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**Disrupting the European Crisis: a Critical Political Economy of Contestation,
Subversion and Escape**

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**Disrupting the European Crisis: a Critical Political Economy of Contestation,
Subversion and Escape**

Abstract. Central to much of the critical political economy (CPE) literature is a declared focus on emancipation. Yet, rather than highlight sources and instances of activity that might result in emancipatory outcomes, much of the CPE literature focuses on relations of domination and the way in which these are sustained and (re)produced. In contrast, and drawing on ‘minoritarian’ strands of CPE, we argue that an emancipation-oriented approach needs to focus upon the ways in which processes of domination are contested, disrupted, and as a result remain incomplete. In doing so, we present an analysis of the European political and economic crisis that contrasts starkly with prevailing accounts. Whilst many observers have considered the European crisis in terms that signal the death knell of labour’s prolonged post-1970s defeat, the paper instead renders visible the ongoing disruptive effects of the European populace’s obstinate, subversive and creative capacity to escape those *attempts* to achieve domination and subjugation which existing accounts tend to identify.

Disrupting the European Crisis: a Critical Political Economy of Contestation, Subversion and Escape

“living labour [...] is an ineluctable movement which continually breaks the limits of domination and pushes forward the configurations of reality. One might object: where has this movement gone? For decades this creative force has not made an appearance. But this is not true. Really, only those who do not want to see are blind to it. To find this creative force we must consider the subterranean, clandestine life” (Negri 2009: 168).

Much has been written lately trying to identify the ‘critical’ in Critical Political Economy (CPE) (Shields et al.: 2011). Perhaps one of the main points of agreement – if there have been any – is that to be critical requires that we search for means of emancipation. Both Shields et al. (2011) and Worth (2011) agree that, ‘the notion of being critical is nothing if it does not have an emancipatory purpose at its heart’ (Shields et al. 2011: 172). If we understand CPE approaches to require a focus on emancipation, however, we need also to consider the process through which such emancipation can and does occur. As Ernst Mandel (1989) put it, ‘what is always decisive is the need to develop self-confidence, the abandonment of servility and resignation, the spirit of rebellion and contestation [...] precisely because, in the long run, all circumstances in which human beings are oppressed have to be overthrown’ (127). In recent decades, however, CPE has focused predominantly upon mechanisms of domination and subjugation, to the extent that challenges to, contestation of, and the capacity to disrupt patterns of domination have been largely rendered invisible or otherwise marginalised. Means

by which emancipatory goals might be furthered - and a radical change in the present might be achieved – have, as a result, become increasingly unclear. A survey of the CPE literature discussing the causes and consequences of the post-2007/8 global economic crisis sees most of these accounts largely informed by a focus upon domination. This means that primacy is given to the role of structured class (Martins 2011; Wisman 2013; Robinson 2010), gender (Roberts 2013) and/or racial (Reed and Chowkwanyun 2012) inequalities, in both *causing* the crisis, but more importantly, in turn being consolidated as a result *of* the crisis. In contrast, accounts which highlight contestation, disruption or particular challenges to the imposition of austerity, or the exacerbation of impoverishment, inequality, and precarity have been largely absent. Whilst a number of contributions have highlighted the emergence of new forms of social protest and mobilisation – most obviously in instances such as the *indignados* and Occupy movements – these have tended to be located within the political sociology, social movements and political participation literature (see, for instance, Langman 2013; Tejerina et al. 2013).

The aim of this article is twofold. First, to make explicit the core differences within the literature, between what we consider an approach to CPE that is oriented towards the study of domination, and one which focuses upon the ways in which attempts to secure domination are perpetually contested and disrupted. Whilst these alternative ways to do CPE have informed a range of contributions to the literature, their core differences have often gone unnoticed or underconceptualised, which we seek here to address¹. Second, in advancing the merits of a more disruption-oriented, ‘heterodox’, approach to critical political economy, the article presents an analysis of the recent European political and economic crisis², contrasting domination and disruption-focused accounts. The differences, the article shows, are stark, with the latter more analytically convincing, more able to inform nascent emancipatory strategies, and (therefore) more optimistic.

Alternative approaches to critical political economy: disruption versus domination

We do not want a theory of domination, we want a theory of struggle.

(Holloway 2012: 516)

The domination-oriented mainstream in CPE

In speaking of ‘domination-oriented’ approaches to CPE, we refer to many of the contributions to the literature with a Marxist heritage, and which follow one aspect of Marx’s work in conceptualising the way in which capitalist social relations of production are characterised by the domination and exploitation of labour by capital. This, we argue, works with a set of assumptions that foreclose an adequate analysis of the means by which relations of domination can be, and are, contested, disrupted, and rendered incomplete. These assumptions are set out below (and summarised in table 1).

Elite-orchestrated acts of domination. Much of the CPE literature - especially within, but not limited to, the neo-Gramscian strand - studies social struggle through a focus on elite-level activities (including the discourses, ideas, actions and associations, of elites), in an attempt to understand the strategies of domination being adopted, enacted and/or pursued at any one point in time (Sekler and Brand 2011). As a result, we typically witness a ‘top-down’ mode of analysis, in which the actions that come under most scrutiny are those of the political and socio-economic elites who purportedly act to construct and reproduce (hegemonic) relations of domination (Bieler and Morton 2006; Drainville 1994; Scherrer 1998). For instance, William Robinson has put considerable effort into uncovering the emergence and role of political and economic elites in constructing contemporary global capitalism (Robinson 2004, 2010). In doing so, he highlights the way in which, ‘[e]merging global elites and transnational capitalists set about dismantling the distinct models associated with national

corporate capitalism and constructing a new global ‘flexible’ regime of accumulation’ (Robinson 2011: 353). This elite focus is not, however, limited to those adopting a (neo-) Gramscian perspective, and indeed extends to those with a more explicit focus upon class struggle. In their extraordinarily historically-detailed analysis of global capitalism, for example, Panitch and Gindin (2013) chart the way in which key economic and political elites within (mainly) US-based multi-national corporations, and the US Treasury, Federal Reserve and successive presidential administrations, acted to produce an informal American empire. Thus, the US ‘imperial state continued to reflect pressures coming from domestic social forces, including *pressures to represent US capitalists’ interests* abroad’ and ‘*key actors inside the American state* struck the compromises and developed the common tactics to produce the kind of policy cohesion’ required for this imperial strategy (Panitch and Gindin 2013: 8, emphasis added).

Stable (reified) institutions of domination. Second, in studying political, social and economic institutions, much of the domination-oriented CPE literature understands those institutions in terms of their role in securing domination. This typically brings with it an assumption (sometimes implicit) that those institutions have been largely successful in achieving that end. As a result, acts which challenge or contest that domination tend only to be of interest when they show signs of being able to prompt fundamental change to, or reform of, those institutions. In contrast, commonplace, or ‘everyday’, acts of resistance appear as ephiphenomenal and outside of the field of interest.

This can be seen in much of the CPE’s treatment of the state, civil society, and economy. Thus, *the state* and other (for instance, supranational) forms of political authority are typically considered in terms of how patterns of domination are secured (Jessop 1990; van Apeldoorn and Horn 2007). For instance, Bonefeld discusses the way in which the ‘class character of the state [...] derives from the world market’, and the ‘neo-liberal principle that

the state must govern for the market ' (Bonefeld 2012: 51, emphasis added). In turn, Bonefeld claims, this means that the state must ensure the reproduction of capital-labour relations of domination: 'the state's purpose, which is intrinsic to its bourgeois character, is to 'govern over the labour force'' (Bonefeld 2010: 22). This is a view expressed in many of the contributions to CPE. Thus, whilst the formal possibility of 'strategic selectivity' – and the influence of subaltern actors – is typically acknowledged, the existence of unequal power relations nevertheless renders this possibility both marginal and oftentimes out of sight (Jessop 1990). In considering the contradictory relationship between the state and private property, for instance, David Harvey (2014) notes how the 'capitalist state must use its acquired monopoly over the means of violence to protect and preserve the individualised private property rights regime as articulated through freely functioning markets' (p.42). These are property rights, moreover, which in turn underpin a system of exchange that 'constitutes a monetary basis for the formation of capitalist class power' (p. 88). The state, therefore, is understood largely in terms of its role in constructing and/or consolidating relations of inequality and domination.

