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Abstract. The anti-austerity movement that emerged in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and 2010 Eurozone crisis, and which forms part of the 'age of austerity' that came after those crises, was and remains in many ways contradictory. Many of the goals of the movement are grounded in concrete material concerns related to inequality, precarity, poverty, welfare conditionality and retrenchment, and the failure, inability or unwillingness of the labour market or the welfare state to provide for the well-being of substantial sections of society within the advanced industrial democracies. This inability of the state or market to meet the requirements of the public is, moreover, compounded by the strikingly similar failure, inability or unwillingness of most formal institutions of representation (especially political parties and trade unions) to react in such a way that they would prompt a reversal of austerity. In this sense, the anti-austerity movement was borne of a pragmatic desperation to achieve material well being through any feasible alternative available. The values that informed much of the anti-austerity movement, however, are oftentimes radical and idealistic; influenced by notions of horizontalism, prefigurativism, anarchism, a critique of representation, and the search for a radically democratic society. It is in the context of the so-called 'age of austerity', therefore,

that these two quite different tendencies have been able to connect in a somewhat contradictory way, witnessing the emergence of a set of ideas and practices that we refer to here as 'pragmatic prefigurativism' (see also Bailey et al. 2018b). Drawing on over 65 interviews with anti-austerity activists based in the UK and Spain, this article sets out and explores the core ideas, practices and experiences that constitute pragmatic prefigurativism; and discusses some of the contradictory ways in which this has been able to cause social change during the so-called 'age of austerity'.

Anti-austerity between militant materialism and real democracy: exploring pragmatic prefigurativism

The post-2008 crisis of neoliberalism has brought with it a challenge to democracy and political institutions. The disciplinary power of capital increased. As economies plummeted into recession, governments hastened to intensify neoliberal austerity-based and competitiveness-oriented policies in an effort to prevent de-industrialisation and the default of private and public debt, by securing a favourable environment for creditors and corporations. Hoping to stabilize the economic situation by attracting investments and credit, while being financially stricken by a decline in tax revenues and rising costs for social welfare, due to unemployment and deteriorating everyday living conditions, governments became even more subordinate to the imperatives of capital accumulation than they had already been during the pre-crisis period (Huke 2017). As Stanley (2016: 2) argues, governments were "disciplined by bond markets, disciplined by their monetary institutions and disciplined by the terms of their international and supranational bailouts". However, those efforts to appease capital were thwarted by an increasing instability of accumulation dynamics that had already before the crisis characterised the post-Fordist regimes of accumulation in the European periphery and which were aggravated further during the Eurozone crisis. The "coercive forces of capitalist competition" (Wigger 2018: 46) not only enforced austerity-based solutions to the crisis, but at the same time subverted them. In particular, problems of low demand, low profitability (especially outside of the financial sector) and low productivity, all combined to create a crisis of very low growth across the European Union for much of the 2009-2015 period (Bieling et al. 2016).

In order to shield themselves from the unwelcome demands being made by the mobilised populations who were affected by these economic processes, such as calls for more generous (or at least to maintain existing levels of generosity of) social security and welfare, governments adopted measures such as 'debt brakes' to insulate policy making from popular pressures. Democratic institutions became both more rigid and less permeable, a process which can be termed a 'hardening' of the state (Agnoli 2003). At the EU level, power moved 'to the most unaccountable and opaque of the EU institutions' (Della Porta and Parks 2018: 90), which further narrowed the scope to articulate (not to mention to enforce) demands for social justice as well as (counter-cyclical or heterodox) policy choices. The increased power of institutions such as the DG ECOFIN of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB) or

the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the bureaucratic locking-in of austerity policies by measures such as the Fiscal compact or the Six-Pack legislation, all acted to weaken national democracy and sovereignty (Heins and de la Porte 2015); as well as weakening welfare provisions (Taylor-Gooby et al. 2017), eroding gains won through earlier struggles (Engelhardt 2017), and witnessing an end to the more cooperative or corporatist industrial relations arrangements (Bieling and Lux 2014).

The new instruments of European control and supervision entrenched labour market flexibility and cost competitiveness as key political guidelines and placed pressure on wages and demand, particularly in countries which had suffered a very deep crisis (Bieling et al. 2016: 65; Scholl and Freyberg-Inan 2018: 107). Labour organizations, in many cases, were caught on the wrong foot by these developments, since institutional inclusion had (in their period of decline since the crisis of Fordism) become their main (or at least one of their key) power resources (Las Heras and Ribera-Almandoz 2017). As a result, both trade unions and the state proved increasingly unable to respond adequately to material concerns related to inequality, precarity, poverty, welfare conditionality and retrenchment. As such, the working and middle-classes - especially in Southern and Eastern Europe - became "caught up in a process of continuous poverisation and dispossession of crucial public resources and social welfare that secured their social reproduction" (Arampatzi 2017: 49).

