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The Strange Dalliance of Critical Theorists with Intellectuals of the Reform Party of Canada: *Telos* and the Search for a Federal Populism¹

Gary Genosko²

Abstract: The American critical theory journal *Telos*, founded by Paul Piccone in 1968, has long enjoyed the status as one of the pre-eminent venues for the exploration of the multiple traditions of Western Marxism. This paper describes a development in the journal's trajectory after its turn to Carl Schmitt in the mid-80s and the claim that critical theory is continued through the theory of federal populism. Throughout the 1990s editor Piccone and his close colleagues investigated the intellectual foundations of various right-wing populist parties, with one in particular providing the focus here, the Reform Party of Canada. *Telos's* roots straddle the US-Canada border, and Piccone's fascination with Canadian politics alights on developments within conservative politics in Western Canada as a potential antidote to the puzzle of populism, presented in terms of Piccone's artificial negativity thesis. This highly critical turn to Canadian conservatism is discussed in depth and situated in relation to the journal's construction of how Canada appears within the journal's overall project, and explains why the promise of Reform was ultimately rejected as a genuine model for federal populism.

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- 1 The research in this essay is based on material contained in my recent book with Kristina Marcellus, *Back Issues: Periodicals and the Formation of Critical and Cultural Theory in Canada* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019), but takes the material in a different direction.
 - 2 Gary Genosko is Professor of Communication and Digital Media Studies at University of Ontario in Toronto, Canada. He has also held a Canada Research Chair in Technoculture. His most recent books include, *Back Issues: Periodicals and the Formation of Critical and Cultural Theory in Canada*. Critical Perspectives on Theory, Culture & Politics Series. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019; *The Reinvention of Social Practices: Essays on Félix Guattari*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018; and *Critical Semiotics: Theory, from Information to Affect*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. He has published extensively on Félix Guattari, including *Félix Guattari: A Critical Introduction*. Modern European Masters Series. London: Pluto Press, 2009; *The Party without Bosses: Lessons on Anti-Capitalism from Félix Guattari and Luís Inácio 'Lula' da Silva*. Semaphore Series. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2003; *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction*. London and New York: Continuum Press, 2002; and edited *The Guattari Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Founding editor of philosophy journal *Telos* Paul Piccone advanced a theory of federal populism during the 1990s that drew upon the traditions of prairie populism, while exposing the stress points of the P.E. Trudeau vision of the unitary nation-state, and some of the most excessively reactionary thinkers on the Canadian right, including members of the so-called Calgary School of political science such as Tom Flanagan, but also non-party aligned conservatives such as William Gairdner. This episode in the journal's stormy history is not well-known but exposes some of the source materials for the journal's restless search for relevance after a tumultuous turn to the right in the late 1980s, and its dalliance with the Canadian right is concomitant with the emergence of the conservative critique of identity politics in the US and Canada in the 1990s.

Although *Telos* periodically contested its own legacy as the leading critical theory journal and bastion of scholarship on Western Marxism – “*Telos* was not founded in 1968 as an American organ of the Frankfurt School. It was meant to provide the New Left, at the time embroiled in internal discussions about its ideological identity, with a rigorous theoretical perspective and a clear sense of direction”³ – the divide between the old *Telos* as a non-orthodox journal of Western Marxism, and a new populist organ in hot pursuit of roots for an American federalism while promoting various populisms, each with its unique shock value, including infatuation with the Reform Party of Canada, was stark to say the least. Undoubtedly this swerve in *Telos* stirs in the long shadow cast by the decisive Schmittian turn of the 1980s. The turn to Schmitt, and to the so-called rigors of jurisprudence as it was practised by this Nazi constitutional apologist, in *Telos* in the mid-80s and the publication of a special issue on his work in 1987 and lead articles in 1990 attracted the attention of the journal's many European readers who noticed that this did not seem consistent with its “editorial line.” In the *Eléments* interview, Piccone responded in a number of ways: Frankfurt School censorship could not suppress writing about Schmitt; editorial opinions about

3 Piccone, “*Eléments* Interview,” *Telos* 117 (1999): 133.

Schmitt's relevance split the editorial board, and many readers responded negatively, but those who could read beyond Schmitt's Nazi past, into his critique of the sovereign state and insights into federation, would see precisely the trajectory of Piccone's political theorizing that actually went against Schmitt's diagnosis of the instability of federated states.⁴ But the kind of federalism that interested Piccone transcended the suspicions that attached to its populist pedigree and centralizing institutional profile, for the sake of a contractualism that enhanced the autonomy of political units and provision of the tools with which local organizations could resist the unitary force of a homogenizing central administration.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that this investigation preoccupied the journal for much of the 1990s. There are many pitfalls with this vision of federal populism – the criminalization of small-town cultural particularity, and the fragile character of sponsored negativity by the universalizing tendencies of the New Class – but the European examples, as well as those from Canada, seemed to point directly to a resurgent right. Yet Piccone tried to chase away the ghosts of Nazism, steel against the cosmopolitan historical linkage between regionalism and fascism, and dispel any connection between genuine communitarianism and corporatist multiculturalism. This more or less left him to dream of exceptional enclaves in both city and countryside.