Similarly, *civil society* is understood as both the field within which the coercion and consent of the subaltern classes is engineered; and simultaneously the site at which any potential counter-hegemonic bloc might at some point emerge. As Bieling (2012) puts it, 'civil society represents an institutionalised discourse arena mostly backing the authority of the state by generating a certain degree of public consensus, but sometimes undermining given state authority as well' (p.180). In considering the possibility for counter-hegemony, the focus is mainly limited to those actors of the institutionalised left, such as parties or trade unions, that are commonly considered capable of mounting a sufficiently well-coordinated mobilisation by subaltern civil society actors – i.e. those with the potential to posit, and institute, a counter-hegemonic bloc (Georgi and Kannankulam 2012; Worth 2013). Importantly, actors

and actions outside of this privileged category of potentially counter-hegemonic social actors tend to be considered ‘unreal or unrealized and, hence, outside the political as such’ (Butler 2011). As a result, it is common for evaluations of civil society to lament a ‘failing substantial counter-hegemonic mobilization’ (Gill 1992: 191). This also extends to the more explicitly struggle-focused contributions to the literature. For instance, in discussing the anti-austerity protests witnessed since the onset of the global economic crisis, David McNally (2011) notes their impact on occasion in winning concessions, but also laments how ‘they were not able to stop the tidal wave of plant closings and layoffs that threw tens of millions out of work. And they did not manage to spark a mass movement to defend jobs and build workers’ control’ (p. 148). This, he claims, would ‘require mass anticapitalist organizations of a sort that simply do not exist today’ (p. 182). The emphasis remains on the articulation of a wider movement with the capacity to constitute itself as a counter-hegemonic bloc.

The *capitalist economy* is considered the site within which capital and labour are both produced and their dominant-subordinate relationship secured. Crises, in turn, tend to be understood as a (top-down) effect of the internal contradictions of strategies adopted by capital (such as over-accumulation), or the failure of state regulation to stabilize the accumulation process. Whilst crises have, in the past, been understood in terms of a labour-driven ‘profit squeeze’, the global economic crisis has been predominantly portrayed in terms of the pathologies of capital’s domination. For instance, David Harvey (2014) discusses the way in which capital’s drive for (and achievement of) the financialisation of the global economy, in search of profit, has simultaneously ‘*made capital itself* less secure, more volatile and more crisis-prone, because of the resultant tensions between production and realisation of social value’ (p. 179, emphasis added). Similarly, McNally (2011) highlights the role of financialisation (secured by capital), which itself rested upon the defeat of organised labour (by capital and supportive governments) – for instance, in the US case,

through the defeat of the air traffic controller's union – that produced a 'decade long credit explosion' and a (now burst) bubble economy that simply 'delayed the day of reckoning' which was to come in the form of a crisis due to occur as a result of (capital's) 'underlying problems of overaccumulation that had first manifested themselves in 1997' (p.41). Labour, in contrast, is considered dependent upon, and subordinate to, capital, posing a problem for capital more in terms of a resource than in terms of social struggle (see for example Harvey 2010: 58).

When the actions, activities, and resistance of workers *are* considered, moreover, it is (as with discussions of civil society) in terms of their ability to pose a counter-hegemonic potential – typically when they adopt the particular form of orchestrated, united, organised labour within trade unions. As Bieler (2011) puts it, social actors' ability to influence EU public policy requires 'a clear material basis rooted in the economy', which tends to refer to the mobilising capacity of 'trade unions, by representing workers within the production process' (pp. 168-9). The everyday activity and dissent of workers, in contrast, is largely obscured from view in much of this analysis.

The absence (or futility) of actually-existing resistance. Following on from (and as a consequence of) CPE's focus on the securing of domination, when this literature does consider resistance, much of the focus (as we have already seen) is placed upon largescale, 'visible' acts of resistance that purportedly contain the potential to challenge the equally largescale (reified) relations of domination that are typically conceptualised. As a result, CPE has a tendency for what Wendy Brown (1999) terms 'left melancholy' – i.e. the regret or sense of loss associated with an observed absence of activity that is (pre-)considered to be capable of success – not least because success itself appears so difficult to come by when considered in the terms expressed within much of the critical political economy literature. Thus, in evincing signs of left melancholy, scholars become 'attached more to a particular

political analysis or ideal – even to the failure of that ideal – than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present’ (Brown, 1999: 20). Left melancholy, we claim, is today widespread across the CPE literature. Forms of contestation that fail to fall within the range of those proclaimed to be potentially counter-hegemonic actions or actors, and thus considered capable of reversing relations of domination, are routinely dismissed as futile. Acts of resistance are commonly assumed to be either absent (because insubstantive), or without importance (due to their inability to replace or reform relations of domination). As Worth (2013) puts it, in discussing the ‘failure of the left’, contemporary attempts at resistance have been ‘vague in their arguments’, ‘considered unrealistic by those in power’, ‘need greater clarity for a counter-hegemonic project to succeed’, and require ‘greater cohesion [...] between different parts of society for it to gain popular appeal’ (Worth 2013: 70-1). Many adopting an explicitly class struggle-based account come to similar conclusions (perhaps surprisingly). Thus, in observing the defeat of ‘traditional left’ institutions (political parties and trade unions) and the inadequacy of the more innovative forms of resistance that they have been replaced by in the present – ‘autonomist, anarchist and localist perspectives [that] are everywhere in evidence’ – Harvey (2014) concludes that ‘to the degree that this left seeks to change the world without taking power, so an increasingly consolidated plutocratic capitalist class remains unchallenged in its ability to dominate the world without constraint’ (p. xiii). Equally for Panitch and Gindin (2013), ‘the gap that exists between the stubborn realities of capitalism and the revolutionary spirit so manifest in public squares around the world which inspired the occupations in the US itself teaches a sobering lesson. It is not in fact possible to change the world without taking power’ (p. 340). Even those more optimistic about the prospects for building a ‘new left’ evince glimpses of left melancholia. For instance: ‘all too often, however, the movement then stalls. The militants lack the

organizations and infrastructures necessary to sustain mobilization when the tired bureaucrats retreat. The ancien régime regroups; order is restored’ (McNally 2011: 188).

Towards a disruption-oriented critical political economy

As we have seen above, domination-focused accounts have tended to emphasise the consolidation of patterns of domination (rather than challenges to them). In particular, with regard to outbursts of resistance, we observe a dichotomous approach that highlights phases of optimism (where public protests appear) and severe pessimism and melancholy (where public protest wanes or is absent). Developing our disruption-focused account, in contrast, we argue that such a dichotomous and discontinuous conception of resistance falls short of how acts of resistance, struggle and disruption develop in reality. In particular, we need to include in our analysis what are sometimes referred to as ‘imperceptible’ forms of contestation (Papadopolous et al. 2008). Taking this into account allows us to show that resistance, rather than appearing and disappearing, is continuously in flux: at certain times taking ‘visible’ forms such as mass demonstrations, whilst at other times stemming more from ‘the subterranean, clandestine life’ (Negri 2009: 168).