As a result of these developments, we might consider European integration during the Eurozone crisis to be marked by the experience of 'minimal hegemony', in which coercion is foregrounded, while material concessions wither away, a hegemony which is fragile and allows a number of challenges and forms of contestation (Worth 2018: 127). These developments combine to explain the eruption, especially from 2011 onwards, of a wave of anti-austerity movements. As such, these anti-austerity movements were borne of a pragmatic attempt to achieve material well-being through any feasible alternative available. The values that informed these movements, however, also tended to be radical and idealistic; influenced by notions of horizontalism, prefigurativism, anarchism, a critique of representation, and the search for a radically democratic society. It is in the context of the so-called 'age of austerity', therefore, that these two quite different tendencies - a militant materialism and an idealistic commitment to horizontalism - have been able to connect in a somewhat contradictory way, witnessing the emergence of a set of ideas and practices that we refer to here as 'pragmatic prefigurativism' (see also Bailey et al. 2018b). Drawing on over 65 interviews with anti-

austerity activists based in the UK and Spain, this article sets out and explores the core ideas, practices and experiences that constitute pragmatic prefigurativism; and discusses some of the contradictory ways in which it has been able to cause social change during the so-called 'age of austerity'.

A brief typology of disruptive agency

As we have argued in more detail elsewhere (Bailey et al. 2018b), capitalism has tended to witness the emergence of four types of disruptive agency, which have taken on different forms and combined in different ways, throughout the period of capitalist modernity. In highlighting these different types of disruptive agency, we claim, it is possible to go beyond the tendency within critical IPE to adopt 'reified conceptualisation of social classes', according to which labour is commonly viewed, 'as a passive factor of production' (Cillo and Pradella 2018: 68). In studying agency, and the subjectivities that give rise to agency, we can help to understand past, current and future struggles. To be clear, our focus is not on individuals, but rather on the types of subjectivities that appear within social struggles. Following Gutiérrez Aguilar (2017), our approach moves away from the idea of social or political subjects, and instead focuses on *subjects of struggle*: 'it is the struggles themselves which constitute subjects of struggle and not vice versa' (2017: 29, authors' translation).

The four types of disruptive agency, or subjects of struggle, that we identify are as follows. First, we see a tendency for disengagement, disaffection and disinterest to emerge as a form of (anti-)political resistance at the level of the everyday. This type of subjectivity is characterised by a refusal to comply or to consent to established political institutions and norms. This disinterest is expressed through a clear non-engagement with formal (and informal) ways of political participation, including a refusal to comply with instructions issued by institutions of authority, or to engage with existing political institutions, whether they be political parties or trade unions. The feeling that "they are all the same", has a tendency to feed into a disengaged attempt to refuse domination. Whilst sometimes this type of subjectivity appears apolitical, it also at other times become more visible, targeting key economic and political elites and interests, as seen during the English riots of summer 2011 (see the discussion in McDowell et al. 2014).

Second, we posit a *vocal agent of political equality*, who draws upon contemporary democratic values, discourses and legal rights to espouse their right to a voice, and for that voice to be heard with an equal degree of attention to that of others within the political community. This demand for a voice, and for it to be heard, remains an important disruptive mechanism within contemporary democracy, albeit one that is often framed differently by different collective actors. In the period immediately prior to the crisis, populist movements had increasingly begun to cause consternation for much of the mainstream political elite in contemporary democracies, drawing largely upon a critique that accuses the political elite of being self-serving and unresponsive and therefore failing to listen to 'the people', who are typically those 'disaffected and disillusioned' workers left behind by the neoliberal phase of capitalism, articulated around a nativist notion of citizenship (Spruyt et al. 2016).

Third, we view capitalism as having a tendency to be disrupted by what we term *refusal-prone materialists*, who are both subordinate within contemporary relations of production, but also empowered by that position of subordination (and the requirement for consent that it creates). This has a tendency to result in collective acts of refusal – including, most obviously, strikes (both official and unofficial), but also extending to mass demonstrations, occupations of property, and acts of disruptive civil disobedience (such as road-blocking) – as a means by which to impose (potential) sanctions upon dominant actors in pursuit of a material improvement in, or redistribution of, the range of resources available to her (Bailey 2015). The refusal-prone materialist is often a waged worker, and obviously the most common reference is to the organised industrial working class, but might also be a benefit claimant, a woman conducting gendered care work, and those who struggle to resist the privatisation of public spaces. The Wages for Housework campaign of the 1970s is perhaps the most well-known example whereby those engaging in what Mariarosa Dalla Costa terms 'care work' have sought to use the capacity for refusal as a means by which to challenge relations of domination that are outside of the formal sphere of wage labour (Dalla Costa 2012; see also Federici 2012b).

Finally, we identify a *prefigurative radical* subjectivity which actively attempts to create new, alternative social relations, or what we might term autonomous forms of social reproduction (Caffentzis and Federici 2014). By posing, and collectively working towards the creation of alternative and radically egalitarian social relations, the prefigurative radical actively and directly disrupts established relations of domination through her everyday efforts to construct alternative socio-economic relations. As such, rather than seeking demands from the state,

capital, and/or other hierarchical structures of authority and inequality, the prefigurative radical disrupts existing hierarchies by creating alternative means through which humans co-exist, cooperate and co-produce.

