



Bieler, Andreas and Jordan, Jamie (2017)
Commodification and 'the commons': the politics of
privatising public water in Greece and Portugal during
the Eurozone Crisis. *European Journal of International
Relations* . ISSN 1460-3713

Access from the University of Nottingham repository:

<http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/45612/1/Water%20Struggles%20in%20Greece%20and%20Portugal%20-%20EJIR%20Final.pdf>

Copyright and reuse:

The Nottingham ePrints service makes this work by researchers of the University of Nottingham available open access under the following conditions.

This article is made available under the University of Nottingham End User licence and may be reused according to the conditions of the licence. For more details see:
http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/end_user_agreement.pdf

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the repository url above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact eprints@nottingham.ac.uk

Commodification and ‘the commons’: The politics of privatising public water in Greece and Portugal during the Eurozone Crisis¹

Abstract

In response to the Eurozone crisis, austerity and restructuring has been imposed on the European Union’s (EU) peripheral member states in order to receive financial bailout loans. In addition to cuts in funding of essential public services, cuts in public sector employment and further liberalisation of labour markets, this has also included pressure towards the privatisation of state assets. And yet, workers have not simply accepted these restructuring pressures. They have organised and fought back against austerity and enforced privatisation. Based on a historical materialist perspective and following a strategy of incorporated comparison, in this paper we will comparatively assess the struggles against enforced water privatisation in Greece and Portugal set against the background of the structuring conditions surrounding the Eurozone crisis.

Keywords

Eurozone crisis, Greece, Portugal, privatisation, resistance, water struggles.

Andreas Bieler is Professor of Political Economy and Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) in the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, UK. He is author of *The Struggle for a Social Europe: Trade Unions and EMU in Times of Global Restructuring* (Manchester University Press, 2006) and (with Adam David Morton) of *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). His personal website is <http://andreasbieler.net> and he maintains a blog on trade unions and global restructuring at <http://andreasbieler.blogspot.co.uk>

Jamie Jordan is an ESRC PhD candidate in the School of Politics and International Relations and a Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ), University of Nottingham, UK. He is a board member of the British and Comparative Political Economy Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association, UK. Details of further publications can be found at his Academia.edu page <https://nottingham.academia.edu/JamieJordan>.

¹ We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers, the editors of the *European Journal of International Relations* and Emanuele Lobina for their constructive comments on earlier drafts.

Introduction

In response to the Eurozone crisis, austerity and restructuring was imposed on the European Union's (EU) peripheral member states in order to receive financial bailout loans. In addition to spending cuts for public services, cuts in public sector employment, and the undermining of industrial relations and trade union rights through enforced cuts in minimum wages and a liberalisation of labour markets, these agreements have also included pressure to privatise a range of state owned enterprises (SOEs) (Bieler and Jordan 2015). In short, the burden of adjustment for 'exiting' the Eurozone crisis has disproportionately fallen upon the shoulders of workers. However, despite the ever present social and economic crises that have plagued the political economies of Europe's periphery, workers have continued to resist the conditions of the memorandums of understanding (MoUs). This article will comparatively analyse struggles surrounding the push to privatise public water and sanitation services in Greece and Portugal, a particular instance of the conditionality included within the multiple MoUs. In order to highlight the deeply politicised nature underpinning imposed restructuring, our comparative analysis of these struggles is incorporated within a broader understanding of struggles over the prospective expansion and deepening of capitalist discipline and domination across Greece's and Portugal's political economies.

In the next section, we develop a historical materialist conceptual framework, through which the struggles over the possible privatisation of water and sanitation can be analysed within the broader economic-political developments. Then, the article moves to analyse the structured agency of capital in pushing for privatisation in Greece and Portugal. In the third section, the article turns to analyse resistance, highlighting how labour has not only put forward an adamant 'no' to the prospect of privatisation, but has also explored the possibility of providing this essential public service based upon principles of 'the commons'.

Politicising privatisation: a historical materialist framework

Since 2010 public debate has focused on the technocratic credentials of the conditionality of privatisation in assisting the likes of Greece and Portugal to ‘exit’ the Eurozone crisis (Brauninger 2013, 2015; [The Guardian](#) 24 July 2015; [The Guardian](#) 25 December 2012). More critical elements of this debate point to the fact that the prospective sale proceeds from, and the savings to government finances following, privatisation are generally far too minimal to have any real effect on the trajectory of public debt and deficit reduction (Jubilee Debt Campaign 2016). However, this is where even critical analysis tends to end, remaining on the terrain of debating the virtues or sins of privatisation as a technocratic pursuit of a particular public policy outcome (Vila and Peters 2016: 11-14). This debate leads to a systemically depoliticised account of the policy response to the Eurozone crisis. A number of academics including colleagues from the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) at Greenwich University have already successfully demonstrated that it is economic interests by large TNCs at the expense of public sector workers, which underlie technocratic discussions about how to manage water (e.g. Goldman 2007, Hall and Lobina 2012a, Lobina 2014; Swyngedouw 2005). In this article, we will focus on developing a conceptual framework, which is able to contribute further to the analysis of the deeply politicised nature of struggles around MoU conditionality and the privatisation of water and sanitation services in Greece and Portugal.

Social movements and civil society more generally have been widely studied from liberal approaches, especially in relation to globalisation and the related increase in inequality. Nevertheless, there are a number of problems involved in these analyses. First, civil society is automatically understood as a progressive force against exploitation, potentially able to re-establish control over market forces at the global level (e.g. Held and McGrew 2002: 135-6; Held et al. 1999: 449-52). Karl Polanyi (1957) and his notion of a

double movement in which a period of laissez-faire is followed by a period of regulation is often invoked in these studies. These analyses, however, overlook that civil society also includes pro-globalisation forces such as business associations, which are often a driving force behind global restructuring. As a result, automatically assuming civil society as an agent of progressive resistance ‘may actually divert our attention from the very power relations that we would seek to explore and question’ (Amoore and Langley 2004: 99). Hence, in this article civil society is understood in a Gramscian sense, representing a terrain of struggle between different social class forces over the dominant economic and political order (Buttigieg 2005: 38). Second, liberal analyses overlook the crucial importance of the capitalist social relations of production around the private ownership of the means of production and wage labour. As a result, different organisations have different levels of structural power available, with business organisations at a time of transnational production networks being more powerful than national trade unions, for example (Bieler 2011: 165-70). In other words, civil society is not a level playing field. It ‘is not some kind of benign or neutral zone where different elements of society operate and compete freely and on equal terms, regardless of who holds a predominance of power in government’ (Buttigieg 1995: 27). Furthermore, by neglecting the social relations of production, liberal approaches overlook in their emphasis on re-distribution of wealth that it is the hidden abode of production, where exploitation takes place (Barker 2013: 44). Emanuele Lobina et al. in their focus on outcomes of water struggles utilise a policy networks approach in order to go beyond the dichotomy of agency and structure. ‘In fact, networks do not exist in a vacuum and both their origin and evolution are a result of the interdependence between agency and structure’ (Lobina et al. 2011: 20). Elsewhere, he develops a sophisticated approach around agency and institutional governance structures for the analysis of water struggles, which ‘promises to be more exhaustive than one based on agency as its sole interpretive key’

(Lobina 2012: 170). Nevertheless, he too overlooks the sphere of production, underpinning institutional governance structures, where exploitation takes place and different levels of structural power are generated.

In order to adequately politicise our analysis of the MoU conditionality to privatise water and sanitation in Greece and Portugal we develop a historical materialist conceptual framework. This will allow us to capture different levels of structural power available to social class forces and provide us with the means of understanding these processes as part of wider struggles over neo-liberal forms of capitalist restructuring. Importantly, in addition to intensifying the exploitation of living labour power at sites of production, the prospect of privatising these public services will expand capitalist discipline by enclosing wider elements of the social and natural substratum, deepening exploitation of ‘social reproduction in its entirety’ (van der Pijl 1998: 36). Karl Marx (cited in van der Pijl 1998: 36) conceptualised this as ‘real subordination’, as even away from the site of economic production labour is subjected to commodification in areas which are vital to social reproduction. Conceptually, this article places the social relations of production as the starting-point of analysis and a focus on class struggle as the main explanatory device. In line with Harry Cleaver’s position, the analysis to follow will emphasise the role of (class) agency in the struggle for and against the privatisation of public water and sanitation services. ‘The “laws of motion” of capitalist society are the direct product of class struggle and denote only what capital has had the strength to impose, given the rising power of the working class’ (Cleaver 2000: 88).

