproblematically adopted by the German public, I maintain that the prevalence and daily repetition of such discourses, found everywhere in the German public sphere minimize alternative and critical frames, and produce a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977, 131) towards the crisis, that is connected to the hegemonic, neoliberal construction of not just the crisis, but of social life, its goals, the aspirations for society and individuality. I maintain that the hegemonic crisis-constructions are generally shared by the vast majorities of German and other north European publics in particular, but simultaneously I also want to establish the link between the public plausibility of the hegemonic crisis-discourses and the ways that social life develops today, following the competition norms and the pace of financial markets. Dardot and Laval (2013, 291) stress the disciplinary aspect of the hegemonic discourses on the themes and norms of neoliberalism today, as distributed publicly through a variety of sources. Besides their spectacular and inspiring tone, the subject is called to conform individually to the demands of efficiency and competition advanced across all fields of social life. The crisis-discourses in the media are part of the broader disciplinary technology of neoliberalism today. The advance of the state reforms demanded by late capitalism in crisis is to be further developed by reforms in the citizens' "hearts and minds" to paraphrase a ruthless neoliberal zealot, Margaret Thatcher.

With crisis and debt being the main vehicles of neoliberal reforms, the position of the media is central in mediating the abstraction of such processes in meaningful and mostly importantly, engaging ways to the publics. As Lazzarato (2011, 104) argued, the debt has a biopolitical power, as social rights are lately being transformed into social and private debts.

The transformation of the Greek public debt from a debt that was owed to private banks, mostly German ones, to a debt now (after its effective swapping) owed to national public sectors, the debt becomes a social issue, for citizens to actively get engaged with. Lazzarato focuses on the subjectivity of the “indebted man” and his analysis makes good sense for the position of the Greek citizens, who, from being one of the people with the lowest private debt in Europe, the politics of crisis have indebted them for several generations to come. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see the ways that the German public is positioned in this relation, as the “owner” of the funds “given to Greece”, and caught in a vicious circle that privatizes debt across countries tightly tied together by common financial institutions, such as the EU states.

3. Research

Founded in 1947, Der Spiegel is owned by the Spiegel-Verlag company, published on a weekly basis and selling 1,113,000 copies per week (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_Germany accessed October 24, 2014). Using the key words “Finanzkrise-in-Griechenland”, I studied all relevant articles published at www.spiegel.de, the main website of Spiegel’s German edition, as well as its English version at www.spiegel.de/international/, using the keywords “Greek crisis”, “financial crisis” and “Eurozone crisis”, between December 26, 2009 and November 24, 2014. The research period marks Spiegel’s position towards a period of the crisis marked by the governing of Greece from various political forces (social-democratic, technocratic and conservative), connected to the broader rationales of neoliberalism, attempting to implement the shock policies of austerity designed by the Troika, without challenging them. Their approach to the crisis was connected to its hegemonic rationales, understanding Greece and its people (the working classes particularly) as problematic.

The Greek national elections of January 25, 2015, with the election of the left-wing Syriza, with a program challenging austerity, marks a political shift in Greece and Europe and a challenge to the neoliberal-technocratic and conservative regimes ruling the EU and dictating austerity. A detailed research on Spiegel (as well as on other German media) would be interesting to see the ways that the new crisis discourses advanced by the Syriza-led government in Greece are mediated and represented by Spiegel. Nevertheless, time constrains (when this research was done [November 2014], national elections had not even been called for Greece [they were called on December 29, 2014]), put specific limits in the research of the ongoing and vast changing reality of the crisis. A daily follow-up of Spiegel’s coverage of the post-Greek-elections crisis’ discussion, suggests that despite moments of critique to austerity from the principles of democratic sovereignty (related to the Greek government’s authority to establish its own policies), as well as to austerity’s detrimental social and humanitarian effects, Spiegel remains close to the hegemonic, neoliberal ideas of the crisis and its managing, because they are related to German capital interests (presented in their “national” form). Research (Stavrakakis and Katsampekis 2014, 120) has also shown that Spiegel (along with other mainstream media in Greece, Europe, and elsewhere) has been highly negative of Syriza and its rise as the main agent of opposition in Greece.

Spiegel’s international version produced significantly less results, than Spiegel’s main website, in German language. Spiegel’s website in English included selected articles translated from German that could be found in the German site too. The research was then focused on the main website of Spiegel (www.spiegel.de) and the material analyzed was drawn from there. This search produced a few thousand results. The crisis coverage focuses on a variety of issues related to the events surrounding the economic crisis in Greece and in Europe. On one hand there are different article genres, such as opinion articles and daily reporting of key events; on the other hand, there are different themes relating to the crisis, such as the official decision making processes of the EU and national governments, the German parliament’s debate on Germany’s role in the EU’s crisis-policies, the oppositional voices and events (e.g. strikes and protests) surrounding the implementation of crisis-

policies, the effects of austerity to local populations, the relations between different EU nationalities in the crisis context, and the explanation and analysis of the crisis and the EU and national governments' dealing with the crisis. Although all topics are interrelated, the research focused mostly on articles explaining the crisis and austerity policies. The four-hundred-forty articles selected are news reports on the socio-politico-economic daily reality of the crisis in the EU through the years 2009 and 2014, and opinion articles, providing with explanations and forms of critique on what the crisis is, how the crisis in the EU affects Germany in particular, as well as assessing the German government's policies in this regard.

Articles were picked from moments when official decisions were being taken: when the German parliament discussed or voted its own share in the loans given to indebted countries like Greece, or during events that triggered anxiety to Germany's capital interests, such as the late 2011 call for a memorandum on austerity (which was later cancelled) by the time's Greek government, or the 2012 national elections of Greece, evaluations of the Greek economy by economic experts, financial institutions, and politicians, along with their broader socio-political projections. Of particular interest is the ways that austerity regimes are discussed, particularly in relation to their failure to solve the problems of the economy and the society, notably their failure to bring capital growth, employment and to reduce debt.