The concept of prefigurative politics developed concretely throughout the twentieth and early twenty first century (Gordon 2017; van de Sande 2015). As Gordon shows, prefiguration has an early history as a theological concept, although it was not until it was popularised by Carl Boggs, as part of 1960s New Left politics of the United States that it was incorporated into the lexicon of left-leaning protest movements. It was at this point, moreover, that 'prefigurative politics' became associated with a commitment towards a unity of means and ends – that is, the conviction that in order to create a progressive, egalitarian society it was equally necessary to engage in progressive and egalitarian practices, or 'means'. This means-ends unity, moreover, has its roots in the more longstanding anarchist tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and especially its commitment to unmediated self-emancipation and direct action, in contrast to the more instrumental approach usually attributed to Marxism and/or Leninism. This commitment towards prefigurative politics subsequently informed the development of the anti-globalisation movement and, as we shall see, came to be influential within the anti-austerity movements that emerged around 2011, especially those which focused on the occupations of public spaces as a key strategy (Maeckelbergh 2011; van de Sande 2015).

Responding to the erosion of liberal democracy: Pragmatic prefiguration during the European crisis

The processes of depoliticisation that characterised neoliberalism since the late 1970s involved a sustained erosion of the institutional frameworks designed to protect working class interests. This intensified significantly during the Eurozone crisis; and in response, solidarity initiatives and networks became increasingly necessary as alternative means of survival, opening up spaces for collective political struggles against austerity which (at least temporarily) replaced individual pre-crisis practices that we might consider to be a form of disengaged 'muddling through' (Arampatzi 2017, 2018; see also Bieler and Jordan 2017). Meanwhile, the hardening of the state, the further move towards a hollowed-out democracy, and the erosion or even destruction of pre-crisis channels to articulate concerns and enforce initiatives that benefit people's daily lives, have all made strategies of voice increasingly difficult to perform (Huke 2017). As a result, we have seen the growth in types of activity that seek to go beyond putting

demands to the state, and instead attempt to self-enforce social rights and establish alternative institutions of collective social care (Arampatzi 2018: 60; Macías 2013). Industrial relations reforms have undermined the capacity of trade unions to exert leverage over employers (Huke and Tietje 2014). At the same time, the vulnerability and precarity experienced during the crisis also led prefigurative radicals to extend their strategies beyond subcultural spaces such as social centres, squats and collectives of the radical left, where they had more often than not been confined before the crisis (Huke 2016).

In sum, therefore, as more established channels and institutions of representation and mobilisation, which have in the past enabled subordinated voices and demands to be articulated or to facilitate acts of collective refusal, have each become increasingly ineffective. As a result, we see new and more innovative forms of protest, based on direct democracy and horizontal organizational forms, have emerged during the Eurozone crisis (Roos and Oikonomakis 2014). This therefore consists of a connection between the disruptive subjectivities associated with voice and refusal, on the one hand, and the more radical forms of prefigurative practice, on the other hand. In this sense, Arampatzi emphasizes the essential role of, "solidarity initiatives, networks of exchange, community cooking collectives and social clinics in filling the gaps left by austerity and, at the same time, introducing a new paradigm for socio-economic organisation" (Arampatzi 2018: 50). As living conditions deteriorated and unemployment, over-indebtedness and precarity became everyday experiences for significant sections of the European population, new disruptive subjectivities have been able to entangle concrete political claims with the creation of incipient networks of mutual support and collective care. These everyday solidarity initiatives offered an avenue to overcome the fragmented and short-term character of protest actions in the street, and to build new community-based structures and relations, thus advancing towards the formation of sustainable, 'self-reproducing' movements (Wigger 2018: 34; on the notion of self-reproducing movements, see Federici 2012a: 147). The new movements were rooted in everyday experiences of vulnerability and characterize by what we have termed a "pragmatically prefigurative" disruptive subjectivity, whereby the growing difficulty with which to express a political voice or to articulate acts of materialist refusal through established institutions has given rise to the pragmatic turn to prefigurative strategies in an attempt to realise those same goals through alternative means (Bailey et al. 2018b: 17). As such, pragmatically prefigurative agents represent a new (hybrid) type of disruptive subjectivity. What makes the development of this type of disruptive subjectivity not only noteworthy but also impactful is its capacity to subvert, through

prefiguration, existing social relations of domination. In particular, pragmatic prefigurative agency has proven able to partially re-politicise the depoliticized and technocratic socio-economic governance that characterized both European and national level austerity-based strategies of crisis management (Parker and Pye 2017: 7). Austerity has therefore been politicised; highlighting its contestable nature and the degree to which it is a political choice taken by both national and supranational institutions (Scholl and Freyberg-Inan 2018: 115). Collective solidarity, and the repoliticisation of previously individualised social problems, have acted to empower subjects who were otherwise at risk of being burdened by debt, guilt and shame. This, moreover, has allowed collective actors to experience a capacity to act and intervene (Arampatzi 2018: 54-55). These new forms of protest have acted to disrupt those everyday forms of neoliberal governmentality that have pervaded social attitudes, identities and cultural representations, such as individualised responsibility for unemployment or homelessness, all of which has pervaded the neoliberal period, but also have been exacerbated during the post-2008 crisis era (Arampatzi 2017: 49).