While we agree with such an importance being attached to agency and thus open-ended class struggle, this does not imply that the structural setting of class agency should not be examined. As Marx (1852/1984: 10) himself stated, ‘Men [*sic*] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the

past.’ Of course, there is a tendential link between the objective class position of social forces and the particular strategies they adopt, but this is determining only in the first instance (Hall 1996: 44). In other words, within each given structural setting, agents are not completely free in their actions, but they nonetheless still have a range of strategies at their disposal, from which they can choose how to go forward (Bieler and Morton forthcoming: Chapter 2). Hence, workers always have possibilities to resist capitalist restructuring as presented in the case of water and sanitation privatisation in Greece and Portugal.

Historical materialist analyses are often accused of overlooking the importance of other dimensions such as gender and ethnicity, when focusing on class struggle. And indeed, because of a focus on class and workers defined narrowly, too often analysis limits itself to trade unions, understood as the institutional expression of the working class (Barker 2013: 52). Harry Cleaver allows us to address this problem. When reflecting on the increasing number of struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s, Cleaver asserts that ‘the reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes ...; the working class had to be redefined to include nonfactory analysis’ (Cleaver 2000: 70). Analysing what he called the ‘social factory’ allowed Cleaver to take into account all the other forms of unwaged activities including child rearing and education which are necessary for the reproduction of capital, but take place outside the workplace. The struggles over water privatisation are precisely an issue which is of importance across the whole social factory. Privatising water, transforming water into a commodity to make profit, clearly affects the workplace and generally results in lower wages and deteriorating working conditions for workers employed in the sector. ‘Public sector workers tend to have higher protection through collective bargaining coverage and are less affected by precarious work’ (Jakob and Sanchez 2015: 76). At the same time, however, it also goes beyond concerns related directly to the workplace and affects every worker as well

as the wider community in their lives outside work, considering how crucial access to safe drinking water and sanitation is in daily life. Thus, the struggle against the commodification of water as a tradable, economic good is an instance of class struggle against the commodification of the sphere of social reproduction. Understanding this struggle consequently involves an assessment of trade unions as well as social movements.

Our comparative analysis of Greece and Portugal does not follow a line of ‘methodological nationalism’, which understands the sociological effect of national level developments as sealed-off from each other and the wider structural setting (Gore 1996: 80-82) or ‘that would examine particular social movements according to standard criteria of process, goals, and outcomes’ (McMichael 2010: 5). Instead, we pursue a strategy of an ‘incorporated comparison’, which ensures that ‘comparison becomes an “internal” rather than an “external” (formal) feature of inquiry’ (McMichael 1990: 389). This approach relates particular manifestations of structured social struggle as ‘components of a broader, world-historical process or conjuncture’ (McMichael 1990: 389; McMichael 2000: 671). Following the methodological strategy of an incorporated comparison we will demonstrate how the proposed sale of public water and sanitation services is not simply a set of nationally tailored policies linked to bailout conditionality. This specific policy response to the Eurozone crisis is most importantly a spatial and temporal component of a neoliberal regime of privatisation that is deepening the commodification of social reproduction as transnational capital, in particular, seeks new opportunities for investment and profit-making in Greece and Portugal. Concomitantly, incorporating the comparison of resistance to privatisation demonstrates that whilst struggles in Greece and Portugal have their own particular ‘meaning, form, and dynamics’, both resist the same ‘exclusionary force of multi-faceted forms of neo-liberal development’ which are being proposed (McMichael 2010: 5). In short, whilst we are comparing specific struggles over national trajectories of development, we are at all times

embedding and internally relating these within the wider struggles contesting the possible privatisation of essential public services as part of the ‘historically integrated process’ of global capitalist restructuring (Morton 2013: 245).

Methodologically, the empirical argument is partly based on a set of 30 semi-structured interviews with Greek and Portuguese water activists. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. Hence, in the bibliography they are listed by function but not by name. Interviews have the advantage of providing an insight into the internal decision-making process of an organisation in contrast to policy documents, which only state the outcome of a debate. The validity of information was cross-checked through the information from other interviews as well as the consultation of further primary and secondary printed sources.

Structure and agency in the push for privatising Greek and Portuguese water and sanitation services

Privatisation and the structuring conditions in the global political economy

Due to the way of how the capitalist social relations of production are organised around wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production, capitalism is characterised by a set of key structuring conditions (Bieler 2014: 116-19). First, both labour and capital have to reproduce themselves through the market. While workers compete with each other to sell their labour-power ‘freely’, capitalists are in constant competition with each other over profitability and market share. Hence, capitalism is characterized by a constant drive towards further innovation in order to outcompete one’s competitors. However, while capitalism is very dynamic it is also crisis prone, a second structuring condition. The more goods are produced and the more profits are generated, looking for further profitable investment opportunities, the more difficult it becomes to bring together excess labour and excess capital

in a fruitful way, a ‘state of overaccumulation’ in David Harvey’s understanding (Harvey 1985: 132). Third, Rosa Luxemburg had already pointed to ‘the inherent contradiction between the unlimited expansive capacity of the productive forces and the limited expansive capacity of social consumption under conditions of capitalist distribution’ (Luxemburg 1913/2003: 323). Hence, capitalism constantly has to expand outward and incorporate new, non-capitalist space in order to overcome crises. This outward expansion can be geographical in that new areas are integrated or re-integrated along new lines into capitalism or it can be inward expansion in that de-commodified areas are re-commodified for profit making.

It is in relation to the third structuring condition that the privatisation of public services becomes important. At times when the global economy is in crisis and other investment opportunities have dried up, investing in service provision, ultimately guaranteed by the state, promises sustainable and usually subsidised profits (Fattori 2013: 378). Since the 1990s the privatisation of public assets, referred to by Harvey as ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2003), has created a global infrastructure market providing capital with new profitable investment opportunities often through so-called Public Private Partnerships (PPP). Private infrastructure investment, writes Dexter Whitfield, ‘is referred to as a “new asset class”, which refers to it becoming a profitable source of private investment with a range of competing investment funds providing good returns relative to other types of investment’ (Whitfield 2010: 91). As recent reports confirm, international banks and investment institutions have identified water as an excellent, profitable investment opportunity. ‘A disturbing trend in the water sector is accelerating worldwide. The new “water barons” – the Wall Street banks and elitist multibillionaires – are buying up water all over the world at unprecedented pace’ (Yang, 2012). Slogans such as ‘water is the petroleum for the next century’ (Goldman Sachs) or ‘the water market will soon eclipse oil, agriculture, and precious metals’ (Citigroup) drive this new investment fever. As confirmed by Shiney

Varghese, ‘in areas ranging from the Ogallala aquifer to the Great Lakes in North America, water has been referred to as liquid gold’ (Varghese 2013). Ultimately, ‘from the perspective of the financial sector, investing in water is expected to be profitable because of growing demand and constant or diminishing supply which will put upward pressure on the price’ (Bayliss 2014: 301).

The push for privatisation in Greece and Portugal during the Eurozone crisis has taken place against the background of varied economic circumstances following the global financial crisis. Between 2008 and 2015, Greece’s gross domestic product cumulatively fell by 29.6 per cent (OECD 2017). An article in the *Financial Times* puts this into astonishing context when it states that ‘the Greek economy had the largest contraction of any advanced economy since 1950’ ([FT](#), 19 June 2015). Set alongside this, Portugal’s cumulative loss of 5.3 per cent does not seem like the significant figure that it still is (OECD 2017). The severity of economic downturn in Greece has created a more explicit push towards, and oversight of, the privatisation of public water and sanitation services. In Portugal, whilst the push towards privatisation has been sustained (Interview 29), a less direct set of interventions initially cohered. In short, following the approach of an incorporated comparison, the contexts in Greece and Portugal do exhibit particular ‘meaning, form, and dynamics’ that it is important to be sensitive to when analysing the ‘historically integrated’ Eurozone crisis and the response to it. The case for the privatisation of water follows neo-liberal lines of argument. ‘Proponents of privatization assert that private companies will perform better: they will be more efficient, provide more finance, and mobilize higher-quality expertise than their government counterparts’ (Bakker 2010: 2). For instance, the privatisation of Greek SOEs was proposed to ensure a reduction in ‘subsidies, other transfers or state guarantees’, whilst also leading to ‘an increase in efficiency of the companies and by extension in the competitiveness of the economy as a whole’ (European Commission 2011: 33). This

argument is combined with a general mistrust of the state, considered to be ‘unable to deliver the infrastructure needs of its people, due to inefficiency and corruption’ (Robbins 2003: 1074; see also Interview 3).