4. Analysis: Spiegel's Neoliberal Crisis-Representations

Of course, the article is highly critical of the so-called structural adjustment reforms pushed by the Troika in Greece, and their main objectives related to the development of competition and "growth". On a similar line of argument, the article also challenges the rather Orwellian idea of "help" advanced by the initiators of so-called "rescue plan" of Greece, with the loans given to the country in exchange of austerity. The loans only serve the paying back of Greece's debt—which in its greatest proportion, was lately (June 2015) found to be odious and unsustainable, by a debt investigation committee (the Debt Truth Committee) composed of international scholars and organized by the Greek Parliament (Truth Committee on the Greek Public Debt, 2015)—with nearly the loans' entire sum given to finance banks (Mouzakis and Malkoutsis 2015). Simultaneously, these loans and their sustaining of the debt, play a political role in pushing neoliberal reforms in the country, as well as a biopolitical one too, through the construction of stigmatized and guilty subjects to be reformed (Stavrakakis 2013, 317). Instead, critique is connected to a growing, broader discussion related to the possibility of de-growth, in a line of thought connected to the ideas of Mumford (1970), Kropotkin (1998) and Illich (2001), or as Harvey (2014, 296) puts it, "zero growth": "The economy converges on zero growth (though with room for uneven geographical developments) in a world in which the greatest possible development of both individual and collective human capacities and powers and the perpetual search for novelty prevail as social norms to displace the mania for perpetual compound growth." Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how the failure of austerity by its own standards, is discussed in *Der Spiegel*, and subsequently continuously supported. To return to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), the non-systemic crisis-narratives serve to further legitimize austerity and to dislocate its failure as a moral failure of people and a problem of failed local institutions.

Through the use of the conceptualization of neoliberalism as an ideologico-political and moral project, and understanding its late socio-political demands on societies, individuals and institutions for competition and efficiency, while maintaining a broader democratic, egalitarian and emancipatory point of departure of critique, I explore the ways that these themes develop in Spiegel's representation of the events related to the crisis and austerity in Greece and in Europe. The analysis is developed according to particular themes emerging by the study of the empirical material.

Springer (2012, 136) argues that there are four different interconnected dimensions and understandings of neoliberalism: a) an ideological and hegemonic project, related to a cultural politics indoctrinating society with neoliberal values (such as entrepreneurialism, competitiveness, the understanding of social affairs in economic terms) b) policy and political program, connected to privatization, deregulation, liberalization, depoliticization, and monetarism

c) state form, connected to the production of economically competitive states through specific institutional reforms d) governmentality, related to the reproduction of a neoliberal state of affairs through the self-governing of citizens' everyday lives according to the values and practices of neoliberalism.

Different aspects of the above categories are enduring themes found in Spiegel's crisis representations. The study of neoliberalism in the media has to do with the advance of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project in society by establishing the neoliberal rationalizations of social life and social problems as common-sense, while publicly legitimizing neoliberal policies (such as austerity regimes). Most importantly, the kind of crisis and austerity narratives studied here connected to the development of a neoliberal governmentality that constructs a self-implementation of austerity regimes and social competition, because such crisis and emergency narratives may also motivate citizens to understand, support and to implement the neoliberal imperatives, with citizens participating and internalizing the knowledge developed by the neoliberal understanding of the crisis, identifying with the banking institutions and the lenders who "want their money back" (and are cleansed from all responsibility on providing high risk loans to corrupt governments or to profit from high risk bonds and various financial derivatives based on risk possibilities (Offe and Whittal 2015) and surveilling the effective implementation of austerity reforms, by supporting them, voting for the politicians that will continue with the same policies (Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic party was re-elected to form government in 2013) arguing in favor of them, or by "pointing the finger" towards the alleged "guilty" ones.

The analysis looks at the ways the problems of the economic crisis in Greece and in Europe and the policy of austerity are discussed by Spiegel, by referring to the dimensions above foregrounded by Springer. I argue that moralistic and technocratic ideas prevail in Spiegel's crisis and austerity representations, foregrounding a non-systemic analysis of the crisis and a non-political (or, post/anti-democratic) understanding of its solution, which are key features of the neoliberal ideology (Amable 2010; Bennett 2014, 28). What I also want to further demonstrate is the celebration of austerity, advanced by Spiegel's representations. This may be connected to a broader neoliberal strategy of highlighting the new models of success (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006, 103) to inspire the public, which are the ones necessary for the reproduction of today's crisis-capitalism.

Although I could focus on the two main ideas defining neoliberal reasoning of social problems and policy making, the moralistic and the technocratic, one could see ruptures in this narrative, unfolded by the course of the events. The analysis is organized according to three main categories and several subcategories: a) austerity has no alternative, and the managing of the contingency unfolded while austerity produces further contradictions and crises instead of its proclaimed objectives b) the moral-individualistic understanding of the crisis and its alleged solution (austerity) as well as the disciplinary and conformist aspect of these moralistic ideas and the ways they are communicated c) the technocratic and post-democratic understanding of the crisis-management. The development of those categories is influenced by the theory developed above, but also by the study of the empirical material itself.

4.1. Austerity as a Solution without an Alternative

The hegemonic crisis discourse, as enunciated by political and economic elites in Europe and elsewhere and amplified by mass media, emphatically argues that there is no alternative to austerity policies (Blyth 2013, 171). This claim is based on technocratic-economistic rationales and calculations, having particular political objectives related to the paying back of public debt, and specific reforms (such as deregulation of labor and social rights, the raising of taxes, and privatization as well as less public intervention on trade and other economic activities) that will lead to capital growth, which in turn will supposedly benefit all society. Spiegel further affirms the no-alternative doctrine by a) not questioning it adequately b) discrediting the proposed alternatives, and most importantly c) by reproducing the governmental

and experts' rationales as well as the uncritical coverage of the policy-related events concerning the given policies. The latter point (c) seems to be the most prevailing activity that publicly establishes the objectivity, reason and rightness of austerity regimes. To use an example:

30/12/14 Television address: Samaras promises Greeks return to the financial markets. The country will need no new assistance and will be able to meet its financial requirements through the financial markets again—A courageous prediction. The country will "return to the markets' return next year and take the road back to a" normal country, "Samaras announced. Greece will not "demand for new loans and new bailout agreements". Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras had already made a similar statement on Sunday. Greece has received in aid the amount of 240 billion euros and private creditors also issued Athens more than a 100 billion euro debt. The ongoing second support program ends in mid-2014, but many experts believe that Greece would need further support from the EU and IMF. Due to the poor economic situation, the country is not expected to survive despite the joined efforts with the previously approved aid credits [...] Although Chancellor Angela Merkel had certified the primary surplus as being the "first fruits" (of recovery) when visiting her counterparts in November, it is questionable whether the confidence in Greece in the markets in the coming year can be fully made again. In January, the Troika will be traveling again to check Athens. It must still determine whether there is a shortfall in the Greek budget for the years 2015 to 2018 and what this would be.