In seeking to conceptualise resistance in this less dichotomous way, we seek to develop a disruption-oriented approach that complements the CPE mainstream and attempts to overcome some of its shortcomings. This draws especially on autonomous Marxism, which emerged from and builds upon the *Operaismo* movement of Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, and its English language counterparts such as Harry Cleaver and the Zerowork collective. The central claim of autonomous Marxism is the reversal of the standard focus within Marxism on the domination of labour by capital; so that capitalism is understood as the movement *of labour*, and attempts by capital to react and respond to that movement (Cleaver 1979). In contrast to a focus on the domination and defeat *of labour*, the approach instead highlights

action, contestation and disruption *by labour*. Rather than viewing stable patterns of domination, it addresses the inherent *instability* of attempts to contain resistance and insubordination, and the disruptive effect such practices always-already have upon *would-be* relations of domination. During the initial development of the approach in the 1960s and 1970s it was the autonomous actions of self-confident mass workers in Fordist factories that were key to the *operaist* conceptions of social change. These were seen to constitute a new mode of social transformation, whilst institutions that co-existed with capitalism – including trade unions and left parties – were considered unavoidably co-opted as a result of that very co-existence and (therefore) compatibility (Filippini and Macchia 2012). Further, as *operaist* scholars embraced post-structuralist theories, the focus on resistance broadened and came to include struggles at the level of the everyday, the mass worker being replaced as a ‘revolutionary subject’ by overarching concepts such as the multitude, and thereby developing compelling conceptions of resistance in post-Fordist (and post-communist) times (Hardt and Negri 2000; Papadopoulos *et al.* 2008). Whilst the work of scholars within this vein, such as John Holloway, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have inspired a wave of analyses of resistance (Abbinnett 2007; Goodley and Lawthom 2013); their influence in CPE has nevertheless been surprisingly limited. In contrast to domination-oriented CPE literature, therefore, a disruption-oriented approach adopts a number of contrasting assumptions, which we also set out below.

Class composition and the creative worker. Central to a disruption-oriented approach to political economy is a focus on the creative capacity of the (broadly defined) worker. In referring to workers in this sense, we mean those engaged in work that extends beyond that which happens inside the traditional factory, including that which occurs ‘outside of it’ – i.e. in the sphere ‘which capital has sought to shape for the reproduction of labour power’ (Cleaver 2003: 43). Whilst domination-focused accounts highlight the constraints that exist

for subordinate actors, disruption-centred accounts identify the ever-present capacity for workers – whether their work is caring, study, reproductive work, or conventionally-defined wage labour – to act creatively, and for that creativity to be central to the construction and reproduction of society. The creative worker can never be (fully) contained, constrained or controlled. As Tsianos et al. (2012) put it, creativity and the originality it contains are transformative: ‘the social changes not when people resist, respond, or react, but when they craft new situations, new worlds, new ecologies of existence’ (p.449). The creative worker therefore forms the central focus of analysis for the disruption-oriented approach to CPE. This focus highlights class not as thing, but rather as a constantly changing process, hence class is always in a process of composition (or de-composition).

Domination as porous, incomplete and unavoidably-disrupted. As a result of the process of class composition – i.e. a creative and disruptive process – the disruption-oriented approach to CPE understands mechanisms and institutions of containment, integration and co-optation as inherently secondary, porous and incomplete and as exposed to ever-present instances of struggle and contestation. Capitalism is considered an always-already incomplete and constantly-disrupted *attempt* to secure domination and exploitation. As autonomous Marxists never tire of pointing out, unless we recognise the primacy of labour, and its ever-present disruption and disturbing, we end up with a ‘narrative of defeat’ that is both politically debilitating and analytically inaccurate (Shukaitis 2007: 104). The process of class composition leads to a circulation of struggles which occur 'at multiple points, to threaten the whole intricate equilibrium of the social factory' (Dyer-Witheford 1999: 76). As such, disruption and resistance occur at multiple locations in multiple forms, not necessarily in a macro-strategic, or counter-hegemonic, fashion.

Each of these insights informs the way in which disruption-oriented accounts approach key social institutions such as the state, civil society and the capitalist economy. Thus, rather than

focusing on the manifestation of social forces within *the state*, disruption-oriented conceptualisations highlight a constitutive excess that exists *beyond* (and thereby acts to disrupt) the state. The state is considered a regime of control, but one which is unable to contain the fluidity that constitutes everyday life. There exists an ‘ultimate incompleteness of national sovereignty that creates the possibility for social change and for its potential overcoming’ (Papadopoulos *et al.* 2008: 7–8). It is considered in terms of *attempts* to secure control, and especially the empirical ways in which it has proven unable to do so. The constituting power of the people, it is argued, continuously challenges the constituted power of the ensemble of state apparatuses, revealing a ‘crack’ between multitude and empire, and the ever-present disruption of mechanisms of capture (Celikates 2010; Hardt and Negri 2000; Papadopoulos *et al.* 2008; Holloway 2010; Bailey 2010). *Civil society*, similarly, tends to be regarded in terms of *attempts* by formal civil society actors and institutions to shield the constituted power or the ensemble of state apparatuses from the political claims of the ‘multitude’ (Hardt and Negri 2005). It is marked by severe mechanisms of exclusion, silencing many everyday practices and even entire subjectivities (Butler 2011), constituting a social sphere dominated by professional intellectuals, an ‘institutional expression of domination by leadership and consensus, and a ‘structure in itself [that] is a boundary for democracy’ (Esser *et al.* 1994: 224, authors’ translation). Emancipation, in consequence – as with the state – is located not so much in rivalries of political projects within civil society – but *beyond*: in imperceptible politics, escapes and struggles from ‘below’ (on the scope of imperceptible politics, see Papadopoulos *et al.* 2008). Finally, in terms of the *capitalist economy*, class struggle (and primarily the agency of the, broadly-defined, worker) is considered by disruption-oriented accounts to be central. Labour, it is argued, must be regarded as an ‘independent variable’ (Negri 1972: 11), a creative force that develops obstinate practices with regard to the needs of capital accumulation. In consequence,

capitalist dynamics are understood to be driven (primarily) by acts of labour, with capital forced to respond to those activities. As Shukaitis (2007) puts it, ‘the working class, which is what it does (i.e. labors), exists for itself before it exists as a class against capital’ (p.100). Disruption-oriented analyses, as a result, focus on the empirical composition and subjectivities of the workforce as well as concrete strategies of labour *within* the production process. This contrasts with domination-focused approaches’ concern with ‘objective’ logics (or laws) of capitalism, strategies of capital, or the formal representation of labour in civil society. Disruption-oriented accounts highlight the creative capacity of labour, the new forms of activity it undertakes, and its endless ability to adapt to and create new social contexts. Capital is thus considered secondary and reactive; its task is ‘to harness these social forces and forms of cooperation into its own working’, and exists ‘as a snare, as an apparatus of capture that turns the vibrant flesh of life lived in resistance to the living dead humdrum of everyday banality’ (Shukaitis 2007: 100).

In sum, and as table 1 shows, we present two contrasting approaches to CPE: one focused on the actions of elites reproducing relations of domination, conceptualising institutions such as the state, civil society and the capitalist economy as reified sites of domination, and evaluating acts of resistance in terms of their (limited) prospect for large-scale counter-hegemony; the other drawing our attention to the creative (and broadly defined) worker, always-already acting to disrupt and escape from porous and incomplete social institutions, and representing an ever-present obstinacy that continually prevents domination from being secured. It is this latter approach to critical political economy, we claim, that is both most analytically adequate and has most potential to inform emancipatory strategies for social change in the present.