Yet, private water companies’ service record is poor. The long-term costs for communities are high, including ‘soaring tariffs, cuts on investments, poor service quality, and the failure of private water corporations to contribute investment finance’ (Lobina 2014: 10). Hence, rather than being about efficiency and universal access of water, this discourse is primarily attempting to delegitimise the role of the state in delivering public services, increasing the pressure for further accumulation through the privatisation of public assets (Swyngedouw 2005: 87). Interestingly, the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company (EYDAP) and the water company of Thessaloniki (EYATH), both earmarked for privatisation, have historically been profitable including the holding of significant cash surpluses, whilst also running efficient and high quality services for consumers (Interview 10). Multinationals Observatory reports that in 2012 EYDAP posted ‘a net annual profit of €62 million out of a €353 million turnover.’ Additionally, it holds €43 million in cash reserves, €881 in equity, and has €1.2 billion owed to the company by a variety of sources, including the Greek government, and various agencies and businesses. In the case of EYATH there is a similar picture. In 2013 the company posted a profit of €18 million from a turnover of €77 million, with €33 million in cash reserves and €135 million in equity ([Multinationals Observatory](#), 28 March 2014). This indicates the deeply politicised nature of the proposed capitalist restructuring of privatisation, as these Greek public companies already have a strong record of performance in delivering water and sanitation services.

The agency of transnational capital in the privatisation of Greek and Portuguese water and sanitation

Importantly, however, the pressure for water privatisation must not be exclusively understood as resulting from capitalism's structuring condition of outward expansion. Class agency is closely involved. Powerful economic interests are behind the push for privatisation. Globally, it was a network around the World Bank, which had pushed for water privatisation especially in the Global South during the 1990s and early 2000s (Goldman 2007: 790). Within the EU, on the basis of their structural power, large European TNCs have lobbied strongly for neo-liberal restructuring. The European Services Forum (ESF) has been closely involved in advising the Commission on further liberalisation and privatisation of the public sector. 'In 2012, the Commission accepted just one meeting with trade unions on the issue of services trade. In contrast, it met more than 20 times with the ESF' (Corporate Europe Observatory 2013: 5). Water management has developed into big business with powerful transnational corporations controlling most of the privatised operations. Since the early 20th century, with the exception of France water companies had been mainly in public hands. Against the background of neo-liberalism emerging as the new economic consensus, privatisation became more widespread in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. 'The biggest national change came in the UK in 1989, when the Thatcher government privatised water throughout England and Wales, against strong public opposition, by floating the 10 regional companies on the stock exchange' (Hall and Lobina 2012b: 124). The expansion of privatisation during the 1990s especially in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War and in Latin America as well as developing countries in Africa was carried out by this small group of French and British private water companies (Hall and Lobina 2009: 81) and backed up by the conditionality of the IMF's and World Bank's structural adjustment programmes.

During the 2000s, the shift towards privation of water services, mentioned above, started to stall. The private French and English companies withdrew from their international engagements and here in particular from developing countries. In view of insufficient profitability and related criticism by their share-holders, the companies' inability to deliver on their promises and mounting resistance movements, these companies started to look elsewhere for business (Hall and Lobina 2009: 84-8). The French companies Suez and Veolia 'have instead refocused on engineering work, such as water and wastewater treatment plants and desalination plants, water and sanitation services for industrial companies, and consultancy contracts. Like the companies' other main business, waste management, these are areas of reliably growing demand' (Hall and Lobina 2012b: 132). English private companies, on the other hand, have increasingly focused on profits via financialisation. In this process, investors bought the water companies 'in large part using debt finance, which was then added to the debts of the company (rather than staying with the investors)' (Bayliss 2017: 387). Moreover, in order to provide investment opportunities satisfying the interest in water by international banks and investment institutions mentioned above, 'financial innovation has led to the launch of at least four major water-focused exchange traded funds (ETFs) since 2005' (Bayliss 2014: 298). This securitisation of water companies is based on household water bills, which have been repackaged and sold on via offshore jurisdictions, linking water consumers to global financial markets.

Few of the 15 million Thames Water customers, for example, will have any idea that paying their water bill connects them to one of the largest Australian investment banks via a portfolio of European infrastructure funds. They are, however, beholden to these investors. Average household bills have increased by 40 per cent in real terms since privatisation. Over the 2010-15 price review period, nearly 27 per cent of

the average customer bill of £360 was paid for “return on capital” (Bayliss 2017: 388).

These developments do not, however, imply that private companies would no longer be interested in taking over water services, provided they are in developed countries with a secure income stream, as the examples of Greece and Portugal in the Eurozone crisis demonstrate.

Unsurprisingly, it has been large European TNCs that have been at the forefront of the bidding process for purchasing state owned water companies in Greece and Portugal ([Multinationals Observatory](#), 28 March 2014; Interview 10). When the tendering process for the state owned water and sanitation company of Thessaloniki EYATH started in early 2013, two consortia were bidding. This included Suez Environment, which was looking to purchase a further 51 per cent of shares in addition to its current 5 per cent of stock, ‘in association with the Greek construction firm EllAktor, controlled by George Bobolas’ ([Multinationals Observatory](#), 28 March 2014). As mentioned above, the drive towards privatising water and sanitation in Portugal has not been as clear during the crisis. However, it gathered momentum towards the end of the official programme period, arguably due to the worse than expected economic recovery. The eleventh and final review of Portugal’s MoU, conducted in spring 2014, stated that

instead of selling the [national holding] company [Aguas de Portugal (AdP)] as a whole it was agreed to first restructure the water and waste branches before selling the waste management holding (EGF) and consider opening up water activities to private capital and management (European Commission 2014: 29).

These proposals, like in the case of Greece, have drawn the attention of transnational capital. The sale of Empresa Geral do Fomento (EGF), which supervises the operation of multi-municipal companies serving 60 per cent of the population (Teles 2015: 36) and is a sub-holding company of AdP, was completed in September 2014. It was awarded to the SUMA consortium, led by Mota-Engil², which now holds a 95 per cent stake in the company ([Reuters](#), 18 September 2014). Beyond the sale of EGF the previous Portuguese coalition government claimed that it had no intention of further privatising public water services (Interview 28). Instead, it argued, the planned restructuring of AdP was solely concerned with tariff structures, making them more equitable between coastal and in-land locations (Teles 2015: 36). As a Deputy of the Portuguese parliament's Committee on Economics, Innovation and Public Works from the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD) put it: 'so it is a question of social equality. Of the price of water. Not to privatisation of the system' (Interview 28). However, this ignores that the main reason EGF was explicitly part of the MoU privatisation programme was because 'all regional corporations belonging to EGF [were] financially viable' (Teles 2015: 37), unlike many of the municipal water companies held by AdP. EGF was therefore already attractive for potential investors.³ In light of this experience Nuno Teles states that 'the privatisation of the public holding company seems to be just a matter of time, depending on the reorganisation of municipal bulk water companies held by AdP' (2015: 37; see also Rodrigues and Reis 2012: 201; Interviews 20, 22).

² A Portuguese-based TNC, 'integrated among the top 100 largest construction companies worldwide and present in three continents and with over 25,000 employees in a total of 22 countries' (see, <http://en.mota-engil.pt/Institucional/Historia>; accessed 23/07/2017).

³ This is evidenced by the fact that the winning bid was 50 per cent higher than the average valuation of the company ([Reuters](#), 18 September 2014).