The above excerpt is part of a report describing in objective terms the course of the "rescue" program and Greece's recovery at the time it was published in Spiegel. The broader "loans in return for austerity" program is outlined and discussed according to expert and official reports and estimations. The vast majority of Spiegel's reporting on the crisis occurs in such terms. No critical or alternative frames emerge, asking important questions on the debt its creation and its viability, on the socio-political implications of cuts. These issues, particularly the humanitarian sides of the crisis (and not its political effects on democracy) are reported on their own, and disconnected from the broader rationales of the so-called bailout program of Greece. The understanding of the crisis, for the informed members of the German-speaking public, should therefore occur in such terms, through the language of conservative politicians and unelected, neoliberal technocrats from the financial "institutions" and "industries".

4.1.1. Encountering the Failure of Austerity and Managing Contingency

The coverage of the crisis however, occurs in a 'slippery' ground, where the density of the crisis-related-events unfolds a great deal of contingency in the politics, the estimations and the meanings connected to the crisis. The contingency that the crisis unfolds in the socio-political context of Greece and Europe often challenges the plausibility and stability of the hegemonic crisis-narratives. By looking at Spiegel's crisis-coverage retrospectively, one finds controversial and fragmented information related to austerity's performance, as it develops in time: recovery is seen to emerge, but is quickly lost in recession and debt accumulation. For example:

01/10/2012 Budget: Greece's debt reached record levels

Despite the harsh austerity programs of the Greek debt continues to rise. Next year, the total debt is expected to reach 179 percent—more than before the bond swap in the spring.

06/12/2012 Turning Point? Light Seen at End of Euro-Crisis Tunnel—SPIEGEL Online International

The worst of the euro crisis has passed, says European Commissioner Olli Rehn, who points to the common currency area's falling budget deficits in an interview on Thursday. Greek Prime Minister Samaras is also optimistic, saying that his country is now on the right track.

19/05/2014 Depression: number of bankruptcies increases in many European countries

Europe is presented in two parts: According to the credit reference agency Credit reform increasing in many Western European countries the number of bankruptcies. Some States recorded in 2013, however, noticeably fewer bankruptcies -. Including the Federal Republic

23/05/2014 Signs of recovery: ratings of Greece and Spain are improving

Greek and Spanish government bonds are regarded since the beginning of the euro crisis as junk papers. But according to rating agencies, the situation of the countries has improved significantly. The credit ratings go up.

22/07/2014 Record status: debt in euro countries rises to nearly 94 percent

This record is a memorable: the mountain of debt in the countries of the euro zone rose to 93.9 percent in the first quarter. In the EU as a whole, the public debt rose to 88 per cent.

Numbers seem to be the ground of the technocratic rationales, and the reasons for public hope. The social effects of austerity often appear as externalities, dramatic, yet inevitable calamities of necessary “tough decisions”. In a report published the same date with an article announcing the economic recovery of Portugal—in numbers, Spiegel also presents “the misery of Portugal”:

17/05/2014 After the Euro bailout: Portugal risky freedom

Portugal returns to the financial markets, thus shrinking the euro crisis to crisis in Greece. The government in Lisbon has achieved much—but the risk of relapse is still large.

17/05/2014 Portugal's social crisis: Millions in misery

Portugal leaves the euro bailout fund, but the citizens pay a high price. Harsh austerity programs have destroyed the middle class, shredded social networks. 2.5 million people live on the edge of poverty. A tour of Lisbon.

The failure of austerity to produce capital growth, reduce debt, attract investments, lower unemployment, make countries more competitive, among other capitalist imaginaries of “growth” and social change, is evident as it brings the complete opposite results. Growth itself is presented unquestioned, as a fact, or a key to the solution of the world’s problems. Endless compound growth however is impossible to be sustained, runs into new contradictions and produces more crises and risks than it supposedly proclaims to be solving (Harvey 2014, 222). The thirty-five years of continuous growth for China have resulted in a degraded natural environment, and brought more exploitation to the Chinese working classes. Local and transnational capital elites are the only ones benefiting from this pursuit of endless growth, which is only about accumulating more surplus value and profit, irrespectively of social, political and environmental consequences, while sustaining an alienating lifestyle of infinitely accelerated production and consumption rates (Fromm 1995, 67). Nevertheless, austerity also fails at meeting its numeric goals, due to a number of contradictions rising from its implementation. Moreover, the connection of austerity regimes to a “bettering of society” needs to be loudly dismissed as propaganda. Austerity needs to be viewed as a process of primitive accumulation (Marx 1976), where wealth is distributed from society’s bottom to society’s top (Harvey 2005). In that sense, austerity is successful indeed.

Austerity is occasionally questioned, particularly under the influence of various events, such as citizens’ concerns on the allocation of public funds to a plan that is failing, or political struggles in the crisis-ridden countries. Critical articles, challenging the mainstream economic policies of the EU, also occasionally appear in Spiegel:

But now, a year later, the actors need to rethink. It cannot be that the more resilient Euro-States should be liable to the indebted countries. Europe's politicians, especially from Germany, have to include the word "debt restructuring" back in their vocabulary. Higher emergency loans from the core Euro-countries' voters and taxpayers funds, cannot be expected. No-one reasonably informed, can continue to indulge in the belief that the billions that have been lent to the Greeks and Irish will ever fully repaid. Both countries,

perhaps even Portugal, need a haircut, to recover in the foreseeable future of the setbacks of the banking and debt crisis. (Greece, Ireland and Co.: Why there must be an end to the billions' Help, 10/3/2011)