As long-serving Toronto *Telos* Group⁵ member John Fekete reflected, there were in some ways two *Teloses*: phenomenological and Schmittian. The walls that the journal gained in New York were built (literally) af-

4 Piccone, "Éléments interview," p. 146.

5 Toronto *Telos* emerged in *Telos* 22 (Winter 1974-75), contributing almost 20 dense pages describing the contents of articles published in issues of theory journals during 1974, arranged alphabetically from *Alternative to Theory & Society*. The Short Journal Reviews section was arguably the most current compendium on social and political theory available to anyone, anywhere. It was a significant collective effort and intimidating in its linguistic and theoretical scope. This would become the signature of the TTG and several later *Telos* editorial group contributions. Toronto *Telos* remains active in the journal for a consistent stretch of five years, from issues 22 to 41 (1974-75 to 1979).

ter a decade of “digging up the corpse of Marxism ... doing an autopsy and re-examining it ... and pretty much by the end of that period, it had been re-buried.”⁶ The walls were those of a mausoleum in which the anti-authoritarian ethos with which *Telos* once identified had been interred, the tradition pillaged, and the service directed by a right-wing populist convert.

The phenomenological Marxism theorized in the pages of *Telos* owes much to Edmund Husserl’s later work on the theme of *Crisis* (in his case of European sciences). After all, the concept of *telos* figures largely in Husserl’s effort to refound, or better, to rejoin what had come asunder through crisis, understood as the splitting of philosophy from its authentic origins and meanings and of science from the lifeworld. So, too, did Piccone engage the lifeworld as the missing dimension of Western Marxism. A general overview of the journal suggests “crisis” as the leimotiv: this is how you get from the initial anxiety of *Telos* to provide critical theory with ontological foundations by grounding it in the *Lebenswelt*, in the context of a social and political crisis in the US and, more specifically, the moribund nature of academic philosophy, dominated as it was (and still is) by a reifying Anglo-American tradition, to a disenchantment with the liberal, that is Habermasian, turn in critical theory and the “managerial state.” At this point there emerged the Picconean artificial negativity thesis and, of course, the turn to the thinker par excellence of political crisis: Schmitt. In a sense then, *Telos* is situated between philosophical and political crises or, perhaps better, it lurched from one crisis to another. It would be too simple, though somewhat pleasing, to cite crisis as the *telos* of *Telos*.

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of *Telos* in 1988, Piccone recalled that although the desire to step beyond its formative interests in European philosophy and begin to confront concrete American problems was articulated among *Telos* editors as early as the mid-70s, this proved to be more difficult than anticipated. Firstly, there had been an

6 Fekete, “Unpublished research interview with Genosko,” (Peterborough, 2004), np.

ill-fated attempt to produce a special issue on the US on the occasion of the bicentennial in 1976.⁷ Secondly, it would have been carried out by the Toronto Telos Group! If the Eurocentrism of the journal stubbornly refused to Americanize, then the task would be assigned to the Canadians, some of whom were Americans (draft dodgers, students on visas), or displaced Europeans, anyway. The TTG failed to bring this off. In fact, as Piccone recalls, his journal also failed to analyze Canada. In the 1990s, Paul did marry into Canada, as his final partner Marie was from a Toronto suburb.

The space for critical reflection opened by the journal could not be activated for the purposes of grasping either Canada or the US except in the most functionalist terms, a problem underlined by Robert D'Amico,⁸ as such a space excluded the requirement of immediate political relevance. Moreover, as Paul Breines concluded: "another notable dimension of the journal's sought-after marginality is the nearly complete absence from its pages of any sense of connection with the traditions and legacies of American radicalism."⁹ While the journal's marginality provided a space for omnidirectional critique, the talk about an 'American issue' was evidence that internal pressure existed to, as Breines explains, "de-marginalize" in some measure.¹⁰ But the "cracks in the armor of our internal exile" never expanded, as attention swung around onto socialist societies and ultimately expressed itself through anti-Communism. Not even fellow American radicals could squeeze through the cracks. Breines contrasts *Telos* with *Radical America* and *Studies on the Left* to make the point that there were American journals engaging with American radicalism; he also contrasts *Telos* with *NLR* regarding the latter's engagement with English leftist traditions, leaving *Telos* with a hollow "anti- or non-Americanism." As reviews editor, Breines did not take up the call for an American issue. However, Frank Adler was categorical: "since there was no