A shift towards 'authoritarian neo-liberalism' in Greek and Portuguese privatisation

Although those who support neo-liberal policies advocate a retreat of the state from the market, in reality governments at national as well as European levels are closely involved in the processes of privatisation. 'Without the various state levels paving the way and imposing conditions that guarantee privatization and then secure profitable operation afterwards, this accumulation by dispossession could not possibly take place' (Swyngedouw 2005: 89). At the supranational, EU form of state level, water privatisation has been pushed especially vis-à-vis Greece and Portugal through the MoUs linked to bailout agreements (EPSU 2012: 1; Hall and Lobina 2012a: 28). These processes are, of course, contested – see the next section – and, thus, unsurprisingly the imposition of restructuring as a result of the crisis has come hand in hand with an increasing move towards 'authoritarian neo-liberalism'. Authoritarianism here does not refer to an order imposed by non-democratic means and brute force. Rather, it is 'the reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent' (Bruff 2014: 115). This is a reconfiguration which is generally passed by national parliaments within political systems of representative democracy and be it by narrow majorities. It 'reinforces and increasingly relies upon 1) coercive state practices that discipline, marginalise and criminalise oppositional social forces and 2) the judicial and administrative state apparatuses which limit the avenues in which neoliberal policies can be challenged' (Tansel 2017: 2). When analysing this shift towards authoritarian neoliberalism, through an incorporated comparison approach, it is evident that the institutional restructuring undertaken to support processes of privatisation exhibits a strong degree of temporal discontinuity, as novel forms of economic governance are implemented across the Eurozone at a supranational level, and internalised within national forms of state.

In Greece, the shift towards practices of authoritarian neo-liberalism has been reinforced throughout the three MoUs signed between various governments and the troika (European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF)). By the fourth review of the first agreement in spring 2011, and under increasing ‘guidance’ from the troika, the privatisation programme aimed at generating a staggering €50 billion worth of revenue. It was expected that there would be an increase in revenues from the initial aim of €3 billion by the end of 2013 to a total of €22 billion, then going onto reaching the €50 billion target by 2015 (European Commission 2011: 33). Included in the plan was an expected share sale of ‘at least 40 per cent’ of EYATH by Q3 of 2011 and 27.3 per cent of EYDAP by Q2 of 2012. A further round of share sales was expected to be completed by Q4 of 2012 in the case of EYATH and Q4 of 2013 for EYDAP (see European Commission 2011: 32, ‘Table 14: Privatisation Plan’). Eventually, a parliamentary vote in late 2012 authorised the full sale of both companies ([Multinationals Observatory](#), 28 March 2014). The first review of the initial MoU outlined expectations that it would be the government itself, primarily the Ministry of Finance, which would be responsible for devising and delivering the detailed privatisation programme (European Commission 2010: 53-54). However, the fourth review stated that there is a need to set up a ‘fund to accelerate privatisation’ (European Commission 2011: 30-31). This was justified on the grounds that ‘experience shows that large privatisation plans are more effective when a single entity is in the lead of the whole process and takes full ownership of the assets to be privatised’ (European Commission 2011: 30). On 1 July 2011 such an entity was created through the implementation of law ‘L.3986/2011.’ Called the *Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund* (HDADF, or otherwise known colloquially as TAIPED), its ‘mission’ is ‘to restrict governmental intervention in the privatisation process’, with the Fund’s Board having ‘absolute authority on privatisation decisions’, with ‘most of the assets contained in the medium-term plan [the privatisation

programme detailed above] hav[ing] been transferred to the Fund' including EYDAP and EYATH (original statement of HDADF, <http://www.hradf.com/en/fund>; accessed 1 July 2014). As Panagiotis Sotiris (2017: 178) sums up, 'each round of evaluation was a hard negotiation with the representatives of the government usually ending up with offering new concessions to the Troika.'

In Portugal too, practices of authoritarian neo-liberalism can be observed in the restructuring of public services. Justified on the grounds of unsustainable debt levels, 'debt brakes' have been introduced at the municipal level. These have then been enforced through the conditionality of the MoU in line with the new forms of European Economic Governance including the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance, also referred to as Fiscal Compact, the so-called 'six pack' of EU laws on European Economic Governance of November 2011 and the 'two pack' on the strengthening of economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States of May 2013 (Bieler and Erne 2014: 159-61). The introduction of this legislation has put further pressure on restructuring or privatising municipal level services in order to meet the quantitative targets set out in the MoU. In order to ensure compliance with this budget conditionality, 'all three levels of government are subject to annual debt limits.' At a municipal level, legislation introduced limits the 'public debt of each municipality and autonomous region to a maximum of 150 per cent of their average net current revenues during the preceding three years.' If a municipality exceeds these limits it has to reduce the difference by at least 10 per cent. Importantly, these laws 'include a no-bailout clause for regional and local jurisdictions' (Burret and Schnellenbach 2013: 45). Hence, the Portuguese central government is not allowed to assume the liabilities of municipalities, placing a significant burden on local governments to restructure and, at the same time, disempowering democratically elected local councillors to a significant extent. In short, these novel forms of technocratic economic governance are creating a strong pressure

to restructure Portugal's political economy, including the possibility of privatising public services. However, considering Portugal's less severe economic crisis, there was not the same set of explicit measures outlined in its MoU as there has been in Greece's previous and ongoing programmes.

And yet, it is important to emphasise that attempts to restructure political economies and deepen exploitation are always contested. In the next section, we will analyse the strategies of class resistance in Greece and Portugal against these restructuring pressures.

Greek and Portuguese labour in the struggle *against* water and sanitation privatisation and *for* a common(s) alternative

In both countries water and sanitation services have been one of the most important areas of struggle when contesting the austerity-laden policy response of the Eurozone crisis, alongside other vital areas of social reproduction, including healthcare, education and pension reform (Interview 22 and 26). There has been a clear perception that suffering defeat in the area of water and sanitation services could create wider ramifications for activists struggling against austerity and restructuring in other sectors. Even in Portugal, where there has been a less explicit push for privatisation until later in the bailout programme, the water and sanitation sector has been a key battleground in the struggle against austerity. Portuguese activists have continued to place the issue central to struggles as the sector has undergone a significant commercial restructuring, increasing the attractiveness for private investment in the future (Interview 26). Due to their prominence within the movement against privatisation, the following analysis focuses on the struggles within large urban centres, such as Athens and Thessaloniki in Greece, and Lisbon in Portugal.

The agents of resistance against the privatisation of public water and sanitation

Alongside resisting the restructuring of labour markets and industrial relations, trade union activists in Greece have also been at the forefront of struggles against water and sanitation privatisation. Prominent Greek trade unions involved in struggles include the Water Workers' Unions of Athens and Thessaloniki (OME-EYDAP/OME-EYATH), and the Athens/Thessaloniki Federations of Unions (EKA/EKTH, also known as Labour Centres). However, active participation across trade union confederations has not always been forthcoming, mainly due to internal political divisions as a result of institutionalised party affiliations within most Greek public sector unions (Ioannou 2000; Interviews 4, 16). Thus, as the government of the day changed so did the positions of support and opposition for various policies, including privatisation. With the continuation of clientelistic practices in the face of a severe socio-economic crisis, this has perpetuated a history of suspicious relations with wider society (Afonso et al. 2015; see also Interviews 6 and 7). It is claimed that there is a perception amongst civil society that prominent unionists are simply positioning themselves for appointments within the company, or potentially even a political career (Interview 2 and 5).