Such positions however, are seldom repeated, and are caught within the enduring catastrophology of the crisis (Mylonas 2012, 659). The insistence in tying the lower and the working class interests to the Eurozone masks the unequal nature of the Eurozone and the core capital interests benefiting from it. The relative affluent situation of the German labor market in the crisis-context, due to the strengthening of the German politico-economic position due to the very crisis of Europe, further performs its functionalist role in dividing the European working classes, subordinating them to capital's interests. That unless austerity is maintained and subsequently, the continuing of loaning the indebted countries, the consequences will be even worse for the (German) "taxpayer". Furthermore, in an absence of a critique of capital, financial one in particular, critique cannot produce a plausible alternative political strategy to austerity that would make public sense in practical terms, as Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) might argue. In his critique (and rejection of) austerity, Blyth (2013, 53) stresses the role of the deregulated banking system: "Just as we saw in the US case, the crisis in Europe has almost nothing to do with states and everything to do with markets. It is a private-sector crisis that has once again become a state responsibility. It has almost nothing to do with too much state spending and almost everything to do with the incentives facing banks when the euro, a financial doomsday-machine the Europeans built for themselves, was introduced."

22/09/2012 SPD calculation: Greece debt cut would cost taxpayers eight billion euros

A new haircut in Greece would be expensive for Germany—as expensive as the SPD finance expert Carsten Schneider has calculated it to be. He estimates that the German taxpayers would have to contribute with more than eight billion euros.

10/02/2012 Bankruptcy: What would a Greek bankruptcy cost to every German Citizen?

The euro zone finance ministers are not satisfied with the Athenians' Savings Plan, while the always open debate on national bankruptcy continues. How much would a Greek bankruptcy cost each individual German?

26/11/2012 Meeting of Finance: Europe's citizens have to pay for Greece

IMF and ECB demand a radical haircut for Greece. But who should bear the costs? Most creditors have long protected against potential losses—will end up paying the citizens of the eurozone.

06/11/2011 Government crisis in Athens: The Greeks must bleed

The austerity is hard, so that the Greeks will pay for failures of the past, because they would not listen to what is wrong with their country. Now there is perplexity, and no political camp offers a way out of the problem—while the crisis makes people truly ill.

Assuming a crude "taxpayers" perspective, Spiegel expresses frequent concerns over Germany's role in the loaning (and thus the further indebtedment) of Greece and other crisis-struck EU countries with public funds. Nevertheless, the particular policy that is grounded on austerity is not challenged as such. Hall (2011, 715) argued that neoliberal discourses endorse the character of the "taxpayer", which is the flip side of the "customer", instead of the citizen, to further advance an economic perspective on politics, related to cost-benefit analyses that return to the money-abstraction as the measure of everything. Austerity is not meant only for the "villains" of the European periphery, but for all Europe, as the austerity rationales are central to all policy formations, on a national and on a EU basis (Douzinas 2013; Blyth 2013, 51). The claim of (some) of Europe's taxpayers (the citizens of Greece are also taxpayers, but are exempted from this narrative due to their supposed corrupt character) is also a political tool of pressure against the resistances towards austerity, as well as an expression of indignation that leads to spite against people and countries (Diken 2009, 42; Mylonas 2012, 665) other than against anti-democratic and anti-social policies, like austerity. It is also to connect the cultivation of public spite as an expression of the neoliberal governmentality and its regressive character. Citizens are invited to surveil austerity regimes themselves through

media “revelations”, and to control the activities of those accused and subjected to reform. Public spite among the lower classes is also an indication of the further activation of competition in biopolitical terms, express in all spheres of life because the economy is connected to all aspects of life, trespassing national and private borders (Lazzarato 2011, 101). The scrutiny of Greece and its inner realities from economic perspectives (connected to revelations of fraud and corruption), and the public mockery of its citizens is an exercise of biopower, activated by the affects unleashed by continuous, persisting and repetitive media representations.

4.2. The Moralistic Construction of the Crisis and Austerity: the Disciplinary Role of Austerity

Moral evaluation argues Fairclough (2003, 98), is one way of producing discursive legitimacy to particular issues (e.g. political decisions) by referring to specific value systems, their imperatives and authority. The values, relating to the ideological premises of austerity are based on an idea of market justice, where the guilty ones should pay. This kind of “justice-call” is a theme constantly repeated across the “liberal” media in Europe from 2010 and onwards, contextualized in different forms and in relation to a variety of events:

05/05/2010 Opinion: Whether Oil Slick or Financial Crisis, Those Who Cause Catastrophes Should Pay

What do the oil slick in the Gulf of Mexico and the Greek crisis have in common? Both are man-made disasters. But while BP plans to shoulder the costs of the catastrophe it has caused, the financial wizards behind the euro crisis are not being held to account.

A rhetorical analogy is created above, between two completely different examples of disasters, to stress an argument moralizing austerity. The economic crisis is metaphorically presented as destruction caused by the work of particular people. Oddly enough, a multinational oil corporation and the destruction it caused due to the trespassing of environmental laws or the lack of adequate environmental control legislation for corporate activity (Klein 2014, 126), is equated to (the supposed functions of) a state and its people, disregarding the core-periphery power relations connected to Greece’s dependency in debt (among other issues entailed in the development of the so-called Greek crisis). Metaphors, as Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, 94) suggest, produce a practical form of reasoning, demonstrating the authors’ conceptualization of problems and solutions. The moral side of neoliberalism advances in texts like the one above, where individual agents should behave responsibly according to the rules of the economy (Amable 2010, 13). There is therefore no questioning of the economic system, which is supposed to be a “neutral” mechanism allocating scarce resources and allowing individuals to pursue their best interests (Amable 2010, 12). Austerity has a disciplinary purpose, while the crisis as such is compared to any other human-made catastrophes. Simultaneously, the abstraction of money and the imposition of monetary penalties (through fines or budget cuts) are presented as the solution to both problems. The use of the money abstraction however, to represent complex forms of realities, such as the cost and solution estimations described above is insufficient and misleading, because money as the universal measurement of values is reductive to the complexity of natural, social and political processes surrounding its proliferation and meaning (Harvey 2014, 27). Money cannot solve environmental catastrophes, particularly in a context where even more “market freedom” from regulation, accountability and subsequently, fines, is promoted globally through agreements like TTIP (Hilary 2014).