The pragmatically prefigurative worker represents a historically-specific combination of disruptive subjectivities that have emerged through the course of the European crisis of neoliberalism which has been ongoing since 2008 (Bailey et al. 2018a, b). We refer to her as a worker, on the basis that she is susceptible to exploitation under capitalism; whilst also recognising that this might occur both within and outside of the formal workplace; including in the institutions of education, the home, or as an unemployed welfare recipient. Having identified the pragmatically prefigurative worker as a key disruptive figure of post-2008 European capitalism, therefore, we seek here to move further in our analysis by highlighting some of the more concrete motives, ideas, tactics, actions, intentions, experiences and practices that appear to mark this contemporary form of disruptive subjectivity.

Our argument can be summarised as follows. In the context of the turn towards authoritarian neoliberalism that marked the post-2008 period of European capitalism (Bruff 2014, Tansel 2017), there has emerged a growing willingness to both express dissenting political voices and to refuse the experience of material exploitation and hardship (Huke et al. 2015). This, however, has co-existed with a simultaneous increase in the reluctance or inability of established channels of representation (especially social democratic parties and the welfare state) and institutions of labour mobilisation (especially trade unions) to articulate, channel or connect with growing expressions of popular dissent. This has therefore prompted a general

popular disaffection towards those apparently unresponsive institutions. As a result, we witness a turn towards innovative, extra-institutional strategies of disruptive activity, in part formed in connection with the practices and agents of radical prefigurativism that were, prior to 2008, more typically associated with the notion of 'horizontalism' within the anti/alter-globalization movement. This adoption of the tactics of radical prefigurativism explains the prevalence of the use of methods such as occupations and assemblies, as a means by which to advance the goals of the pragmatically prefigurative worker. It also explains the oftentimes awkward or unusual relationship that collective activity has had with the established trade unions, and the emergence (or re-emergence) on certain occasions of independent trade unions. At least temporarily, we argue, these new repertoires of action were able to prevent workers from having to passively accept austerity measures, reduced wages, longer working days, and redundancies (Wigger 2018).

One of the main 'weapons' available to the pragmatically prefigurative worker is the capacity to publicise the negative actions of those seeking to assert domination. This focus on negative publicity has been enabled in part by the turn to more radical and innovative forms of collective association, as well as being necessitated as a strategy by the heightened difficulty with which more conventional forms of material refusal (such as official strikes coordinated by trade unions) can be conducted. Many of these new opportunities for disruptive activity, moreover, have been facilitated by the technological development of social media. In addition, we see the pragmatically prefigurative worker adopt a purposeful willingness to disseminate the lessons and achievements gained in particular struggles, so that we see a tendency for earlier experiences to inform and assist later ones. The pragmatic nature of this move towards radicalism also explains both the willingness to attempt a re-connection with more established channels of representation and mobilisation, and in some cases to directly seek to re-enter those institutions. Likewise, the disaffection that fuelled much of the development of pragmatic prefigurativism also explains the ambivalent and cautious attitude commonly adopted during this process of re-connection. The main outcomes of these developments, we claim, are both the emergence of new and important means by which experiences of domination and exploitation can and have been disrupted; alongside a similar disruption of the attempt, that is central to neoliberal governmentality, to ensure that social problems are experienced as individual and personal failures (on neoliberal techniques of governmentality, with a particular focus on how these interact with notions of crisis and individualised economic responsibility, see Kiersey 2009).

We unpack each of these elements of our analysis below. This draws especially upon our research into episodes of contention as they have occurred in the spheres of work, welfare, education and housing, in both the Spanish and British contexts, throughout the post-2008 period (Bailey et al. 2018a). In keeping with the sentiment of this special issue, moreover, we seek to speak with (rather than on behalf of) the pragmatically prefigurative worker. As such, we attempt (where possible) to illustrate our key observations using the words of our interviewees themselves.

Unresponsive (left) institutions during the crisis: disaffection and the impetus for pragmatic prefigurativism

One of the key sentiments that prompted the emergence and development of a pragmatically prefigurative subjectivity is a feeling of disaffection and disappointment regarding the degree to which key institutions, that might otherwise be expected to represent the demands and interests of those experiencing hardship, have been unable to perform such a role. The rise of the authoritarian neoliberal state (Bruff 2014, Tansel 2017) has left little room for manoeuvre to trade unions or parties of the left.

We witness a particular trend of disaffection with established trade unions, in part in reaction to their apparent unwillingness to respond appropriately to workers' experiences; itself part of a longer term weakening of trade unions and organised labour throughout much of the neoliberal period of c.1980 onwards (Clua-Losada 2010), which coincided with an attempt to adopt a more conciliatory and cooperative relationship with employers (often termed 'social partnership'), in an attempt to retain pertinence despite a dwindling of power resources. This, however, acted to reinforce and to contribute to the process of demobilising trade union members, so that following 2008, as employers moved to adopt a more antagonistic relationship with trade unions, it proved difficult for those trade unions to respond with anything other than capitulation (Huke and Tietje 2014). This disaffection has also meant that when collective action has been associated with the involvement of established trade unions, that the relationship has often been an uneasy one.