The ongoing suspicion of trade union confederations has meant that many individual activists of the Athens and Thessaloniki water company unions have developed novel political practices in an attempt to address the disconnection between their institutionalised organisation and wider civil society. In this process their union practice has become 'effectively reborn', including the autonomy of their union activities from all mainstream political parties (Interviews 4, 9, 10, 16, 17). This is claimed to be central to a process of emancipating union activists 'from the hierarchies, dependencies and pervasive forms of domination associated with a state operating through clientelism' (Wainwright 2014: 27). Equally important, union activists have shifted their political practice towards so-called

‘social movement unionism’ (Krestos 2011). This is a form of unionism that attempts to integrate workers, trade unions and the wider labour movement into broader coalitions for social and economic justice. For members of OME-EYDAP, this has been through the creation of SEKES (‘participatory unity movement’), whilst OME-EYATH has been central to the establishment of a city-based umbrella social movement organisation SOS te to NERO (‘Save Our Water’). This approach has been the central factor in (re-)building reciprocal relationships of solidarity across civil society (Interviews 4, 9, 10, 17) and allowed union activists to demonstrate that they are attuned to the importance of struggling for public water as an issue of social reproduction, not simply as workers ‘who are afraid of losing our jobs’ (Interview 10). The other prominent activists involved in resisting the privatisation of public water and sanitation have been social movements emerging from the ‘*indignados*’ squares movement (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulos 2013). The emergence of a wider politically active civil society in Greece has assisted in breaking the historical dominance of political parties. Prominent activists include the union activists discussed above, as well as the likes of Save Greek Water (Athens) and Initiative 136 (Thessaloniki). The success of developing a united front against the privatisation of public water and sanitation in Thessaloniki meant that in April 2013 ‘SOS te to NERO’ was consolidated to act as an overarching social movement organisation that coordinates the activities of all its constituent elements (Interview 10). These included social economy activists (Interviews 8, 11), academics (Interview 12), Mayors, union members (across different sectors) (Interviews 9, 10), environmentalist organisations (including the Green Party, Interview 14), and those who would simply identify themselves as ‘ordinary citizens’.

In Portugal, trade unions have also been at the forefront of resisting water and sanitation privatisation. However, there has not been an equivalent shift in the practices or alliances formed in these struggles due to the greater political coherence in how the trade

union movement is institutionalised compared with Greece. Thanks to a unified political position – with the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) leadership being closely aligned to the Communist Party (PCP) (Costa 2012) – and no networks of clientelism to maintain, Portuguese trade union activists have not been presented with an internally generated dispute concerning the privatisation of water and sanitation. In turn, there has been no perception that novel forms of mobilisation and alliance need to be pursued, such as ‘social movement unionism’, in order to successfully struggle against privatisation. Whilst there has been the creation of an umbrella body, Agua de Todos (‘Water for All’) – drawing together a wide network of groups, including other public sector unions (particularly teachers), unions of municipalities, and farmers associations (see, <http://www.aguadetodos.com/>) – there is still a continued focus on the National Union of Workers of Local and Regional Administration, Public Companies, Concessionaries, and Related Companies (STAL), affiliated to the CGTP, leading the struggle as the dominant institutional expression of the labour movement related to this sector (Interviews 26). In comparison, the creation of SOSte to NERO in Thessaloniki has led to a much greater horizontal devolution of organisational formation and practices, not privileging the role of OME-EYATH. As a result of the missing internal dispute within the Portuguese trade union movement, a deeper questioning of the historical relationship between trade unions and social movements has not taken place. Instead, an arms-length relationship has continued between these two organisational forms, with reciprocal suspicion shaping their interaction (Interviews 21, 24, 27, 29). Trade union leaders argue that social movements approach struggles over possible forms of restructuring as a ‘100 metre race’, when instead they should be prepared for a ‘marathon’ (Interview 30; see also Interviews 21, 22). On the other hand, social movement activists argue ‘that union bureaucratic structures have been incorporated within state structures for too long, and therefore are too slow and ineffective to react when

required by circumstances’ (Clua-Losada and Horn 2014: 218). This has led to some sections of the broader labour movement ‘more forcefully arguing for a different role for unions, one which is less concerned with bureaucratic state-union relationships and instead is more willing to resist when required’ (Clua-Losada and Horn 2014: 218; Interview 24).

Unsurprisingly, whilst STAL activists have clearly demonstrated a generalised concern over the ability of labour to socially reproduce itself – beyond simply sectoral concerns over pay and conditions – this has not been aligned with political practices that allow for a widening of the organisational basis of the national water movement. This is not simply isolated to the issue of public water or to STAL as a single federation, but is a more generalised response from the union movement in Portugal. Unlike the situation in Greece, there is greater trust between Portuguese trade unions and political parties, particularly between STAL/CGTP and the Communist Party, with trade union-party relations not having become discredited during the crisis. Nevertheless, the lack of co-operation between trade unions and social movements has had a negative impact on trade unions’ ability to influence policy-making. A former President of CGTP, for example, argued that ‘CGTP should have cared more as a trade union...with building bridges towards other social movements’ (Interview 23). Achieving this, he claimed, would ‘revitalise the social and political within the trade union movement’ (Interview 23). This conclusion is supported by Teles, who points out that such ‘union-centric’ struggles are an important factor in explaining why union impact has been ‘feeble in terms of popular mobilisation and public debate [against water privatisation], concentrating on municipalities that have Communist Party mayors’ (2015: 36), i.e. reflecting the greater trust between the institutionalised trade union movement (particularly CGTP) and political parties (particularly the PCP). In other words, struggles in Portugal are more defensive in the resistance to water privatisation, focusing on the retention of institutional gains that were made during the Revolutionary period and are now considered

to be under systematic attack (Interview 30). What is clear from this comparison is that when analysing struggles surrounding water privatisation we need to be sensitive to particular meanings, forms, and dynamics, and here the links between political parties and the labour movement. At the same time, we need to appreciate the way in which both cases of resistance are faced with the same exclusionary force of multi-faceted forms of neo-liberal development. In short, whilst we are comparing specific moments of struggle over the possible privatisation of public water, we are also relating this dynamic to the historically integrated process of global capitalist restructuring that has once again gathered momentum during the Eurozone crisis.

Resisting the privatisation of public water and sanitation

Participants in the struggle against the privatisation of water and sanitation in Greece and Portugal emphasised the importance of this struggle being part of a wider European movement. Thus, both the Greek and Portuguese movements participated in the first European Citizens' Initiative 'Water and Sanitation are a Human Right'. This initiative was coordinated by the Federation of European Public Service Unions (EPSU) together with the European Water Movement (EWM) (Interviews 10, 14, 26; Bieler 2017). As a member of Save Greek Water succinctly outlines,

We have to understand who are the people who push for this? The big multinationals of water at European level, like Suez and the...water lobby in the private sector. And how do they do it, through the Commission, fine. So let's try to do something about that (Interview 1).

In other words, there was recognition that in the face of prospective global capitalist restructuring through privatisation, struggles resisting this also had to be transnationalised, attempting to disrupt these efforts through the legislative mechanisms of the EU (Interviews 1, 10, 14, 26). The minimum quota for the ECI was fulfilled in 13 countries, including Greece but not Portugal, highlighting the more successful, broader mobilisation in the former discussed above, but equally reflecting the more urgent need in Greece to confront water privatisation, which was not on the agenda in Portugal in the same way.

Despite ongoing debates about the possible alternative forms of ownership and management that could be pursued in relation to water and sanitation services (analysed below), Greek activists involved with the umbrella organisation SOS te to NERO have been keen to emphasise that ‘the target is common...even if we shoot from different directions. Let’s surround the target’ (Wainwright 2014: 25). In other words, the diverse democratising initiatives that are a common thread of interest amongst SOS te to NERO members should not distract from the dominant aim of ensuring that privatisation is stopped. ‘Surrounding the target’ primarily took the form of countering the European Commission’s disappointing response to the European Citizens’ Initiative (Bieler 2017: 313). In February 2013 activists of SOS te to NERO decided to hold a city-wide referendum in Thessaloniki about the proposed privatisation of EYATH (Interview 10). The referendum was held on 18 May 2014, supported by the European Water Movement and EPSU, with both organisations sending 30 monitors between them from European countries including Italy and Germany (Interview 11). Campaigning on the issue was conducted at local level through the well-established links with neighbourhood councils (Interview 11). The result of the referendum was resounding. 218,002 citizens voted in the referendum across 181 polling stations, with 98 per cent voting against the privatisation of water. This is a clear sign that the novel practices of ‘social

movement unionism' had ensured a broad and effective movement against the prospect of privatisation.