4.2.1 Why Failure? “It is Their Own Fault—‘They Can’t Reform’”

Despite constant failures of all official prognostics on “recovery”, Spiegel, like the bailout program’s zealots, is keen in highlighting the numeric (proclaimed) successes of austerity, even though they are soon falsified since Greece is proclaimed to be in the edge of “collapse” eve-

ry now and then. This kind of controversy is seldom addressed. Instead, the structural and cultural problems of Greece are monotonously repeated, with the use of scandal cases that verify the exceptional construction of Greece. The “unmodern and corrupt” mythological construction of Greece resolves the tension rising in the failures of austerity to produce economic recovery. Austerity regimes thus maintain their credibility, as the right and sole options for “success”.

13/12/2011 Greece: IMF criticized snail's pace at reform

The reform process in Greece is stagnating. The government in Athens have changed the business practices of the country not fundamentally criticized the International Monetary Fund. Particularly in the fight against tax evasion there was little progress.

08/12/2011 New study: OECD holds for Greece completely incapable of reform

Officials who did not speak to each other, spending plans at will, lack of databases—two years after the start of the Greek crisis certifies the OECD the government apparatus complete failure. According to the OECD lacks any form of control, the experts are now pushing a “big-bang reform.”

The failure of austerity regimes is attributed to the inadequate implementation of the “reforms”. Whole processes, related to resistances and the lived experiences of people—who cannot accept their sudden and forced redundancy (Sennett 2006, 96)—are abstracted by the “neutral” technocratic, economistic language of elites, adopted by *Der Spiegel*. The iteration of IMF or other technocratic reports is done uncritically, legitimizing and amplifying their discourse, under the veil of the “science” they perform in their social engineering experiments in Greece and elsewhere. Fascinating nominalizations and metaphors (a “big bang” reform) are meant to obscure and spectacularize the brute reality of radical austerity and states of exception imposed in the countries quarantined by the Troika.

Internal problems of Greece are exaggerated and stressed beyond their limits and realities, to rationalize the failure of austerity. Just like the crisis itself, the failure of austerity has to do with internal institutional and cultural problems. Nepotism, corruption, idle national characters, riots and strikes, “inefficient” public sectors, historical burdens of failed modernities are the main features rationalizing the failure of austerity, placing it in the burdens of those suffering from it, for resisting it and not embracing it. This form of social autism that wants the victim to be responsible of its own suffering is characteristic of bourgeois hypocrisy and the crude neoliberal ignorance and narrow-mindedness advancing today, negating history, unequal power structures and monopolies, or globalization and its interconnectivity. It is also a typical feature of colonial reasoning, where responsibility over the destruction of countries, peoples and cultures is not assumed by the colonizers but instead blamed on the colonized (de B'éri and Louw 2011, 337).

04/03/2010 Euro crisis: "The Greeks have to suffer"

The money came with the accession to the European Economic Community since Greece was able to live on credit, says the writer Petros Markaris, who talked to SPIEGEL ONLINE about the mentality of his countrymen and the difficult relationship with Germany.

07/06/2012 Interview with Greek Writer Nikos Dimou: 'We Like to Live Beyond Our Means' SPIEGEL Online International

In a SPIEGEL interview, Greek writer Nikos Dimou analyses the state of his country's psyche, describing the “deep fears that torment the Greek soul.” He blames Greek politicians for the current crisis but insists the EU and Germany only have themselves to blame for the resentment that many Greeks feel.

On an intertextual level (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, 85) *der Spiegel* refers to voices that verify its own moral, individualistic and cultural assumptions. Greek intellectuals Orientalizing their own country for not being “modern enough” (Baysha, 2014, 56) are quoted to legitimize the representation of a “Greek exceptionalism”, in favor of austerity (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, 94), while critical authors from Greece remain unmentioned. Such narratives maintain the hegemonically constructed racio-cultural distance between the citizens of

the center and the periphery, dividing the working classes in nationalist and racio-culturalist terms.

Scandals, in the ways that tabloids and infotainment genres deploy, are often used by *Der Spiegel* to further legitimize the aforementioned exceptionalist claims. Isolated cases of corruption are amplified to produce generalizations maintaining the culturalist mythologies of the crisis:

06/06/2011 Chaotic management: Greece has over dead pensioners money

Looking for ways to save the Greek authorities encounter literally skeletons in the closet: The state pays for 4500 retired people a total of 16 million euros a year—even though the receivers are long dead. Now, the Labor Department checks the centenarians.

The present analysis does not deny corruption in the Greek governing system. Blyth (2013, 63; Douzinas 2013) also stress that the public over-borrowing of funds was an important factor for Greece's indebtedment, as well as the state's unwillingness to tax high capital in particular. Nevertheless, corruption is one reason for Greece's indebtedment. The second reason is the destruction of Greece's production base after its entry to the Eurozone and the loss of its competitive advantages by the EU's core. Greece's indebtedment substituted the loss of productivity and served the boost of consumption of imported goods, particularly from Germany. The third reason for Greece's indebtedment is the more directly systemic one, having to do with the financialization of the economy and the reckless provision of high-risk credit loans by major banks, without accepting any loss for such risks taken. What I criticize in *Spiegel* is the operationalization (Fairclough and Fairclough 2013, 84) of the idea of corruption and its strategic use to legitimize an exceptionalist discourse on Greece and the Greek society, addressing corruption in culturalist characteristics and not in systemic ones. The argument is that corruption is a universal phenomenon related to the infiltration of private interests with political power. Likewise, international politico-economic interests tight to the corruption of the Greek state are also related to German capital.