In the case of the Lindsey Oil Refinery dispute, for instance, which took place in the UK during 2009, immediately after the onset of the global economic crisis, we saw an early indication of this dissatisfaction towards established trade unions. Thus, whilst the dispute itself was conducted largely by trade unionists who had been elected as representatives for either Unite or GMB; in order to carry out the dispute those trade unionists chose to step down from their official positions. This was largely in order to avoid attempts by the established trade unions to control or hinder the industrial action which they were coordinating. As one of the members of the Lindsey Strike Committee put it, 'the unions wouldn't listen to us, so we set up a group of - well, we were shop stewards of course' (interview with Lindsey Oil Refinery Strike Committee Member, 28 May 2014).

Similarly, in the case of the Panrico workers' strike, which began in 2013 and turned out to be the longest lasting strike in Spain since the restoration of democracy in 1978, one of the initial events that prompted the strike was the decision by the main established trade unions (CCOO and UGT) to agree with the company that they would suspend a planned strike in exchange for a reduction in the number of redundancies (from 1,900 to 745) and which would also include the acceptance of a cut in wages by 18 per cent. As one of the participants of the strike put it, 'Two years ago, they presented a restructuring plan and they took from us everything that we had achieved in 42 years, every right, and the money from our salaries. And who signed it? The trade unions!' (Documentary Panrico, Panpobre, October 2014, authors' translation; quoted in Bailey et al. 2018a: 96).

This tendency for trade unions to show an unwillingness or inability to respond effectively to assaults on workers' conditions of employment was especially badly felt by marginalised employees with casual, short term or insecure contracts. For such workers, established trade unions have been unrepresentative, as the nature of their employment has meant that they have few bargaining resources and are often only based within a particular workplace for relatively short periods of time. As such, trade unions have oftentimes deprioritised this group of workers, on the grounds that they are too difficult to organise. This has therefore prompted further disaffection towards those established trade unions, who have been viewed as uninterested in representing the demands or interests of such precarious workers, and therefore only interested in what we might consider a form of 'exclusive solidarity' that is only directed towards 'core' workers who are already relatively privileged (Dörre 2011). As one trade unionist active in Spain describes, the move towards a more flexible workforce 'has been endorsed by trade union

leaders. […] We have had to hear them say 'indefinite strikes are crazy', 'if laws allow outsourcing, we can't do anything to prevent it', and the idea of the 'lesser evil', which ends up naturalizing precarious workers and making them pay the consequences (Javier, trade union delegate in Cotronic workers' committee in Zaragoza, quoted in Ubico, 2016, authors' translation; quoted in Bailey et al. 2018a: 101).

The awkward relationship between disaffected workers and the trade unions that claimed - but often failed - to adequately represent their interests and demands has also resulted on occasion in the creation or growth of more 'autonomous' or 'independent' trade unions that have sought to provide an institutional form to workers' struggle, when the more mainstream or established trade unions have proved unable to do so. This can be seen in the case of the UK with the launching of a number campaigns focused on migrant workers and those within the so-called 'gig economy', especially through the trade unions, Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), and the United Voices of the World (UVW). Similarly, in Spain, the Movistar strike that emerged in Spain in 2015 (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz 2017), in opposition to a move to cut the pay of workers who had already seen their contracts of employment severely deteriorate as a result of contracting-out, was the product of ongoing workers' assemblies, coordinated by radical grassroots trade unions CoBas (Sindicato de Comisiones de Base), AST (Alternativa Sindical de Trabajadores) and CGT (Confederación General del Trabajo), and which had an antagonistic relationship towards the established trade unions who were considered to be organising activity without proper consultation of the workers themselves. As one worker describes,

> The main trade unions weren't on our side, and that was a huge handicap, it made our struggle much more difficult. We started an indefinite strike without them; while they called a parallel 2-day strike every week for three weeks. If you call for a 2-day strike every week, that means that you dilute the struggle, you lose strength... It was obvious to us that they wanted to break our strike. And some members of UGT and CCOO started saying that our strike was illegal, that everyone had to follow theirs. Then they signed a very ambiguous pact with Telefónica, which was the perfect excuse for the company to avoid initiating negotiations with us. They said: "how can I sign an agreement with you if I just signed one with CCOO and UGT?" That was too much, so we had a massive demonstration, and it was impressive because it was spontaneous, people were

throwing eggs at the headquarters of CCOO in Barcelona and we covered their offices with papers reading "We fight, we negotiate". And from then on, all possible links with the main trade unions were broken" [...] Anyway, many of us are rank-and-file members of these unions and we don't agree with their leaders. We'll carry on, we believe in a grassroots unionism and not in this hierarchical unionism sold to companies and multinationals.