Table 1 about here

Addressing the European political and economic crisis: from domination to disruption

We turn in the second half of this article to highlight the different conclusions generated by each of the approaches to CPE, by applying them in turn to the recent crisis of Europe's political economy. In doing so, we draw on an ongoing research project, informed by a disruption-oriented approach to CPE³. This highlights key differences with regard to five key elements of the crisis: the historical context; the crisis itself; the impact upon and/or of labour; the development of social movements; and the prospects for resistance, left agency and social change.

1. Historical context: European integration as consolidation or crisis of capital accumulation?

For much of the CPE literature, European integration represents the consolidation of capital accumulation and the process whereby capital dominates labour. This approach informs many of the contributions to domination-oriented accounts (see, for instance, many of the contributions to Nousios et al. (2012a), which we draw on in much of the discussion of domination-focused accounts below). In this literature we witness a series of claims that the process of European integration has contributed to, and consolidated, the shift from the post-war Keynesian consensus/Fordist mode of capital accumulation, to the post-1970s neoliberal mode of accumulation. Thus, according to this account, capital was prompted by the exhaustion of the earlier mode of accumulation (understood in terms of technical problems such as declining profit, productivity, and growth, and the increasingly 'unaffordable' nature of (institutionalised) concessions to labour), to seek (and largely achieve) a (partial)

resolution of this crisis of accumulation, through the internationalisation of production, wage repression, welfare austerity, and market liberalisation. As a result, and in keeping with the key assumptions of domination-focused CPE, exploitation and domination were re-secured and consolidated across the European Union, through a (top-down) process of depoliticised neoliberal European integration. For Bonefeld (2012), for instance, '[t]he sovereignty of European law fetters nationally delimited democratic aspirations, concerning for example welfare provision and labour market organisation, to market liberal principles, strengthening the liberal character of the liberal-democratic state at the expense of its democratic element' (p.57). Further, following a combination of efforts by (especially) the British government, certain actors within the European Commission, and the European Roundtable of Industrialists, European integration witnessed the liberalisation of European markets and trade, the eradication of a number of forms of intra-European protectionism, a competition policy that privileged European capital, the projection of an expansionary free trade agenda beyond the boundaries of the European Union, and a hamstrung 'Social Europe' agenda that did little more than offer a (false) hope to social democratic opponents to this project (Bieler 2011; Buch-Hansen and Wigger 2012; for a similar assessment, see the contributions to Apeldoorn et al. 2009). Resistance towards the implementation of this 'competition state' mode of European integration, moreover, has been portrayed as scarce, weak and/or embedded within the neoliberal project. From a disruption-oriented perspective, we consider this view to be both pessimistic and to rest upon an overly narrow conception of resistance as is often the case within CPE.

Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, we argue, the paradigmatic form of resistance was constituted by a circulation of struggles that questioned the social compromise acquired in much of Western and Northern Europe, as well as the exhaustion of the military and dictatorial regimes in much of Southern Europe. Labour militancy (in terms of strikes and other forms of

industrial conflict) peaked during the 1970s, whilst participation in new social movements and other forms of extra-parliamentary, or (especially in Southern Europe) clandestine, activity continued to grow steadily throughout the post-war period (Crouch and Pizzorno 1978; Kriesi et al. 1995; Dodson 2011). The rise in labour militancy during the 1960s and 1970s prompted a much-noted profit squeeze across Western Europe, alongside a subsequent drop in growth, as wages tended to increase in response to outbursts of industrial conflict (Paldam and Pedersen 1982; Glyn 2006). Changing trends in political participation – i.e. the rise of extra-parliamentary activity, along with a commonly noted decline in voter participation, or the development of strong clandestine movements in Spain, Greece and Portugal - also reflected an ascendant scepticism and declining deference towards, growing distrust of, and an increasing inclination to challenge, formal institutions of political authority (Blais and Rubenson 2013; Li and Marsh 2008; Norris 2011). As the domination-focused accounts highlighted above have noted, the combined effect of these trends created an increased need in the EC/EU for political and socio-economic elites to seek mechanisms through which to directly discipline workers in an attempt to reduce the wage share, restabilise profit rates and consolidate the authority of political institutions.

As a result, and despite the continued existence of an upward pressure upon wages (especially within the European periphery), labour's potential for disruption shifted between the 1980s and 2000s in the direction of individual strategies of withdrawal, alongside a debt-financed securing of living standards. Whilst productivity and competitiveness continued to be of central concern to European policymakers from the 1980s onwards, sustained opposition, avoidance and disruption – in different forms – on the part of Europe's (broadly defined) working class consistently acted to thwart and hinder elite-level initiatives that sought to achieve those goals. Indeed, the Single European Market project – and wider, national-level, attempts to move towards a more competitive European economy – were far

from uncontested. The disruptive capacity of organised labour and European civil society - developed throughout the course of the post-war period - continued to limit what would otherwise have been more substantial moves towards a depoliticised and neoliberal European socio-economy. For instance, pension and social security reforms proposed for France in 1995 under the so-called Juppé Plan were vigorously contested (Hassenteufel 2008: 228-9), and again in 2006 France witnessed the failure of the CPE labour market reforms in the face of widescale public (student and union) opposition. Similar responses were seen in Spain with a series of general strikes between 1988 and 1994 in opposition to the introduction of flexible labour contracts (Smith 1998: 95-101), and in Germany in 2004 with the 'Monday demonstrations' in opposition to the neoliberal Agenda 2010 reforms to unemployment benefits (Bruff 2010: 420).

In seeking to identify new means by which to achieve productivity gains, EU leaders moved in 2000 to adopt the Lisbon Agenda, which focused directly on European competitiveness and labour market flexibility, including through the flagship (and now infamous) Services Directive (otherwise known as the Bolkestein Directive). The Services Directive was, however, poorly received throughout much of the European Union – witnessing a series of high profile protests, attacks within the media and cultural opposition to the so-called 'Polish Plumber' (who, it was supposed, would undermine job security and employment conditions for those in the more protected labour markets of Western Europe). Indeed, the Services Directive was held responsible by many for a growing opposition to European integration, including the French rejection of the draft EU constitution (Bailey 2008). Thus, whilst Crafts (2013) laments the fact that increased intra-European competitive pressures 'would have raised productivity performance significantly but governments still have considerable discretion to maintain these barriers notwithstanding the Services Directive' (p.R16), we must also note the sustained opposition faced by Bolkestein in seeking

to adopt the Services Directive, and especially the subsequent watering down of the Directive as a result of that opposition (Badinger and Maydell 2009; for a similar view regarding the watering down process, albeit offering a different explanation, see also Jensen and Nedergaard 2012). In other words, the absence of competitive pressures was brought about precisely by an ongoing opposition to both national- and European-level attempts to impose competitiveness-oriented measures, and should not be considered merely the result of technical policymaking errors.