The sums of money mentioned in *Der Spiegel*'s report above are high, but they are not the cause of the Greek budget deficit. The loss of competitive advantages of the country after its entry to the Eurozone (Offe and Whittal 2015), the low taxation of the high capital are the key reasons of the Greek budget deficit, briefly covered by excessive loaning, encouraged by the deregulated global financial system, and the political elites in Greece and elsewhere. The corrupt political class of Conservatives and Social-Democrats ruling for forty years, indebting the country and placing it in the Eurozone without a referendum, was and still is supported and tolerated by the EU, because the remaining of Greece in Europe's periphery secures the competitive advantages of the oligopolistic capital of the EU's core and provides lavish business opportunities in Greece for further exploitation of its labor and resources. Simultaneously, less discussed scandals, concerning colossal German corporations like Siemens and their bribing of Greek politicians to obtain lavish deals on major Greek public works, trespassing so-called transparency and fair competition rules, prove both the German interests in sustaining Greece in a peripheral position through a burgeoning debt, for its further exploitation, as well as the fact that oligopolies do not abide to competition laws, or use any force at their disposal to maintain their favorable status.

It is important to understand corruption not as an inherently "Greek" phenomenon. We should instead understand corruption as an intrinsic element to bureaucracy and most importantly as an intrinsic element of power inequalities and an outcome of pursuing of private interests by all means. Crouch (2013, 24) describes the framework of actually existing neoliberalism, as one where "corporate lobbying of governments and the deployment of corporate and other private wealth in politics today, usually accompanies introduction of the neoliberal agenda". In response to the indiscriminate categorization of all Greeks as corrupt, Douzinas (2013, 58) notes that "we should distinguish between the elites and the professional middle class who could benefit from tax evasion and avoidance and public and private employees who are taxed at source". The pathologization of Greece and its people as sick

from corruption thus benefits the local and global elites. Local elites were also fast to agree to the particular allegations, and to demonstrate their racism towards society's poor. To conclude, the repetition of lay-corruption cases is a propagandistic strategy to discredit and demoralize the opponents, by infiltrating sentiments of guilt in order to self-discipline themselves to the moral and material redemption strategies of austerity regimes. On a further level, this process curbs the questioning of austerity and the development of solidarities through identification processes in terms of common class, social conditions and humanity.

4.2.2. The Panegyric Frame: Celebrating Austerity

The particular frame of representation addressed here is important for the development of public consent on austerity, its application and development, its rationales and the agents intellectually and politically responsible for its advance. Most importantly, the positive construction of austerity is susceptible to the propagandistic effect of spreading public enthusiasm for austerity, in order to strengthen its position as something positive to the Germans primarily, but also to their constructed opponents, the malfunctioning Greek citizens. The hype over austerity also appears as a positive new from the symbolic battle field of the crisis, where "our" (national) efforts in (supposedly) "helping" and reforming Others, and simultaneously securing our money (as well as our capital interests) is developing well. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, 164) argue that the "new spirit of capitalism" developing from the 1970's and the 1990's across the world, related to the aforementioned neoliberal "assemblage", is rhetorically manifested by the developing of a) inspiring themes on what is exciting while dealing with the new developments of capitalism (such as the financialization of the economy), b) the security entailed in such businesses and policies, c) the fairness of such developments. All of these three features are evident in the constructions of austerity, given that the support of these policies are made to be inspiring, exciting and spectacular, and they are also good for "us" Germans by securing "our" interests (as national or "European" ones—masking their bourgeois class bias), and simultaneously fair too, because they affirm the Calvinist-bourgeois morals of hard work and private property (Fromm 2007).

An additional aspect that should be stressed is that such an enthusiastic representation of austerity has the propagandistic role in the sustaining of support to the German government's policies and constructs the neoliberal subjectivity for the working class required by the neoliberal reforms, not just in Greece but everywhere. In their classic study, Chomsky and Herman (1988, 2) argue that the propagandistic role of mass media is based upon their reliance to government and expert sources of information, their basis of income upon advertising, the slandering of opponents, and anti-communism. Again, all these features prevail in Spiegel (like in all mass media), with the reliance to experts and established sources of information being the most pertinent, along with its broader anti-leftist or anti-oppositional approach, and the slandering of left leaders, movements and activities.

7/11/2013 Austerity: OECD praises "spectacular turnaround" in Greece. Through hard cuts Greece is heading for a budget surplus. There are now of the industrialized countries OECD Organization high praise. Its president speaks of "the most impressive program that I have ever seen."

01/08/2012 Greece: government parties decide for a billions austerity package

For weeks, was negotiated, the agreement is now here: The ruling coalition parties in Greece have the new 11.5 billion euro austerity program decided heavy. Apparently Socialist Party leader Venizelos has waived a claim.

11/07/2011 Privatization: Greece brings trust to the start

The Greeks advance with a privatizations' program. The debt country has established an authority to state ownership to make quick money. The conditions are good: One of the top sellers is an investment banker.

29/06/2011 Austerity approved: Europe cheers, Greece revolts

The EU and IMF's relief is great: After the Greek Parliament passed the austerity program, the state bankruptcy is fading—but in Athens, the violence escalates. Ministry of Finance on fire, a luxury hotel was evacuated.

Such headlines show the positive, and often enthusiastic rhetorical presentation of austerity, as decided, voted by EU and national governments and implemented in Greece. Such positive claims are legitimized by their rationalization (Fairclough 2003, 98) from expert evaluations and opinions (e.g. OECD, IMF). Privatizations of public property, cuts in public services, wages and benefits, the closing down of sectors, the sacking of employees and the coming into power of conservative and technocratic governments are presented as successes in a rather celebratory tone, meant to provide relief to Germany and the “markets”:

10/11/2011 Greece's new government: A man shows edge

It took long agonizing days until the two major Greek parties agree on their interim Prime Minister Lucas Papademos. But the marathon of negotiations also shows the strength of 64 years: He has kept socialists and conservatives in their place.

17/06/2012 Conservatives win in Greece: A little bit of hope

The Conservatives won the election in Greece—the country of permanent crisis gives only a brief respite. The nation is deeply divided, the coalition negotiations start in difficult conditions. New Chaos threatens when the Greeks finally pull together.

Conservative and technocratic politicians (the case of the unelected PM, Lucas Papademos) are positively presented as the “correct” governing agents—despite popular protests or the lack of citizens’ approval of technocratic governments established in Greece and in Italy in 2011 and 2012—in order to continue with the “program” of austerity. Details or critique on the terms of privatization of public property, which is devaluated in times of crisis, is also avoided.