7 Piccone, "20 Years of *Telos*," *Telos* 75 (1988): 25.

8 D'Amico, "The Hidden *Telos*," *Telos* 75 (1988): 34.

9 Breines, "Recalling *Telos*," *Telos* 75 (1988): 41.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

American theory which could adequately make sense of American reality, New Left journals and anthologies almost uniformly became organs of foreign thought."¹¹ Even when *Telos* did change its orientation in the 1980s, it was no less Eurocentric, D'Amico observed.¹²

The relentless and often unforgiving "drive to criticize" – omnivorous and omnidirectional – that animated *Telos's* editorial style would come to be aimed at those who, in the estimation of David Gross, obstructed access to the three big 'isms' that constituted the journal's emerging ideal of a federated, decentralized society: populism, communitarianism, and 'lifeworld' federalism.¹³ Yet this did not solve the problem of what a theory journal should do: "should not a journal that advocates more power to 'real, existing people' be forming its theoretical positions in direct interventions with the individuals or communities it wants to empower? If so, this is not happening."¹⁴ By the mid-90s, David Ost could write that "there is a new sense of political urgency in *Telos* writings," citing that "numerous articles in recent years speak directly to ongoing American policy issues."¹⁵ This soft endorsement of distributed attention did not impress younger hands such as 'twenty-something' board member David Mattson, who pointed out that *Telos* had not backed up concretely its recent endorsements, such as the Northern League in Italy, and "in addition, closer attention must be paid to concrete political developments in the US."¹⁶ In this scenario, *Telos's* trajectory was handcuffed by a lingering adherence to Piccone's artificial negativity thesis. The restless search for a kind of negativity in communal life that did not extend the very logic it was meant to challenge was not convincing for many *Telosians*. The theoretical orientation that would deliver results, gleaned from Husserl, proved to be inadequate as it became harder and

11 Frank Adler, "Telos, 1968 and Now," *Telos* 75 (1988): 53.

12 D'Amico, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

13 Gross, "Where Is *Telos* Going?" *Telos* 101 (1994): 113.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

15 David Ost, "Search for Balance," *Telos* 101 (1994): 138.

16 Kevin Mattson, "Back to Basics," *Telos* 101 (1994): 156.

harder to identify organic forms of negativity that were spontaneous, autonomous, and able to resist coercion from above. All sorts of negativity deficits were trotted out and explored before the holy grail was sighted: the rediscovery of America as the source of a federal populism accessible through the work of unlikely bedfellows, Schmitt and Christopher Lasch (who had the courage to “go through the dialectic of enlightenment to the other side”).¹⁷ Thus, in issue 100 of *Telos*, Piccone and Gary Ulmen could conclude that critical theory had come a long way, but its journey was not yet over: “federalism becomes attractive once again to the extent that it can limit the size of basic political units, allowing collective participation and the possibility of confronting the problem of political alienation and democratic legitimation, while at the same time, through the aggregation of units at increasingly broader levels, guaranteeing the smooth interaction of the various units.”¹⁸ Thus, resisting the tendency of centralization, upholding the autonomy of the lower units, and securing their democratic right to self-governance and secession. These lessons are all available in American history before rationalization became centralization. Tim Luke surmised that federal populism is a continuation of the Telosian critique of the state, and situated local communities against the violence of nation-states and the evils of globalization: “federal populist designs for resisting both global transnational business and national bureaucratic power might be the most effective means for wading through the swamps of post-Cold War disorder.”¹⁹ While Piccone identified federal populism as perhaps a telos of *Telos*, it was not considered to be a profound break with the journal’s project.

17 Piccone, “*Telos* in Canada: Interview with Paul Piccone by Gary Genosko and Samir Gandesha,” *Telos* 131 (2005):163.

18 Piccone and Gary Ulmen, “Re-thinking Federalism,” *Telos* 100 (1994): 5.

19 Luke, “Toward a North American Critical Theory,” *Telos* 101 (1994): 108.

Federal Populism is a Continuation of Critical Theory by Other Means

Piccone's own misgivings about the conservative turn are refreshing, and he still managed to put on a brave face: "the culmination of phenomenological Marxism and Critical Theory in federal populism successfully reformulates *Telos'* original project to reconcile American reality and European philosophy – a project the Frankfurt School dismissed as impossible shortly after their forced emigration, but much more viable under the changed post-1989 socio-political context."²⁰ Penultimately, *Telos* was able to get around to defining its American issue, even if it didn't do so by publishing an American issue of the journal. Whether anyone ('the people' or merely New Class intellectuals) bothered to notice remained an ongoing concern for Piccone. Piccone was insistent that many of his own editors and writers found it difficult to get excited about 'the people' and seem shaken by the fact that federalism and populism are on the political agenda around the world. This may not be such a bad thing, Piccone thought. Still, he was stoic in the face of a search for an outside: "The people most likely to find these ideas in any way interesting are precisely those New Class intellectuals designated as the most substantial part of the problem."²¹