Resisting the privatisation of water in Greece has also been pursued through legal initiatives. In the Attica region of Greece this was led by Save Greek Water and SEKES (Interview 1), whilst in Thessaloniki this was pursued by the workers union of EYATH (Interview 10). Both filed law suits to Greece's Constitutional Court, the Council of State, demanding that the ownership transfer of both companies from the state to TAIPED be reversed. Whilst the EYATH suit was dismissed on technical grounds, the case of EYDAP was successful. In May 2014, the court ruled that the transfer of ownership to TAIPED, and the proposed privatisation beyond this, violated articles 5 and 21 of the Greek constitution. These articles outline that the state is responsible for the protection of the citizens' fundamental right to health. The ruling itself stated that 'the effective transformation of the state company to a private one which operates on a for-profit basis renders uncertain the continuation on its part of accessible services for the common good of a high quality as they will no longer be comprehensively secured by state oversight' ([Neos Kosmos](#), 3 June 2014). The ruling would not have been quite so unanimous had there not been successful campaigns raising awareness of the negative experience of privatisation at both a national and European level (Interviews 1, 10). In the end, the New Democracy Greek government decided to put a stop to the privatisation of water services in both Thessaloniki and Athens ([Macropolis](#), 2 July 2014). However, highlighting the manner in which practices of authoritarian neo-liberalism have insulated institutions from popular dissent and contestation, TAIPED continues to hold ownership of both EYATH and EYDAP to the present day, despite the ruling that both must move back under state control (Interview 1, 10, 12).

The Portuguese water movement initiated their own legislative process after the formation of Agua de Todos in 2011. The aim was to enshrine the 2010 United Nations (UN)

resolution of ‘water and sanitation are a human right’ in national legislation, with the official procedure being initiated by citizens signing a petition and proposing legislation (Interview 26). 50,000 signatures were collected, and the PCP supported the initiative in parliament. However, the vote held on the legislation in 2014 was easily defeated in parliament (Interview 26). This was not solely due to opposition from the PSD led centre-right coalition government of the day, as a coalition of leftist parties could have commanded a majority in the rounds of voting. Instead, whilst there was widespread support amongst left parties – the Socialists (PS), Left Bloc, and PCP – for enshrining legislation which reflected water as a human right, the same could not be said for another part of the legislation, which aimed to legally prevent any kind of privatisation in the future. Having been central to water privatisation initiatives in the past, including ‘Aquapor’ (Teles 2015: 37), PS became divided over this issue ideologically with only leftist members of the party being in support of ensuring that water services remained public in the future. Overall, this rather general attempt to protect public water services in national legislation reflects a situation, in which water was not yet under direct privatisation challenge. Hence, while in Greece the Constitutional Court had been appealed to in relation to defend the public nature of the water companies in Athens and Thessaloniki that were to be privatised, in Portugal the constitutional initiative was an attempt to pre-empt and prevent privatisation in the future. Despite widespread public opposition to the possible privatisation of water, the Portuguese water movement was unable to translate their mobilisation into more effective political pressure through the legislative process. The inability to overcome electoral divisions is further highlighted by the fact that Agua de Todos has only gained prominent support amongst Communist controlled municipalities, primarily through relationships with STAL activists. The ‘National Association of Municipalities they don’t join us because they say well if a municipality wants to give the water to a private water company that is a matter of that municipality’ (Interview

26). In short, the broad based alliance of trade unions and social movements in Greece has been more effective in achieving their aims compared with the water movement in Portugal.

Struggling for a common(s) alternative to 'real subordination'

The prospective privatisation of public water and sanitation services has been resisted by a broad-based coalition of labour. Importantly, resistance by labour has not simply pursued a 'no' to privatisation, but has also explored the possibility of pursuing development initiatives linked to social-economy alternatives. Such alternatives highlight how resistive class agency during the crisis has partially gone beyond simply objecting to the technical policy of privatisation, and has begun to question the very presence of capitalist social relations in areas of social reproduction. To an important degree, targeting the systemic characteristics of how such a service is 'produced' and distributed has been directly influenced by the Italian water movement, which has argued that water and sanitation services should be considered a 'commons' (Bieler 2015b: 47-8). The commons are here understood as a shared, collectively managed resource amongst the human population, 'the source of shared popular livelihoods and cultural meaning' (McMichael 2017: 296). This conceptualisation of water and sanitation has important political implications, as those who advocate for the 'commonification' of water and sanitation assert that relevant services should be jointly owned, and governed collectively through new forms of participatory/direct democracy (Bakker 2008: 241-43). The foundational human need for water, and its unique quality in this regard, has been presented as an effective discursive framing tool against the justifications for privatisation put forward by transnational capital. This counter discourse organised around water and sanitation as a commons has been evoked equally in the Greek and Portuguese water movements as a central principle of resistance against water privatisation (Interviews 9, 26). However, when looking at prospective alternatives, the idea of the commons offering an

alternative configuration of political economic organisation in the ‘production’ and distribution of water is much more prominent in the Greek movement (Interviews 8, 9, 10, 11). As a Greek interviewee pointed out, ‘this is a new mentality of changing society and of more participatory democracy which we need absolutely in order to survive’ (Interview 18).

The clearest example has been the development of Initiative 136 (K136) in Thessaloniki, Greece. K136 originated from the squares movement. As well as being part of the wider water movement in the city (SOS te to NERO), K136 is also part of an umbrella organisation known as PROSKALO, a non-profit civil society organisation. PROSKALO was founded in 2011 with the aim ‘to promote a social solidarity economy through direct democracy’. This was particularly in areas which are considered a commons, such as water, food, energy, waste management, and education (see, PROSKALO’s [website](#); Fattori 2013; Interviews 8, 13, 15, 19). Cooperatives provide the preferred formal organisational model to pursue the ‘commonification’ of social goods. The establishment of the Bios Coop, a food and convenience store, in 2012 is the prime example of the organisation’s activities. Specifically in relation to water and sanitation services, the main idea of K136 is that if every household connected to the city’s water service bought a non-transferable share in the state-owned water company of Thessaloniki, the public could own the water and sanitation company through a system of neighbourhood cooperatives coming together through a single overall cooperative (Interview 11). As an activist of K136 states, ‘it would, in effect, be a public-public answer to the troika’s public-private partnership’ (Wainwright 2014: 25). Explicitly, activists of PROSKALO and K136 see this as a means by which to reject both the statist ‘Soviet’ and the private ‘capitalist’ model of ownership (Interview 8). Whilst this initiative has become internationally recognised there is a hesitancy within the Greek water movement about the idea, even within the Thessaloniki-based SOS te to NERO, as it is argued that through state taxation and company bills citizens have already paid for the

company and the sector's infrastructural development. The question is therefore posed, 'why should they have to do so again?' (Interview 12). Further, there has been a general problem of affordability across the city amongst citizens due to the implementation of poverty-inducing austerity and tax increases. However, despite this, cooperatives have been formed in eight out of sixteen neighbourhoods in Thessaloniki, and the municipality has issued a generally positive response to the initiative.

The preference for municipal or state-led management of public water services in Portugal, by contrast, also reflects the greater participation and success of the PCP in electoral politics, the party's affiliation with a largely unified trade union movement, and the desire to retain their prominent institutional presence within the state apparatus. In short, the links between political party and trade union were clearer than in the Greek case and not tainted by notions of patronage and corruption. This has created a strong degree of historical continuity, dating back to the Carnation Revolution, concerning the gains that can be made for labour.

Conclusion

The privatisation of water and sanitation has been a key battleground against neo-liberal restructuring in Greece and Portugal. Our historical materialist approach has been important for our analysis of class struggles around the prospective 'real subordination' of labour in Greece and Portugal during the Eurozone crisis within the wider temporal restructuring of global capitalism. First, it has allowed us to demonstrate how the policy response of privatisation is not simply a technical fix pursuing an 'exit' from the crisis, but is actually an expression of a wider historical project of opening up new areas for commodification and capitalist accumulation. Second, it has allowed our analysis to identify and assess not only strategies of resistance, but also to understand how these are linked to the search for

common(s) alternatives that explicitly question the presence of capitalist social relations. Importantly, the concept of water as a commons to be jointly owned and administrated has played a role in both countries, but was most developed by Greek activists. As such, it represents a direct challenge to neo-liberal capitalism and its attempt to utilise water as a commodity to make profit. Through a deeper questioning of the role of water as a 'commons', resistance has contested the wider 'historically integrated process' of neo-liberal capitalist restructuring, bringing to the fore possible democratic alternatives that could potentially produce more socially and economically equitable practices and outcomes.