22/07/2011 After an extraordinary summit: Greeks’ Saver builds new Euro-Land

The clearance appears to have succeeded. The markets clam down after the adoption of new aid for Greece. But the summit decisions are likely to profoundly change Europe. Especially rich countries such as Germany could in future be regularly asked to pay.

09/08/2011 Immigrants from southern Europe: at the economic miracle!

Germany is not sexy—but it is rich. Many young southern Europeans want to escape the crisis in their homeland and set a future in the Federal Republic. But the hurdles are high: the only ones welcome, are those complying with the German ideals.

Nationalist narcissism as well as banal nationalist frames also appear within the euphoric representational style of austerity, celebrating Germany as a “savior” (sic) of Greece and the Eurozone, while emphasizing on Germany’s wealth in a classless manner, as if all wealth of the country is equally shared and no class divisions or exploitation exist in this core capitalist nation-state. The “German ideals” implied to “those welcome in the Federal republic”, seem to concern productivity, competitiveness, efficiency, mobility, labor discipline and consumerism, the values of the “entrepreneurial subject” (Dardot and Laval 2013, 288). The brain draining of the European South, and the exploitation of a cognitive proletariat for which Germany spent nothing for its education and training, is also presented as an achievement under constrain, as these subjects need to self-discipline themselves, abide and integrate to the German ordo-liberal values.

On a similar style, the technocrats of the Troika are also celebrated as allies to Germany’s cause:

04/10/2012 Troika in Athens: Greece trembles before these three men

Greece desperately needs more aid money—but only if the troika of the EU, ECB and IMF agrees, the billions flow. Who is the Troika really? Two of their members are from Germany, but a Dane is the voice of it.

The excerpt above refers to the three white, middle aged, male yuppies performing the so-called Troika (nowadays [May 2015] referred to as “the Institutions”—sic) in Greece. This yuppie-lot, executing what professor David Graeber (2013) might describe as “useless jobs”,

and incarnating one aspect of the polyvalent form of alienation triggered by capitalism today (Harvey 2014, 264), is the managerial class representing post-democratic institutions—often described as zombie institutions by critics and social movements across the globe, which strengthen their dictates and political position through the crisis, turning its contradictions to capital's favor. Nevertheless, they are enthusiastically presented to Spiegel's audience in a celebrity fashion.

4.3 The Technocratic and Post-Democratic Understanding of the Crisis-Management

The presentation of yuppies as celebrity icons (also referred to as “the men in black”—connoting the famous Hollywood blockbuster—in another article (July 25, 2012) making the same argument of Greeks supposedly fearing the Troikans) can be understood as part of a broader post-democratic discourse advancing in the crisis. Crouch (2004, 4) argued that the post-democratic shift can be identified by the ceding of power to business lobbies, the depoliticisation of political discussion with the dominance of individualist and consumerist frames with a negation of left-right distinctions and the understanding of politics in terms of effective management. All these result in the degradation of popular sovereignty, participation in decision making and control, as well as in the further compromise of social demands for justice and wealth redistribution.

28/01/2012 Plan for Financial Control: Greece struggles against EU watchdog
Greece needs more money, and the European partner slowly losing patience. The federal government is now proposing that an EU budget commissioner controlled Athens budget. But the government of the heavily indebted country wants to know nothing.

Spiegel advances a support towards the further centralization of the EU's political decision making processes that dispossess national states from their potential in developing sovereign policy-making. Simplistic formulations such as the statement “Greece needs more aid money” are articulated to legitimize the manifested authority of Germany and the Troika to intervene to the Greek affairs and even to “lose patience” due to the money it risks. The colloquial narrative is mythopoietic (Fairclough 2003, 99), as through the development of a “moral tale”, it incarnates in solid terms the abstract entities of two nation states, appearing in a dynamic relation of (business?) partners, implying that certain things may happen if the right things do not occur, meaning the austerity regimes to be implemented “faster”. “Aid” is a form of Orwellian newspeak, to cover the degradation of life and social exclusion caused by austerity as unavoidable externalities, while covering the high risk financial strategies of the deregulated international banking system, which based their post 1970's growth on excessive loaning (Harvey 2005, 2010).

The crisis-context appears as an opportunity to legitimize the development of a more centralized EU authority with weaker national sovereign states and citizenries, in the pre-text of corruption or lack of effectiveness (to implement reforms):

03/02/2010 strict austerity to 2012: EU to take control of Greece's finances
Greece is facing bankruptcy—and Europe fears about the euro. The Brussels Commission therefore now resorts to drastic measures: it represents the Greek budget under strict EU control. By 2012, the debt-ridden southern state must reduce its debt by 75 per cent.

16/12/2010 Euro-stabilization: EU agrees on permanent crisis mechanism
The EU Heads of State and Government decided a permanent crisis mechanism for the euro stabilization. They agreed Diplomats on the amendment of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Federal Government welcomed the summit outcome.

A high level of abstraction prevails in the descriptions of technocratic governance and institutions of financial capitalism, such as “rating agencies” and their political role in the production and the instrumentalization of the crisis. Paradoxically, the so-called (financial) “markets” obtain a supernatural character that needs to be “calmed down” through loans of public money to countries to pay private banks. The one-dimensionality dogmatism of mainstream

economics demonstrates an anti-modernist and anti-enlightenment face, mystifying economic and political power, while excluding critique. The neutralized realm of austerity, markets and effective crisis-governance is further normalized and the prevailing crisis-beliefs and new policy making tools (crisis-mechanisms) are institutionalized (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012, 80).

30/04/2010 Poor Greece's ratings: "If the bailout occurs, the markets will calm down"

Rating agencies have been criticized because their reviews exacerbate Europe's debt crisis. Brian Coulton, is an expert on Greece working at Fitch. In a SPIEGEL ONLINE interview, he explains the reasons for the devaluation of the country—and why he believes in an early relaxation.

The reliance on experts is established on the theme connected to the incapability and the lack of honesty from the side of local governments and people. Financial agencies and technocrats are supposedly not connected to interests and obey only the objective truth of numbers and economic manuals. Mainstream economics are abstracted from their political history and the power relations they emerge from.