Alongside visible public protest in opposition to attempts to impose competitiveness and productivity measures, a range of 'imperceptible' forms of opposition and obstinacy also met these attempts to tighten market discipline. Of particular interest, almost all of the productivity gains achieved during the 1980s and 1990s were used to finance declining labour force participation rates and declining working hours per person employed. Thus, GDP per hour worked in Europe rose from 75.4% of US levels in 1973 to roughly equal (98.3%) to US levels in 1995. This occurred, however, at the same time as hours worked per capita fell from roughly equal to the United States (101.9%) to 76.2% of US levels (table 2). This, moreover, has tended to be explained with reference to contrasting attitudes to work/leisure balance, high unemployment benefits, and higher unionisation rates (van Ark et al., 2008: 28-30). In short, whilst attempts to tighten market discipline appear to have had an impact during this period upon in-work productivity levels, this was almost entirely offset by an (obstinate) culture that valued rest, leisure, social security and solidarity. Similarly, whilst many of the labour market reforms introduced to the European economy during this period were focused on increasing flexibility, reducing employment protection, and seeking to increase turnover in jobs, each of these measures had considerable implications in terms of workers' attitudes and everyday responses, which in turn impeded attempts to improve productivity. For instance, increased job insecurity was found to lead to rising levels of

‘withdrawal’ from the employer-employee relation, including reduced organisational commitment, and heightened absenteeism and tardiness (Podsakoff et al., 2007; Staufenbiel and König, 2010). The rise in low quality jobs (associated with the move towards a service sector post-fordist economy) has been linked to a higher frequency of ‘quit decisions’ (i.e. resignations) for those in low quality jobs in low job protection countries (Gielen and Tatsirsamos 2012), thereby increasing training and/or hiring costs for firms. In understanding the sluggish growth in productivity (and especially multi-factor productivity growth) in the European Union throughout the 1995-2005 period (O’Mahony and Timmer 2009, table 2), therefore, we do well to note the continued impact of the obstinacy - antithetical to productivity improvements - exhibited across the European working population.

Table 2 about here

Labour costs (especially) in the European periphery also continued to rise relative to those of trading partners, despite slow productivity growth throughout the 2000s; thereby acting to deepen unequal developments within European capitalism. Thus, whilst some core states saw unit labour costs held down as a result of the integration of organised labour through either competition-corporatist agreements (most obviously in Germany) or anti-trade union initiatives by the state (especially in the UK), capital in the European periphery was largely unable to contain rising labour costs despite low productivity gains. For instance, Chen et. al (2013) decompose the real effective exchange rates in a number of Eurozone countries to show that between 2000 and 2010 – a period marked by an over-valued and rising nominal effective exchange rate, which we might have expected to have had a dampening effect upon unit labour costs as a result of the detrimental impact it had upon international

competitiveness - we witness a rise in unit labour costs relative to those of trading partners in each of the EU southern periphery countries and Ireland, and no change to unit labour costs in France. Indeed, only in Germany (which we might consider a special case given its already higher level of per capita income in comparison with most of the European Union) do we see a decline in unit labour cost relative to trading partners to offset this rise of nominal exchange rates (Chen et. al, 2013). The continued ability for labour to create upward pressure upon wages, especially in the European peripheries, therefore further evinced the ability to contest and disrupt attempts to discipline labour throughout much of the 2000s period.

Finally, alongside the disruption of a range of disciplining measures introduced in the sphere of production, we can also witness changes in consumption patterns throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, thereby acting to further subvert pressures generated by economic competition. Thus, whilst domination-focused accounts in CPE have primarily focused on rising household debt in terms of its consequences for increased impoverishment and the financial subjugation of European society (and whilst not denying that this is indeed one of the consequences of that process), we can also interpret rising levels of household debt in terms of an obstinate commitment to the maintenance of existing living standards (Wisman 2013; Tridico 2012). Thus, as figure 1 shows, private consumption consistently outstripped growth from the early 1980s onwards, with private household debt also rising as a proportion of disposable income, especially from the mid-1990s onwards (figure 2). Indeed, we see throughout this period an increasing reliance within most of the European periphery countries upon externally-financed private debt (especially from France and Germany), used in turn to finance a growing trade deficit, in each of what would become the major debtor countries during the European political and economic crisis. In short, rather than adjust to the pressures of international competition, the periphery countries relied instead on increased borrowing (Chen et. al, 2013). We also see similar trends in terms of credit-financed consumption

enabling maintenance of consumption patterns across countries experiencing economic inequality and instability. On the one hand, this trend might be considered a process whereby necessary support for consumption is privatised (thereby enabling a reduction in the quality of the public provisions of the state) (Crouch, 2008), yet debt-financed consumption has also been shown to have acted to suppress ‘public discontent with increasing income inequality, thereby lessening the political urgency of redistribution’ (Kus 2013). Similarly, whilst rising house prices – also the product of more readily available credit – have been shown to have reduced demand for redistributive public policies (Ansell 2014), we might also argue that this reflects a refusal amongst those facing labour market insecurity to accept an absence of housing provision as a consequence. In this sense the obstinate commitment to the maintenance of existing living standards - despite declining relative productivity, increased labour market insecurity, heightened wage disparities, and declining welfare generosity – produced a tendency for consumers to increasingly rely on rising levels of household debt in order to (obstinately) maintain living standards (which, of course, was one of the key contributing factors in the crisis).

Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

In sum, pressures to increase productivity and reduce real wages, living standards, and the wage share in Europe (pressures which were brought about by European elites in an attempt to respond to declining profit and growth rates) were ‘obstinately subverted’ across Europe;

thereby denying the European political and socio-economic elite the level of discipline, submission, subjugation and subordination necessary for the smooth reproduction of European capitalism. These recurrent acts of disruption, subversion and opposition to productivity-oriented reforms are, moreover, the backdrop against which the subsequent European political and economic crisis that erupted in the first half of 2010 can be understood – i.e. as a crisis of excessive demands that obstinately refused to be placated, eventually resulting in an overwhelming level of (public and private) debt, insufficient productivity/economic growth, and in turn threatening the solvency of national governments.

2. Conceptualising the Eurozone crisis: re-consolidating capitalist hegemony or the legitimacy crisis of the capitalist state apparatuses?

In turning to the post-2007/8 global economic crisis, domination-focused CPE has highlighted the consolidation of neoliberal accumulation and the shoring up of capital's dominance over labour (as rescue packages have benefited European financial capital, and subsequent sovereign debt crises have been responded to in the form of austerity measures and welfare retrenchment). These measures are typically considered, moreover, to be the successful outcome of a transnational global competitiveness strategy, as undertaken by capital. As Heinrich argues, the 'strategy aims to generalize the (formerly national) strategy of competitive disinflation and deregulation of EU surplus countries over the entire Union by sustainably enforcing disciplinary policies, also and especially in the European periphery', at the same time as creating 'the possibility for European manufacturing capital to exploit cheap labour all over the Union' (Heinrich, 2013). Similarly, for Cafruny and Ryner, 'the crisis of the Eurozone is an object lesson in the power of capital to determine the nature and scope of integration' (Cafruny and Ryner 2012: 46).

Adopting a perspective of disruption, in contrast, we identify at least two tendencies that question the notion that what we have witnessed is the relatively smooth implementation of austerity and the re-consolidation of capitalist hegemony. Firstly, the capitalist competitiveness strategy has proven unable to create a permissive consensus within the European populace. Despite the fact that significant sections of the electorate have acquiesced to claims that austerity measures are ‘necessary’ (Stanley 2014), we have nevertheless seen considerable decline in popular satisfaction and trust in national democracies (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014), alongside considerable popular protest against austerity measures (Rüdiger and Karyotis, 2014). As Armingeon and Guthmann (2014) show, support for both the national government and European Union, as well as established parties implementing austerity measures, has dropped sharply in the European Union, and especially in the European periphery, during the crisis. As a result, the ongoing conflict between the requirements of global capital and the interests of the population have become more clearly visible, evincing an intensified ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009) and further undermining the extent to which democratic legitimacy is rendered compatible with the state’s attempt to secure stable capitalist accumulation (Leys 2013: 108).