Following the method of incorporated comparison, we have, furthermore, been able to compare the specificities of struggles in the two countries in line with the way of how both are confronted by privatisation pressures through MoUs by the troika as well as the increasing authoritarian neo-liberalism across the EU and how this is reflected within the two national forms of state. Thus, we assessed how the pressure on Portugal was much less direct and less severe than on Greece, where the Athens and Thessaloniki water companies were directly earmarked for privatisation, due to these two countries' different position within the European political economy with the former in a less economically dire situation than the latter. Hence, initiatives against privatisation were of a more general nature in Portugal such as the attempt to include the 2010 UN resolution of 'water and sanitation are a human right' in national legislation, while struggles in Greece focused directly on ensuring continuing state ownership of EYDAP and EYATH. In the struggle over the privatisation of water, it is clear that broad-based alliances have been a key asset in resisting the push for privatisation in Greece and Portugal, especially where dynamics of transnational solidarity are present. Importantly, the close relationship between trade unions and political parties in Greece had become discredited and as a result activists were pushed to organise broad based alliances of trade unions and social movements out of sheer necessity. By contrast, similar efforts have

been limited in Portugal as a result of the much closer links between the main trade union and the PCP, which had remained above suspicion. Unsurprisingly therefore, while privatisation especially of the Thessaloniki and Athens water companies were stopped in Greece, the current restructuring of municipal bulk water companies held by AdP are potentially the first steps towards privatisation in Portugal.

Public water remains under threat in both countries. As mentioned in regards to Portugal, current corporate re-organisation may simply be laying the foundation for privatisation. Moreover, the recently established minority government of Portugal, led by PS, has a history of privatisation. However, as a PS member of parliament stated, ‘we don’t want to lose control of another strategic asset. We’ve lost too many...so really it’s time to stop’ (Interview 25). Having recently stated that PS is open to re-examining the national citizens’ initiative on implementing the UN resolution of ‘water and sanitation are a human right’, discussed earlier, it would seem this position is holding firm at the moment. In Greece too, the success of struggles are anything but assured. The negotiations leading up to, and the signing of, a third MoU between the coalition Greek government led by Syriza and the troika in 2015 has put in doubt the decision not to privatise EYDAP and EYATH. Whilst the Council of State ruling has ensured that a majority shareholding will continue to be owned by the state, Syriza has agreed to sell a further 23 per cent of EYATH and 11 per cent of EYDAP, outlined in the privatisation programme of July 2015 ([euobserver](#), 20 August 2015). Amongst activists there had been an expectation that the government would ‘respect this decision [from the court]’. The fact it was not means that it is difficult for the movements to consider the Syriza-led coalition government any different from previous Greek governments ([The Guardian](#), 14 August 2015). Syriza also agreed – under immense political and financial pressure – to measures which further entrench practices of authoritarian neo-liberalism. The third Greek bailout signed in August 2015 outlines the need to establish ‘a new independent

fund (the “Fund”)', which will have 'in its possession valuable Greek assets' (European Commission 2015: 28). Again, water companies are included in this new Fund and their future remains uncertain ([Macropolis](#), 20 May 2016; [Save Greek Water](#), 21 May 2016). Overall, public water is at the cross-roads in Greece and Portugal. While the two countries are pushed towards privatisation, however, there have been numerous examples of re-municipalisation of water services elsewhere in Europe and the wider world, including Paris, Berlin and Jakarta (Lobina et al 2014; Pigeon et al 2012). As always, the future of struggles over exploitation is open-ended.

References

- Afonso, A. et al. (2015) 'How party linkages shape austerity politics: clientelism and fiscal adjustment in Greece and Portugal during the eurozone crisis', *Journal of European Public Policy* 22(3): 315-34.
- Amoore, L. and P. Langley (2004) 'Ambiguities of global civil society', *Review of International Studies* 30(1): 89-110.
- Bakker, K. (2008) 'The Ambiguity of Community: Debating Alternatives to Private-Sector Provision of Urban Water Supply', *Water Alternatives* 1(2): 236-52.
- Bakker, K. (2010) *Privatizing water: Governance failure and the world's urban water crisis*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Barker, C. (2013) 'Class Struggle and Social Movements', in C. Barker, L. Cox, J. Krinsky and A.G. Nilsen (eds.) *Marxism and Social Movements*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, pp.41-61.
- Bayliss, K. (2014) 'The Financialization of Water', *Review of Radical Political Economics* 46(3): 292-307.
- Bayliss, K. (2017) 'Material cultures of water financialisation in England and Wales', *New Political Economy*, 22(4): 383-97.
- Bieler, A. (2011) 'Labour, new social movements and the resistance to neo-liberal restructuring in Europe', *New Political Economy* 16(2): 163-83.
- Bieler, A. (2014) 'Transnational Labour Solidarity in (the) Crisis', *Global Labour Journal* 5(2): 114-33.
- Bieler, A. (2015) "'Sic Vos Non Vobis" (For You, But Not Yours): The struggle for public water in Italy', *Monthly Review* 67(5): 35-50.
- Bieler, A. (2017) 'Fighting for Public Water: The First Successful European Citizens' Initiative "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right"', *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 9(1): 300-26; available online: <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Interface-9-1-Bieler.pdf>; accessed 8 July 2017.

- Bieler, A. and R. Erne (2014) 'Transnational solidarity? The European working class in the Eurozone crisis', in L. Panitch, G. Albo and V. Chibber (eds) *Transforming Classes. Socialist Register 2015*, Pontypool: The Merlin Press, pp.157-77.
- Bieler, A. and J. Jordan (2015) 'Austerity and resistance: The politics of labour in the Eurozone crisis', in V. Satgar (ed.) *Capitalism's Crises: Class Struggles in South Africa and the World*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp.97-122.
- Bieler, A. and A.D. Morton (forthcoming) *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brauninger, D. (2013) '[Privatisation in the euro area: Differing attitudes towards public assets](#)', *Research Briefing: European Integration, Deutsche Bank: DB Research*; accessed 20 December 2016.
- Brauninger, D. (2015) '[Privatisation in the euro area: Governments should grasp opportunities](#)', *Research Briefing: European Integration, Deutsche Bank: DB Research*; accessed: 20 December 2016.
- Bruff, I. (2014) 'The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism', *Rethinking Marxism* 26(1): 113–29.
- Burret, Heiko T. and Schnellenbach, J. (2013) 'Implementation of the Fiscal Compact in the Euro Area Member States', *German Council of Economic Experts, Working Paper* 08/2013.
- Buttigieg, JA (1995) 'Gramsci on Civil Society', *Boundary 2* 22(3): 1-32.
- Buttigieg, JA (2005) 'The Contemporary Discourse on Civil Society: A Gramscian Critique', *Boundary 2* 32(1): 33-52.
- Cleaver, H. (2000) *Reading Capital Politically (second edition)*, Leeds: Anti/Theses.
- Clua-Losada, M. and Horn, L. (2014) 'Analysing Labour and the Crisis: Challenges, Responses and New Avenues', *Global Labour Journal* 5(2): 102-113
- Corporate Europe Observatory (2013) '[At your service: the European Services Forum's privileged access to the EU Commission](#)', *Corporate Europe Observatory*; accessed 30 October 2014.
- Costa, Hermes A. (2012) 'From Europe as a model to Europe as austerity: the impact of the crisis on Portuguese trade unions', *Transfer* 18(4): 397-410.
- EPSU (2012) '[Why water is a public service: exposing the myths of privatization](#)'; accessed 24 December 2014.
- European Commission (2010) 'The Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece – First Review – Summer 2010', *European Economy, Occasional Papers* 68, August 2010.
- European Commission (2011) 'The Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece – Fourth Review – Spring 2011', *European Economy, Occasional Papers* 82, July 2011.
- European Commission (2014) 'The Economic Adjustment Programme for Portugal – Eleventh Review', *European Economy, Occasional Papers* 191, April 2014.
- European Commission (2015) 'Greece – Memorandum of Understanding for a three-year ESM programme', Draft agreed at staff level, 11 August.
- Fattori, T. (2013) 'From the water Commons Movement to the Commonification of the Public Realm', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(2): 377-87.
- Financial Times (2015) 'A modern Greek tragedy – the crisis years in context', 19 June 2015 [accessed: 21 June 2015]