“Revelations” proving the supposed abysmal corruption of Greece come in spectacular forms too; while popular resistances are discredited as irrational and irresponsible, “losers” (Mylonas 2015), selected voices of “resistance” are selected to align to Der Spiegel’s reforms’ repertoires. In the excerpt below, a doctor “breaks his silence” on the oppressive situation of corruption:

30/06/2011 Corruption in Greece: A doctor breaks his silence

"Fakelaki" is the phenomenon that has become synonymous in Germany for the ailing Greek State: policemen, teachers, doctors can be lubricated and silent about it. One has the courage to talk about the corrupt system.

In Spiegel, the signifiers denoting struggle assume a conformist, authoritarian stance, as the ones “fighting” (for a good cause) seem to be key agents of the old, bourgeois, conservative establishment of the EU’s governing elites, like Merkel, Schäuble, the Troika, and occasionally, the Greek state, when it obediently follows the “reforms program”. An interesting (neoliberal) discursive construction worth stressing is that related to the colonization of signifiers denoting struggle and resistance (e.g. “fight against the crisis”). Such signifiers are articulated under the agency of key establishment figures, such as the conservative German finance minister, Schäuble:

08/12/2010 Finance Minister Schäuble: The Euro-Fighter

The euro crisis is now his stage [...] The finance minister fights for the European single currency—even with unpopular visions.

15/04/2011 Fight against permanent crisis: Greece needs to save even harder

The first rescue package was only the beginning. Now the Greeks have to adjust again to "radical changes", announced Prime Minister Papandreou. To get the massive debt under control institutions are to be closed and key state enterprises to be privatized.

Finally, the post-democratic governance of Greece, something to expend to the rest of Europe too (according to the German finance minister Schäuble below) in the exceptional context of the supposed crisis emergency, allowing for the overcoming of its national sovereignty, is further emphasized by Spiegel’s “neutral” style of news reporting:

30/03/2010 Financial Crisis: Schäuble calls for economic government for Europe

Finance Minister Schäuble advertises urgently for a closer integration of Europe. In light of the financial crisis, he called for a common economic government. In the federal government lacks commitment to Europe.

5. Conclusions: “We can't really apologize for the ability of our industries to compete internationally”

The quotation above belongs to a Deutsche Bank chief economist, Thomas, Meyer, mentioned in an interview to Spiegel (March 25, 2010). The main crisis and austerity concern is competition: how to make citizens more competitive, while having their rights reduced, and at the same time, to produce the institutions that can enable the maintaining of oligopolistic capital's freedom to compete largely unchallenged on a global scale. Austerity strengthens this power by abolishing civic, labor and welfare rights as well as by offering new assets and resources of states and territories for commodification and exploitation, as capital's utopia of permanent growth cannot be sustained otherwise. Austerity is thus not only a bad policy-making formula, based only in the ideological beliefs of neoliberals as Blyth (2013) argues, but also a political tool to serve capital interests, as Harvey (2014) argues.

This study analyzed Der Spiegel's articles presenting the crisis and austerity in Europe, focusing on the Greek case. Deploying critical political economy literature and critical media studies literature, the article criticizes the neoliberal hegemony of the EU's crisis politics and foregrounds the role of progressivist or objectivist media such as Spiegel, in the reproduction of neoliberal ideas that expand far beyond the crisis, in order to produce the institutions, social relations, beliefs and subjectivities for a post-crisis configuration of capitalism. The reason for that has to do with the establishment of neoliberalism's mantras as common-sense after forty years of neoliberalism, and the powerful agents from the political and the business world, dogmatically iterating neoliberal capitalist values and most importantly, arguments that by now sound practical and plausible, to fragmented and consumerist publics that lack broader counter-hegemonic political visions and political agency. A further reason concerns the national perspective of the crisis, and the fear it causes, within the precarious social world of late capitalism, where the scope of uselessness (Sennett 2006) is continuously being broadened. The pressures of capital on the German working force, as Dörre (2014) showed are tremendous, so the scapegoats of the crisis (e.g. the South of Europe) serve the German elites well, as public attention is diverted and demands for redistribution avoided.

Thematic analysis was used to study a broad corpus of Spiegel's articles, by focusing on the main ideas unfolded in them. These ideas were critically presented in three interconnected analytical themes, including subcategories in them: a) the austerity as a no-alternative solution to the crisis theme, and the subsequent management of contingency rising in the development of austerity policies and their failure b) the moralistic frame, which is a key issue in austerity regimes and their discourses, in order to produce a new neoliberal governmentality connected to the competitive entrepreneurial subject c) the post-political rationalization of the permanent crisis politics of exception. These themes play an educational and a disciplinary role to their German-speaking audience, with the latter assuming a task of observing and policing through the media, the exceptionalized subjects constituting the Greek people, individualized and as a whole. The analysis demonstrates the biopower exercised by the class politics of Spiegel and other mainstream media, as well as their biopolitical role in developing the neoliberal neo-subject.

When compared to the crisis-frames of Bild-zeitung (Mylonas 2012), Spiegel offers a more politically correct argument, avoiding the manifestations of racial indignation and spite expressed by the right-wing tabloid. Nevertheless, Spiegel's crisis coverage lacks the critical premises that would allowed it to reach the heart of the EU's current problems and address the contradictions it runs into, other than avoiding them through their strategic exceptionalization. Spiegel offers a bourgeois approach to social events and social phenomena. Although the term “bourgeois” is not often used nowadays, I believe that critical research has to reintroduce it, in order to speak about class inequality and alienation again, without apologies to positivist and post-modernist repertoires. To establish what I mean by criticizing Spiegel as “bourgeois”, I will refer to Susan Buck-Morss' work (1989, 265) on Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project, to foreground the points of critique on bourgeois culture relevant to this study of Spiegel's representations. Bourgeois culture suppresses people's creativity from a young age and thus their potential in releasing new possibilities of meaning: “parroting back the

‘correct answer’, looking without touching, solving problems ‘in the head’, sitting passively, and learning to do without optical cues”. Mainstream media cannot offer the critical knowledge required for the empowerment of citizens to advance their rights against capital’s crisis-offense. On the contrary, the importance of critical information and consciousness is further marginalized by the representational strategies of mass media. One seeking interesting information on the crisis and related topics should therefore look for it elsewhere, in critical media, and in critical literature of the past and of today.

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