Secondly, alongside this increase in public discontent, we have also witnessed a normalisation of (civil) disobedience and new forms of collective self-organisation that offer new possibilities for social movements to actually contest and disrupt capitalist accumulation and competitiveness strategies. Perhaps the most prominent and successful case of this development is the experience of the Spanish *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (PAH, or the Platform of people affected by mortgages). Counting on strong public support, the PAH has been able to actively hinder evictions, pressure banks into offering debt cancellation and/or forms of social rent that seriously reduce the payment obligation of affected families, and occupy housing blocs able to accommodate evicted families. In doing

so, moreover, the PAH and similar groups have acted to transform what would otherwise be privatised social problems into collective demands (Clua-Losada, Ferrer and Simon, 2013). The case of the PAH, therefore, reveals the extent to which radical movements in a context of strong public dissensus and disaffection with state policies and crisis management have been able to achieve “little big victories” (Colau and Alemany 2013). Similar developments have occurred elsewhere, witnessing for instance Greek families reconnect electricity that had been cut off by energy providers (Staley 2013), the autonomous reorganisation of healthcare in Greece (Roos 2013), and a wave of housing occupations across Italy (Struggles in Italy 2013).

3. Labour during the European crisis: disciplining labour or new forms of worker organising?

The capitalist competitiveness strategy in the Eurozone crisis included far-reaching reductions in workers’ and trade union rights. From a domination-focused perspective, this has been considered a further breaking of the back of labour, which was anyway already ‘manifestly broken’ by European integration (Nousios et al., 2012b: 5). As Nousios and Tsolakis (2012) argue, ‘neoliberalism is currently being re-entrenched to further the disciplining of labour in the context of ‘crisis’ (p.256). Trade union resistance – it is argued – remained weak and limited to crisis management through social dialogue with employers and the state, rather than engaging in open contestation. The Irish trade unions have typically been presented as the paradigmatic example (Albo and Evans 2010; Erne 2013).

Adopting a disruption-oriented perspective, in contrast, we present a much less bleak evaluation. Despite cutbacks and a weakening of national labour movements as a result of soaring unemployment and increased precarity, a closer look at the concrete forms of labour resistance during the crisis allow us to (cautiously) outline a number of important advances,

including the remobilisation of trade unions (including – perhaps surprisingly - social democratic trade unions) and a recourse to more confrontational approaches to resistance.

Firstly, new '*producer-user-community alliances*' (Albo 2012: 20) emerged in public sector areas being threatened by cutbacks, privatisation and neoliberal restructuring such as education or healthcare. We witness, for example, social movements in defense of public healthcare and education in Spain, organising strong – and, in the case of the privatisation of hospitals in Madrid – successful resistance. The strength of these movements derives from two sources. On the one hand, platforms of 'traditional' trade union and civil society organisations, and on the other hand grassroots assemblies in education centres or hospitals where workers and service-users (e.g. children, teachers, parents in the case of education and healthcare users and professionals within health services) organise collectively (see, for instance: Riutort Serra 2014; Gallo and Gené-Badia 2013).

Secondly, the crisis has witnessed on many occasions an increased confidence amongst workers, including especially a willingness to adopt more radical modes of labour organising. This includes a pattern whereby militant workers are increasingly organised autonomously from traditional trade unions, and display growing distrust towards establishment politics and political actors (della Porta et al., 2012). Exemplarily, in Spain, the Andalusian SAT undertook acts of civil disobedience to collectively appropriate basic foods from large supermarkets and give it to food banks and houses occupied by the movements against evictions. This represented an attempt to make visible, and protest against, the severe consequences of austerity based crisis management – an act that earned the SAT wide popular support as well as high fines for its activists (Roca Martínez and Díaz Parra 2013). During 2011, moreover, attempts to impose austerity measures in Greece were hampered by wildcat strikes conducted by civil servants seeking to disrupt the information-gathering process of the Troika in its attempt to draft austerity measures (Hope, Mackenzie and

Wigglesworth, 2011). At the same time, large trade union confederations such as the Spanish CC.OO. or UGT proved in individual cases – such as public cleaning services in Madrid – an increasing dedication to support widespread strike action and willfully overcoming what had in the past been a predilection for ‘fatalism’ (Gindin 2012: 29).

4. New Social Movements: Failure or the politicisation of everyday life?

Domination-focused accounts within CPE have also tended to view new social movements as unable to provide sufficient resistance, or respond adequately to, the re-consolidation of capitalist discipline over labour as witnessed during the crisis. That resistance which has been witnessed, it is argued, remains firstly ‘spontaneous and sporadic’, and therefore ‘[a]s crucial as such resistances are for any progressive change, there has not been the degree of political organization necessary for them to be effective and to be sustained’ (Albo et al. 2010: 24). Secondly, new social movements have been criticised for lacking ideological coherence and left rhetoric - see, for instance, Charnock et al’s concern that the *indignados* movement might ‘ignore questions of political economy and Spain’s place within the world market and to instead focus upon abstract and purely political notions of ‘real democracy’ (Charnock et al. 2012: 9). Third, an inability of the new social movements to influence state policies has prompted systematic disappointment. And finally, on the occasions when new social movements have been considered relevant this has only been on the condition that they fuse ‘with mass protest by organised workers’ movements [...], which can shut off the flow of business profits’ (McNally 2011: 51).⁴

Such a conception of the new social movements, we argue, overlooks several key features of the movements. Firstly, despite the experience of discontinuity and fragmentation, contemporary anti-austerity social movements have evinced significant learning effects. As the case of Spain shows perhaps most obviously, learning processes have enabled practices

developed in earlier protest movements to be subsequently adopted by later movements. This includes lessons such as how to organise collectively, as well as over the particular forms of action to be adopted. As such, we might consider each stage of these movements to constitute a cycle of protests, rather than isolated, singular struggles. In that sense, we can consider the *indignados* or the 15M movement that occupied public squares and organized neighbourhood assemblies in 2011 to have contributed significantly to the further development of movements such as the PAH (which itself existed prior to, and contributed to the creation of, the 15M) or the different *marea* (tide) movements that have emerged. On the one hand – under slogans such as “They don’t represent us” or “They call it democracy, but it is not” – they contributed to a mass delegitimation of crisis management and state power. On the other hand, these movements have popularised social forms – e.g. grassroots assemblies or the spontaneous occupation of public spaces - that have been taken up even by many other movements as well as providing with more strength already existing movements such as the PAH. Furthermore, new movements have developed and strengthened existing physical locations – such as social centres or occupied houses – acting as focal points or ‘organizing hubs of resistance’ (McNally 2011: 53), securing a certain continuity of the movements. Processes such as Agora99 or Blockupy have also acted to improve collaboration on a European scale and allowed a certain transnational translation of grassroots struggles.

Secondly, the commonly-made criticism, that anti-austerity social movements have lacked ideological coherence and/or a sufficiently cogent ‘left’ political vision stands in rather odd contrast to radical activists’ own perceptions of the social change produced by their movements. Indeed, not only were the new social movements able to normalise forms of grassroots democracy, occupations and (civil) disobedience way beyond the ‘traditional’ left, but they have also disrupted individualised neoliberal subjectivities by tackling supposedly individual problems (e.g. mortgage problems) as collective ones (Huke 2014). While

developing, in their actions and social forms, a radicalism that dwarfed all actions of the radical left in the previous years, these new social movements have also acted to secure an unprecedented level of mass appeal. The utilisation of ‘empty signifiers’ (Nonnhoff 2011) such as ‘real democracy’ and the development of demands from concrete individual needs rather than leftist ideology in that sense (in many cases) proves a strength of the movements, rather than its commonly purported weakness. (Martínez and García 2011).