- Goldman, M. (2007) 'How "Water for All!" policy became hegemonic: The power of the World Bank and its transnational policy networks', *Geoforum* 38: 786-800.
- Gore, C. (1996) 'Methodological nationalism and the misunderstanding of East Asian industrialisation', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 8(1): 77-122.
- Hall, D. and E. Lobina (2009) 'Water Privatization', in Philip Arestis and Malcolm Sawyer (eds) *Critical Essays on the Privatization Experience*, London: Palgrave, pp.75-120.
- Hall, D. and E. Lobina (2012a) [Water companies and trends in Europe 2012](#). London: *Public Services International Research Unit*; accessed 28 October 2014.
- Hall, D. and E. Lobina (2012b) 'The birth, growth and decline of multinational water companies', in T. Katko, P.S. Juuti and K. Schwartz (eds) *Water Services Management and Governance*, London: IWA Publishing, pp.123-32.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees', in D. Morley and K.-H. Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, pp.25-46.
- Harvey, D. (1985) 'The Geopolitics of Capitalism', in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds) *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, London: Macmillan, pp.128-63.
- Harvey, D. (2003) *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Held, D. and A. McGrew (2002) *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Held, D., A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt and J. Perraton (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Ioannou, Christos (2000) 'Change and continuity in Greek industrial relations: the role of and impact on trade unions', in J. Waddington, and Hoffmann, R. (eds.) *Trade Unions in Europe – facing challenges and searching for solutions*, Brussels: European Trade Union Institute, pp.277-304.
- Jakob, C. and P. Sanchez (2015) 'Remunicipalisation and workers: Building new alliances', in S. Kishimoto, E. Lobina and O. Petitjean (eds). *Our public water future: The global experience with remunicipalisation*, Amsterdam et al: Transnational Institute, pp.76-84.
- Jubilee Debt Campaign (2016) '[The Never-Ending Austerity Story: Why Greece's third "bailout" changes nothing](#)', 12 February 2016; accessed: 20 December 2016.
- Kretsos, L. (2011) 'Grassroots unionism in the context of economic crisis in Greece', *Labor History*, 52(3): 265-86.
- Lobina, E. (2012) 'Water service governance, technological change and paradigm shifts: a conceptual framework', *International Journal of Water* 6(3-4): 155-75.
- Lobina, E. (2014) [Troubled Waters: Misleading industry PR and the case for public water](#), London: PSIRU; accessed 24 December 2014.
- Lobina, E., P. Terhorst and V. Popov (2011) 'Policy networks and social resistance to water privatization in Latin America', *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 10: 19-25.
- Lobina, E. et al. (2014) '[Here to Stay: Water Remunicipalisation as a Global Trend](#)'; accessed: 30 March 2015.
- Luxemburg, R. (1913/2003) *The Accumulation of Capital* (translated by Agnes Schwarzschild), London: Routledge.
- Marx, Karl (1852/1984) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- McMichael, P. (1990) 'Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method', *American Sociological Review*, 55(3): 385-97.

- McMichael, P. (2000) 'World-Systems Analysis, Globalization, and Incorporated Comparison', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 4(3): 668-690.
- McMichael, P. (ed.) (2010) *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change*, New York and Abingdon: Routledge.
- McMichael, P. (2017) *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective* (sixth edition), London et al.: SAGE.
- Morton, A.D. (2013) *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development (updated edition)*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- OECD (2017) Real GDP forecast (indicator), doi: 10.1787/1f84150b-en (Accessed on 22 June 2017).
- Pigeon, M. et al. (2012) *Remunicipalisation: Putting Water Back into Public Hands*, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- van der Pijl, K. (1998) *Transnational Classes and International Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Polanyi, K. (1957) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Robbins, P.T. (2003) 'Transnational Corporations and the Discourse of Water Privatization', *Journal of International Development* 15: 1073-82.
- Rodrigues, J. and Reis, J. (2012) 'The Asymmetries of European Integration and the Crisis of Capitalism in Portugal', *Competition and Change* 16(3): 188-205
- Sotirakopoulos, N. and Sotiropoulos, G. (2013) "'Direct democracy now!': The Greek *indignados* and the present cycle of struggles', *Current Sociology*, 61(4): 443-56.
- Sotiris, P. (2017) 'The Authoritarian and Disciplinary Mechanism of Reduced Sovereignty in the EU: The Case of Greece', in C.B. Tansel (ed.) *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International, pp. 171-87.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2005) 'Dispossessing H2O: The Contested Terrain of Water Privatization', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 16(1): 81-99.
- Tansel, C.B. (2017) 'Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Towards a New Research Agenda', in C.B. Tansel (ed.) *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International, pp. 1-28.
- Teles, N. (2015) '[Financialisation and neoliberalism: The case of water provision in Portugal](#)', *FESSUD Working Paper No.102*; accessed: 1 June 2015.
- Varghese, S. (2013) '[The Global Water Grab: Meet the "New Water Barons"](#)' (08/02/2013), Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; accessed 27 July 2017.
- Vila, S.T. and Peters, M. (2016) 'The Privatising Industry in Europe', *Issue Brief*, Transnational Institute (TNI): Amsterdam.
- Wainwright, H. (2014) *The Tragedy of the Private, The Potential of the Public*, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
- Whitfield, D. (2010) *Global Auction of Public Assets: Public sector alternatives to the infrastructure market and Public Private Partnerships*, Nottingham: Spokesman.
- Wright, E.O. (2006) 'Compass Points: Towards a Socialist Alternative', *New Left Review* 41: 93-124.

Yang, J.-S. (2012) '[The New "Water Barons": Wall Street Mega-Banks are Buying up the World's Water](#)' (21/12/2012); accessed 28 October 2014.

Interviews

Interview 1: Co-ordinator of Save Greek Water, Athens, 18 April 2015.

Interview 2: Editor, Macropolis, Athens, 18 April 2015.

Interview 3: General Manager, Hellenic Fund and Asset Management Association, Athens, 20 April 2015.

Interview 4: Head of Research, GSEE, Athens, 21 April 2015.

Interview 5: Member of Hellenic Parliament, New Democracy, Athens, 27 April 2015.

Interview 6: Minister of Hellenic Government, Syriza, Athens, 29 April 2015.

Interview 7: Professor of European Politics and Economy, Athens University of Economics and Business, Athens, 29 April 2015.

Interview 8: President, PROSKALO, Thessaloniki, 4 May 2015.

Interview 9: Union Member, Thessaloniki Labour Centre (EKTH), Thessaloniki 4 May 2015.

Interview 10: President, OME-EYATH, Thessaloniki, 5 May 2015.

Interview 11: Organiser, Initiative 136, Thessaloniki, 5 May 2015.

Interview 12: Professor of Coastal Engineering and Oceanography and Organiser, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and SOS to NERO, Thessaloniki, 6 May 2015.

Interview 13: Organiser, Thessaloniki Social Clinic, Thessaloniki, 6 May 2015.

Interview 14: Spokesperson, Green Party, Thessaloniki, 6 May 2015.

Interview 15: Organiser, Drama Social Clinic, Drama 8 May 2015.

Interview 16: Executive Committee Member, ADEDY, Athens, 18 May 2015.

Interview 17: President, Athens Labour Centre (EKA), Athens, 20 May 2015.

Interview 18: Minister of Hellenic Government, Syriza, Athens, 25 May 2015.

Interview 19: Organiser, Elliniko Social Clinic, Athens, 26 May 2015.

Interview 20: Professor of Economics, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 15 June 2015.

- Interview 21: Ph.D. Researcher, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 18 June 2015.
- Interview 22: Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, 18 June 2015.
- Interview 23: Former President, CGTP, Lisbon, 26 June 2015.
- Interview 24: Organiser, Precarious Inflexible, Lisbon, 2 July 2015.
- Interview 25: Member of Portuguese Parliament, Socialist Party, Lisbon, 3 July 2015.
- Interview 26: Organiser, Agua de Todos / STAL, Lisbon, 3 July 2015.
- Interview 27: Former Leader and Member of Parliament, Left Bloc, Lisbon, 8 July 2015.
- Interview 28: Member of Portuguese Parliament and Committee Member of the Economy, Innovation and Public Works, Portuguese Social Democrats, Lisbon, 14 July 2015.
- Interview 29: Assistant Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, Lisbon, 14 July 2015
- Interview 30: Executive Committee Member, CGTP, Lisbon, 15 July 2015.