(interview with a worker of one of Movistar's contractors, CoBas member and activist, 5 November 2015, authors' translation).

In addition to the heightened disaffection towards established trade unions, the post-2008 period also saw a rise in the degree to which national governments were perceived as unwilling or unable to help citizens ameliorate their experience of everyday hardship. This also could be seen as a factor in the development of the pragmatically prefigurative worker. For instance, one of the key motivations behind the Vestas factory occupation, which took place in 2009 in opposition to the decision to close a wind turbine factory based in the Isle of Wight, in the UK, was in part prompted by a perceived unwillingness on the part of the government to act to avoid the closure of the plant. For many, this represented a double hypocrisy, given that the Vestas factory was considered to be both a source of jobs for the island and a boost for green energy. As such, the workers, residents and environmentalists involved in the campaign felt that the Labour government could act to support the plant and avoid its closure, and thereby meet two of its declared goals: to tackle unemployment and to promote green growth. The resolute unwillingness of the government to show any such signs of responding to these demands was therefore one of the major factors that prompted the occupation. As one of the participants in the solidarity demonstration put it,

We were hoping that the government would do something about it, given that they were going to have to pay benefits to all of us if we couldn't find work. We felt they could have put pressure on Vestas to handle it a bit differently. […] To draw attention to the fact – and I think there was a lot of sympathy as well really. The government could have put conditions on the money that they gave them [Vestas] – they could have made them give jobs to local people. It just seemed like because they had given them the money they had some responsibility to think about us lot. The general feeling was that we were badly treated because of the fact that they'd got this government grant.

(interview with Vestas ex-employee and participant in the solidarity protests outside the occupation, November 2015; quoted in Bailey et al. 2018a)

Radical prefigurativism as the method of voice and refusal: occupations, assemblies, and negative publicity in the age of social media

It is alongside this growing disaffection that we can understand the decisions by a number of those engaging in disruptive forms of dissent, to adopt what we might consider to be a range of more radical forms of collective action than we might otherwise expect to feature as the mechanisms through which relatively conventional demands for a voice and for material workplace demands could be made. In this sense, therefore, the lack of an adequate response by either trade unions or governments prompted the emergence of grassroots struggles, which came to serve as "both a buffer for the severe impacts of deepening austerity and a platform for grassroots creativity and experimentation with alternatives" (Arampatzi 2018: 51). On a number of occasions, then, we see a connection between those adopting more radical or 'horizontalist' tactics of disruption, with those who feel unrepresented by more conventional channels or institutions. In one of the examples, cited above, for instance, the Vestas occupation witnessed a coalition of un-unionised workers, residents, left activists, and environmentalists, all cooperating to occupy a factory and stage a solidarity camp outside the factory, lasting for several days.

Indeed, the connection between radical and prefigurative forms of politics, with more conventional demands for a voice and material gains, also explains the repeated use of open assemblies as a means by which to reach decisions over how the particular campaign at hand should be conducted. As we saw in the discussion above, the Telefónica strike witnessed the sustained use of workers' assemblies as the means by which the strike activity was coordinated. Likewise, what came to be known as the *marea blanca* - a wave of relatively spontaneous protests led by workers in Spain's healthcare sector - was largely coordinated through organized assemblies with the participation of a large share of the workforce (Bailey et al. 2018a: 150).

One of the key methods of disruption adopted by these more radically organised forms of social mobilisation was the attempt to publicise the negative actions of target firms and the

government; partly as a necessity due to the weakened bargaining position of labour in a context of heightened unemployment and flexibilisation of the labour force, and also due to the ongoing weakness of organised labour to coordinate effective strike action. Thus, whilst strike activity was often used as a means of seeking to disrupt the activity of the employer, at the same time it was also often coupled with the use of negative publicity as a means by which to amplify this disruption. In a sense, therefore, even when strike activity was unable to shut down or prevent the operation of exploitative practices, nevertheless the use of negative publicity as a tactic was still able to provide workers with a degree of bargaining leverage. For instance, the Brixton Living Wage strike of 2014 saw members of BECTU trade union (who were working at the Picturehouse cinema in Brixton) launch a campaign for the London Living Wage that relied on publicising the negative actions of the cinema chain for which they worked. In particular, the arthouse focus and ethical stance taken by the cinema on a number of issues opened up the possibility that the employees could use this as the basis for demanding that they too be treated ethically. As they put it in one of their press releases issued at the launch of the campaign:

> "Recently bought out by Cineworld, the Ritzy is one of the highest grossing Picturehouse cinemas. Pitching themselves as an ethical enterprise, they host the Human Rights Film Festival, sell fair-trade chocolate and support charities, whilst not currently paying a living wage to their staff."
>
> (quoted in Brixton Blog, 2014a)