Thirdly, whilst it is the case that the new social movements have been (in most cases) unable to shape state policies, as domination-focused accounts have been quick to point out, there have nevertheless been a number of important exceptions. For instance, we have witnessed a moratorium suspending evictions in Greece during the crisis that was (partly) extended in 2013, despite pressure from the Troika to end the moratorium. Further examples include anti-eviction legislation adopted in Andalusia and the verdict of the Portuguese High Court that declared parts of the austerity measures unconstitutional. The impact of ongoing resistance to austerity measures has also been visible in statements made by members of the political and socio-economic elite (as we might expect, see Bailey forthcoming). Perhaps most notably, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso noted in April 2013 that ‘while this policy [of deficit reduction] is fundamentally right, I think it has reached its limits in many aspects, because a policy to be successful not only has to be properly designed. It has to have the minimum of political and social support’ (European Commission 2013). However, measuring social movements only by their direct impact on state policies obscures important aspects. Not only were social movements in some cases (e.g. occupied factories, self-organised healthcare, occupied houses) able to reduce the precariousness and despair of everyday life for a broad range of individuals, but these experiences have also paved the way for a renovation of a number of radical left parties whose effect remains still to be seen (the

most obvious examples being Syriza in Greece, Podemos and the advent of candidatures for the forthcoming municipal elections in 2015 in Spain, such as Guanyem Barcelona).

Finally, movements such as the PAH must also be understood as a form of societal class struggle in which people are mobilised as ‘those who are proletarianized and exploited in every aspect of their lives - at risk of foreclosure and unemployment, diminishing futures, increasing debts, and accelerated dependence on a system that is rapidly failing’ (Dean 2012: 57). This implies new political and strategic options beyond the limitations imposed on mass protest by organised workers in the era of disciplinary neoliberalism (for the limitations see exemplarily Mahnkopf and Altvater 1995; Gindin 2012). Collective forms of organising and ‘small big victories’ established successful structures – mostly outside the workplace and in the sphere of social reproduction - ‘through which workers can overcome their debilitating fatalism and gain the confidence to ‘concretize hope’ (Gindin 2012: 34). This enabled new forms of class struggle and challenges to capitalism, including through the occupation of banks, houses and public squares or road blockades.

5. The contemporary left: a diminished stature or new prospects for radical social change?

The Eurozone crisis, domination-focused approaches have tended to conclude, has brought with it further limitations for emancipatory potentials. In consequence, the current Left has been regarded as the weakest ‘since the defeat of the Paris Commune’ (Panitch et al. 2010: x). Even on occasions when episodes of resistance that are ‘by no means unimpressive’ have been observed, they have also been considered in terms of the extent to which they ‘reveal the continuing impasse of the Left, and its limited strategic and organizational responses’ (Panitch et al. 2011: x). Proposals for reform and leftist strategies, in consequence, have been notably lacking in terms of identifying social forces that might produce the radical social change that is routinely identified as both necessary and desired. In the place of highlighting

present opportunities for disruption and subversion, therefore, we witness instead a *hope* for a better future (Huke and Schlemmer 2012); a hope, moreover, that sits oddly alongside dystopian proclamations regarding the ‘manifestly broken’ back of labour (Nousios et al., 2012b: 5) and a ‘diminished stature of the Left’ (Cafruny and Ryner 2012: 46).

A disruption-oriented approach – in contrast – is more able to show possible passageways and points of departure for resistance or emancipation in the current crisis. Some forms of disruption that have been paradigmatic for previous phases such as the ability to prompt wage rises or to gain access to debt-financed consumption have each become increasingly difficult. Heightened precariousness and impoverishment have limited opportunities for withdrawal. Still, social struggle has not ceased to exist but – led by new social movements such as the 15M movement or the PAH in Spain – has instead shifted in form towards mass mobilisations and collective, autonomous, self-organisation. In this way, the crisis has both strengthened possibilities for capitalist agency to impose structural reforms *and* given rise to strong social movements. To some extent we have even witnessed revived traditional trade unions (gaining mobilisation power while losing institutional influence). The consequence is a growing antagonism between an ensemble of state apparatuses ‘hardened’ by austerity measures and supporting capitalist interests, and the everyday needs of wider parts of the population articulated through new social movements. A situation that – as the example of the PAH shows perhaps most explicitly – offers potential for radical interventions *beyond* state representation and existing forms of labour activism.

Table 3 about here

Comparing domination- and disruption-focused critical political economy accounts of the European political and economic crisis

The European political and economic crisis, and the austerity-based crisis management measures that have been implemented by Europe's political elite in response, have been met by changing patterns of contestation, protest and disruption. As we have sought to highlight, much of the (domination-focused) CPE accounts of the crisis have thus far focused on top-down, elite-level, attempts to secure and/or consolidate relations of domination, through a range of austerity and depoliticising measures. In contrast, the disruption-oriented account we present herein highlights how far we are from witnessing the death knell of labour's prolonged post-1970s defeat. Whilst domination-focused accounts have rightly identified an attempt by capital to secure its own interests through authoritarian austerity measures, alongside an attempt to produce the hegemony of a pro-competitiveness discourse, throughout the course of the crisis; these developments have nevertheless been accompanied by new forms of subjectivation and largescale social unrest, evincing ongoing struggle over, and resulting obstacles to, capital's attempt to impose the conditions for stable accumulation, and the attempts by contemporary institutions of political representation to legitimate themselves. It is these – autonomous, creative, and ongoing - instances of contestation, disruption and struggle that domination-focused critical scholars have, we claim, under-emphasised or obscured. Further, whereas domination-focused accounts view resistance (somewhat melancholically) in terms of the capacity, or hope, for a Keynesian U-Turn and/or leftist government programmes; the disruption-oriented account we develop here makes visible passageways towards new forms of radical emancipatory action, collective self-organisation and an autonomous reorganisation of social reproduction. In sum, and as table 3 illustrates, the 'critical' in CPE is far from uncontested.

Endnotes

1. For the sake of clarity of argument we have sought to distinguish between two ‘schools’ – domination and disruption-focused - although obviously in actual texts there is scope for overlap. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of what we refer to as the ‘class struggle’-focused Marxists, such as Greg Albo, David Harvey, David McNally, and Leo Panitch – each of whom have tendencies to be both domination and disruption-focused in their analyses, as we see in some of the examples that follow.

2. Whilst it is more commonplace to refer to the ‘Eurozone crisis’, the present article instead refers to the European political and economic crisis, in part because the crisis has affected European countries who are both members and non-members of the Eurozone.

3. . The research project is being conducted by the authors, and Stephen Bates, comparing patterns of resistance in the context of the global economic and Eurozone crises.

4. Whilst McNally does much to highlight instances of resistance, he nevertheless also tends to display some of the tendencies of ‘left melancholic’ analyses, in downplaying the impact of new social movements.

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Table 1: Comparing domination- and disruption-focused critical political economy

| | Domination-focused critical political economy | Disruption-oriented critical political economy |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Agents of interest</i> | Political and socio-economic elites | The creative and resisting ‘worker’ (broadly defined) |
| <i>Approach to social institutions</i> | Reified sites of domination | Secondary, porous and incomplete attempts at domination and capture. |
| <i>State</i> | Reflection and consolidation of capital’s domination of labour | Incompleteness of sovereignty and control |
| <i>Civil society</i> | Site of struggles over hegemony, in which consent is secured | Institutionalised attempts to secure domination |
| <i>Capitalist economy</i> | Exploitation and subordination of labour | Site of labour’s creativity and disruption |
| <i>Resistance</i> | Evaluated in terms of counter-hegemonic potential - largely absent or ineffective; left melancholy | Perceptible and imperceptible. Continuous contestation, cracks, and passageways; obstinate practices in the ‘everyday’ |

Table 2: European productivity as a percentage of US productivity

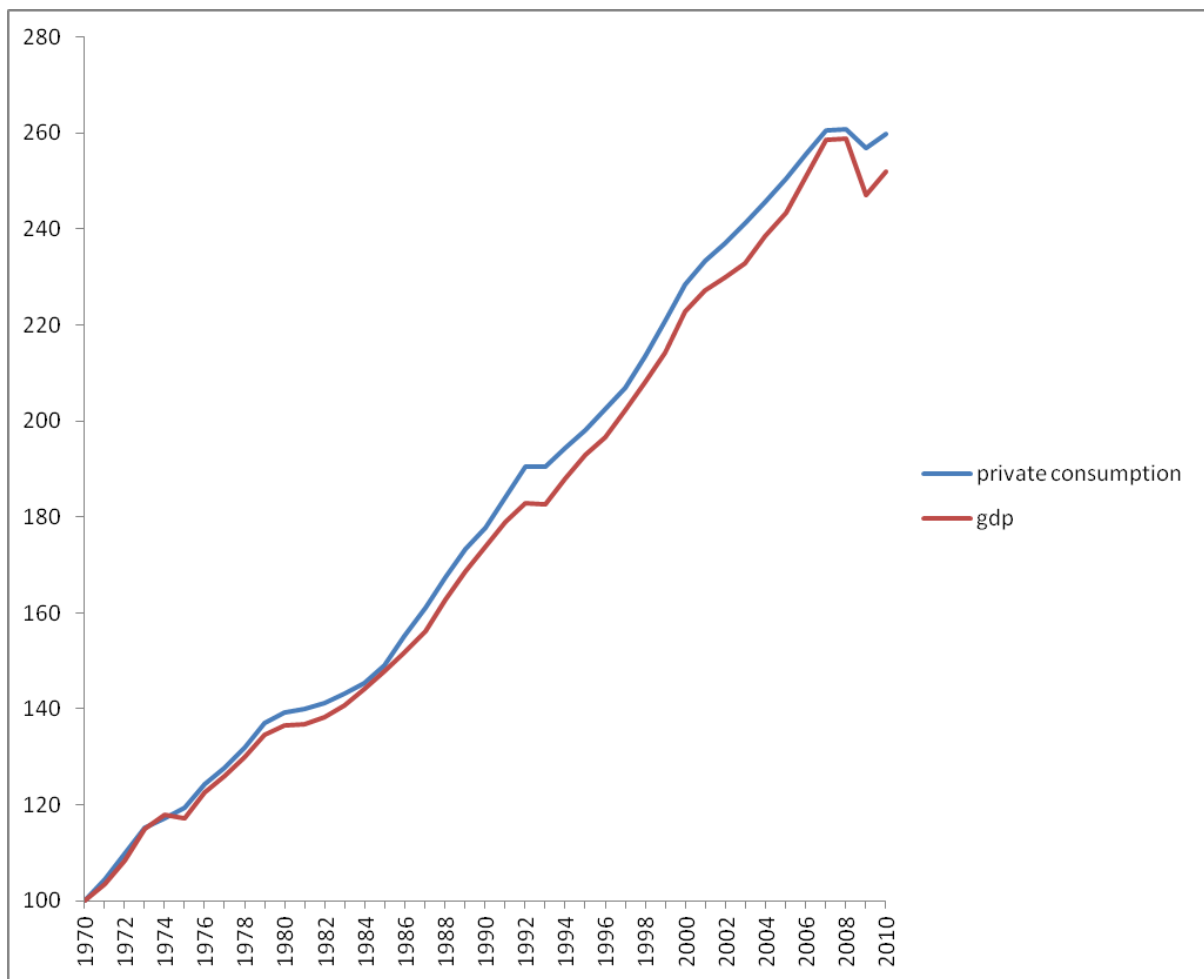
| | 1973 | 1995 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| GDP per hour worked (% of US) | 75.4 | 98.3 |
| Hours worked per capita (% of US) | 101.9 | 76.2 |
| GDP per capita (% of US) | 67.7 | 68.6 |

Source: van Ark et al., 2008; OECD factbook

Table 3: Comparing domination- and disruption-focused critical political economy analyses of the European crisis

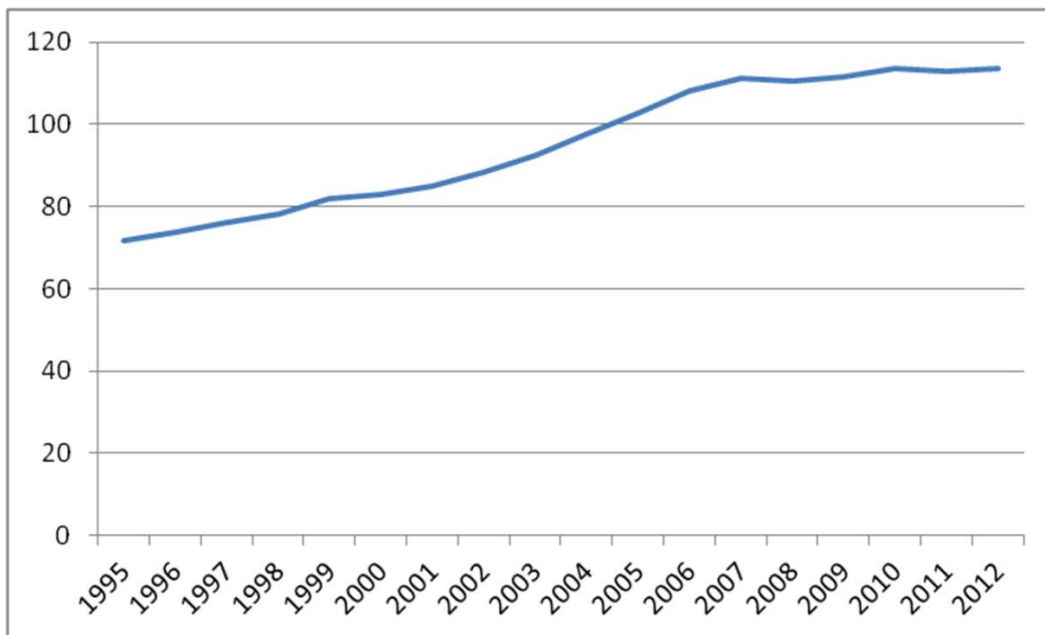
| | Domination-focused critical political economy | Disruption-oriented critical political economy |
|---|--|--|
| <i>History of European integration from the 1970s to the Eurocrisis</i> | European integration during the Fordist mode of accumulation (1970s), (neoliberal) competition state mode of integration (1980s-2000s), and its consolidation (Eurocrisis) | Collective labour militancy and political mass mobilisations (1970s), individual strategies of withdrawal and the debt-financed stabilisation of living standards (1980s-2000s), and attempts at autonomous self-organisation alongside disruptive mass mobilisations (Eurocrisis) |
| <i>State and Civil Society</i> | Consolidating capital's interests through authoritarian austerity measures, hegemony of a pro-competitiveness discourse | Precarity and instability of political representation, new forms of subjectivation, social unrest |
| <i>Capitalist economy</i> | Dominance of capital | Inability of capital to impose stable accumulation and discipline |
| <i>Resistance</i> | Pleas for a Keynesian U-Turn, Leftist government programmes | Collective, autonomous, self-organization, disruption, and political mass mobilisations |

Figure 1: Indexed growth in GDP and private consumption for the EU-15 (1970 =100)



Source: AMECO, European Commission; data relates to the 15 EU member states that were member states before the 2004/7 accession. Private final consumption expenditure and GDP at 2005 prices; both measured in national currency; private consumption (average of national growth rates weighted with current values in ECU/EUR).

Figure 2: European household debt (% of GDI)



Source: OECD factbook; countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, UK