In addition to, and often as part of the process of, focusing on publicising the negative actions of target firms, pragmatically prefigurative workers have also resorted to the occupation of shops and factories as a means by which to further amplify the demands that have been made. As one of the participants of UK Uncut, which sought to challenge the UK government's commitment to austerity, on the grounds that this was avoidable if large corporations could be made to pay their fare share of tax, put it, 'it soon became clear for Uncut's members that if occupations almost guaranteed coverage, then that was a clear opportunity to draw attention to the damage caused by the cuts and discuss alternative policies that might not otherwise be heard' (Street, 2015: 140). A similar strategy was adopted by the organisation, Boycott Workfare, which sought successfully to target firms that participated in the workfare scheme, which required benefit claimants to work for firms as part of the condition for them receiving welfare payments. As a result, a large number of participating firms withdrew from the scheme,

often citing the negative publicity associated with the scheme as the reason for that withdrawal (Bailey et al. 2018a: 139-46). As one participant in the Boycott Workfare demonstrations put it,

> I think the strategy was a good one – of scaring off participants. And if you look at the review of the scheme produced by the government themselves – they have actually explicitly recognised that getting charities to agree to be part of the scheme and to offer placements was one of the key problems that they faced.
>
> (interview with Johnny Void, Welfare Rights Blogger and
> Campaigner, 17 June 2016; quoted in Bailey et al. 2018a: 145-6)

This focus on negative publicity was also associated with the marked increase in prominence of social media during the post-2010 period. Thus, whilst the role of social media is often noted, and indeed for some commentators it has been overstated, nevertheless it is important not to underestimate its impact upon the capacity for dissenting voices to highlight their grievances as a result of the increased popularity of social media (see also the discussion in Gerbaudo 2015). Indeed, this was often key to many of the actions, as often noted by participants themselves:

> Twitter was still was quite new. And so the fact that me and my friends who had been doing our anti-cuts thing […] and organising people here - being able to see, live, as it was happening, a protest taking place, was new. (interview with UK Uncut participant, 22 September 2015).

Similarly, one of the participants in Boycott Workfare noted how,

> there's quite a substantial and growing claimants' movement that's not just about unemployed people, but also disabled people and people in low paid and part time work who are also going to get caught up in the system; and that already exists and the internet has made that community much stronger by putting everyone in contact with each other and allowing people to get in touch with each other who otherwise wouldn't be able to; and allowing us to publicise it; and also to take action against the companies and charities by using their twitter feed and facebook page to tell people about the bad things that this organisation are doing. (interview with UK Uncut activist, April 2015)

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This combination of radical strategies, social media, and disruptive tactics could also be seen within the Iai@flautas campaign, which was a movement of older activists who sought in part to use their identity as older people to challenge the Spanish government's austerity agenda. In describing their strategy, one of the participants described the group's strategy: 'to use the old methods, the ones we used during our clandestine struggles, to occupy things; and once they are occupied, to use the new technologies and social networks to advertise it' (interview with Iai@flautas activist, June 2014).

Lesson learning and lesson sharing

In addition to viewing the different actions and events which have been undertaken as part of the anti-austerity movements that have emerged during the post-2008 period, we should also note that what we refer to as a pragmatically prefigurative subjectivity has been developed over time, partly through a process of lesson learning and lesson sharing that spans across and between many of these discrete events. Thus, as Wigger describes (2018: 35), anti austerity mobilisations have been characterised by 'collective capacities for memory (reflection on past struggles), analysis (theoretical discussion and debate), communication, knowledge transfer and shared learning and can thereby foster sustained mobilization by creating networks of mutual support and spread alternative practices'. Public square occupations and the occupations of buildings and factories have all enabled a coming together of different disruptive activists, thereby facilitating this process of lesson learning and sharing. Occupations such as the Movistar/Telefónica office at Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona served as meeting points in which workers but also neighbours and activists converged and established mutual solidarities, creating experiences of solidarity and cooperation, which have further fostered community bonds and politically empowered participants (Arampatzi 2018: 56). The following quote from the Panrico conflict gives an example of the way in which new forms of solidarity were established in everyday interactions and the experiences of the struggles:

> "Above us, there is a super mafia. They can do whatever they want with us, with the students, with the pensioners, with all the civil society. We are too calm, too quiet. As a society, we don't know how to respond. This strike is awakening our consciousness. We are now in contact with other social movements, we have been trying to stop evictions with the PAH, we have received food from the neighbours' associations …

Because what's happening in Panrico is an example, an example of what they're planning to do to all of us. (Interview with striking worker, April 2014, authors' translation)"

A quote from one of our interviews with activists from the Movistar strike movement mirrors these experiences:

We learned our lesson during the Sintel struggle. […] We established links with Iai@flautas, with the health sector workers of the marea blanca, the PAH, the IAC [Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya], the pro-Catalan independence radical left movements, etc. They all helped us; we were starting the strike of the century. This unity we showed, with social movements struggling with us inside the Telefónica building [Movistar is a commercial brand owned by the Spanish telecommunications company Telefónica], is crucial when you're trying to open negotiations with such a powerful multinational company. (interview with a worker of one of Movistar's contractors, CoBas member and activist, 5 November 2015, authors' translation)

As a result, moreover, we witness a confluence of social movements and workers struggles, which have combined to produce new strategies of social movement unionism, in which workers' activism and its goals have expanded beyond wage and employment issues (Engelhardt 2017: 696).

The pragmatic and ambivalent return to the institutions

One of the consequences of the pragmatic nature of the turn towards prefigurative strategies, has been the preparedness to re-connect with, and at times re-enter, those institutions which were initially the subject of such disaffection. This can be seen, for instance, with the success of Podemos, Barcelona en Comú, and the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. Indeed, we might consider this 'institutional turn' to be surprising given the antipathy shown by many of these movements to those same institutions in the past, and due to an apparent incompatibility between prefigurative politics and institutions of representative democracy. As Kiersey and Vrasti describe, therefore, this is a somewhat 'curious twist in the tale' (Kiersey and Vrasti, 2016: 88). While prefigurative forms - such as workers' assemblies, and the occupation of foreclosed houses - made it possible to establish new bonds of solidarity, relatedness and integrative interaction, the pragmatic character of these protests and their

rootedness in everyday problems and despair shared by large parts of the populations gave the protests mass appeal. In addition, the pragmatic adoption of prefigurativism ensured that the degree of antipathy towards institutions of representative democracy was more practical than principled; ensuring that once political opportunities opened up they would be taken up. As such, social movements were able to act as a breeding ground for attempts to open up or dissolve the hardened institutions of the state, in order to secure their responsiveness to the demands of the respective populations (Huke 2016, Clua-Losada 2018). This could be seen, for instance, in observing the link between the Movistar strike and Ada Colau's election as a Mayor in Barcelona and her (and others) promises ahead of that election. Thus, as the Movistar occupation was taking place, Colau used the publicity that it generated to promise that public service contracts, under her mayorship, would be linked to an ethical stance by the contracting firm; a process that came to be referred to as the 'Ladders' Pact'. Similarly, participants in the housing movement in London were keen to exploit opportunities that appeared within the National Union of Students, despite the earlier poor relationship between student activists and the NUS, which was largely viewed as ineffective. In the words of one campaigner, 'If you'd told me on all those occasions that literally last week I would be sitting on a press conference panel […] saying 'we look forward to working with the NUS' as they plug our rent strike, I wouldn't have believed you. Essentially we need to take the position that is most strategically advantageous to us at the time. For ages it was apparent that the NUS offered no effective mode of struggle that was in any way a useful use of time and resources. That composition has now changed and we've got at least an onside NEC, who ultimately hold a lot of the power' (interview with Ben Beach, former UCL student occupier and activist with the RHN, 23 August 2016)

At the same time, however, we should also note the cautious nature of this re-connection with formal institutions. Thus, at the same time as Ada Colau was fostering a closer relationship with the striking Movistar workers, nevertheless those workers were skeptical about the degree to which she could uphold her promises:

> it's not easy to find an alternative mechanism to enforce The Ladders Pact, because the European Union treaties limit the use of social clauses in the contracts signed by municipalities. The Lisbon Treaty always favours free market and competition over anything else: the right to strike, social clauses, environmental protection … So, our situation is a bit like Syriza's, isn't it? Even if the Mayor is with us, we don't have that

many options. (interview with a worker of one of Movistar's contractors, CoBas member and activist, 3 November 2015, authors' translation)

Conclusion

In the context of the post-2008 crisis era of neoliberalism, in which we see a hardening of the institutions of the state and a growing inability of existing channels of representation to meet the demands of subordinate interests, we have witnessed the emergence of what we term a pragmatically prefigurative form of disruptive subjectivity. We have sought in this article to expand upon and clarify earlier conceptualisations of this subjectivity, oftentimes in the words of individual activists themselves. In doing so, we highlight the role of disaffection with unresponsive (left) institutions in explaining the emergence of pragmatic prefigurativism, the use of radical methods of disruption as the method through which to attempt to redress the imbalance between capital and labour that has marked much of the neoliberal period, the opportunities for lesson learning and lesson sharing that this has generated, and the subsequent development of a re-connection with those same institutions which were the cause of such initial disaffection (and which arguably marks one of the most important developments within the more formal sphere of politics during the post-2008 period). This, we argue, has witnessed both a politicisation of everyday life and a disruption of established practices within the formal institutions of democracies. Assemblies and occupations have constituted spaces in which new alliances and solidarities have been forged and a convergence across social movements has been able to take places. These new forms of protest have thereby disrupted everyday forms of neoliberal governmentality that pervaded social attitudes, identities and cultural representations. In doing so, they have also enabled a partial repoliticisation of the depoliticised and technocratic forms of socio-economic governance that have characterised both European and national austerity-based policymaking during the European political and economic crisis. Yet, the adoption of relatively conventional demands for voice and redistribution and the pragmatic willingness to re-connect with formal institutions of representation prevented this hybrid type of disrupting agency from entirely securing autonomous forms of social reproduction and constituting strong 'self-reproducing' movements (Bailey et al. 2018b; Federici 2012a). It is in this sense that we witness the emergence of a pragmatically prefigurative subjectivity, central to some of the most interesting forms of disruptive agency that we have witnessed during the so-called 'age of austerity'.

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