The response of 'the Canadians' to *Telos'* embrace of federal populism from the bottom up beginning with the family ('roots') in a thoroughly and uncritically arborescent schema,²² ranges from bemusement to a recognition of the descriptive valency of the artificial negativity thesis within the framework of party politics. Embedded in the history of the TTG, Piccone's befuddled fascination with Canada took the form of a debate about the desire to produce an issue focused on North American issues. Wodek Szemberg recalls, however, that Piccone thought of North America

20 Piccone, "From the New Left to the New Populism," *Telos* 101 (1994): 190.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

22 Thomas Fleming, "The Federal Principle," *Telos* 100 (1994): 17.

in terms of “natural history,” in other words, no world-historical individuals, no traditions to embrace, just the Grand Canyon, the Rockies, and the California redwoods. It was evident for Szemberg that “Paul’s getting older and returning to his village ... It is a return from an attack against the self-consciousness of modernity.”²³ And as Janet Lum explains, an early example of this village was the TTG itself: “in our group people liked each other – the atoms [that hung together] had social things with each other, we were all doing the same sorts of stuff, we were all at the same stage of life.”²⁴ And Ray Morrow deepens this vein by observing a number of intimacies: “Another contextual factor of the *Telos* group was geographic. Most of us lived near the Annex (rent was relatively cheap compared to graduate support) and at one point we used to meet regularly for beer and discussions. Partners were often brought along and there was an important social dimension that reinforced the solidarity.”²⁵ The confines of the neighbourhood defined by groups with a common purpose did not mean that Paul was able to catch up with Canadian issues, perhaps because, as Morrow continues, “none of us were sufficiently focused or yet ready to do so adequately to show him the possibilities ... It would probably be fair to say that our scholarly concerns took precedence over any potential obsession with immediate political practice or diagnosis of Canada.” Morrow concludes on this point:

We were not indifferent to such issues, but situated in Canada an apocalyptic crisis mood did not make much sense. We implicitly justified our position in terms of a Gramscian long-term strategy of forming a cultural movement that might contribute to transformative change in the future, beginning with a (pluralist) counter-hegemonic movement in the academy.²⁶

23 Szemberg, “Unpublished research interview with Genosko” (Toronto, 2001), np.

24 Lum, “Unpublished research interview with Genosko (Toronto, 2001), np.

25 Morrow, “Unpublished research interview with Genosko,” (Toronto, 2001), np.

26 *Ibid.*

This early retreat did not yet have the theoretical foundation that the later debates about federalism would provide. The artificial negativity thesis struck some Telosians as a kind of embodied version of Canadian electoral politics, as Fekete noted, in which the New Democratic Party (NDP) make the policies that the Liberals institute and thus critical opposition is subsidized because it keeps the system rational. The “creative paradox” is that “you have a system whose rational development depends on the simultaneous production of an oppositional creativity, and its integration into the system, so there’s a constant tug and play where that oppositional creativity looks for ways of transcending the limits that are given to it.”²⁷ Either you have a recipe, Fekete claims, for a “perpetual capitalism,” or a formula for a “best case scenario for a system living up to its expectations and its values.” In its identity as a “discourse generating thesis,” artificial negativity was highly productive, but was never really fully worked out in book-length form. At the same time the thesis guided the search for such “spaces of transcendence” that were not immediately instrumentalized. Although the promise of Toronto as a site of organic negativity was hinted at, the group dissolved as its members went in search of careers, the only particularity preserved was by definition employer-sponsored negativity.

In this respect, it would be instructive to contrast Piccone’s village dreams with John O’Neill’s vulgar Catholic Marxism where he “did church, not sects,” and bigger was better. Despite their shared interest in phenomenology, their orientations lead in different directions. The problem of being a migrant Marxist in Canada was, as O’Neill explained, that it meant you were anti-American, or at least aligned with anti-imperialist Americans, and perhaps also a federalist promoting Canadianization, not to mention a separatist against continentalist Anglophone Canada, which made the terms of working on a North American issue of *Telos* somewhat fraught, to say the least.²⁸ By the time Piccone became in-

27 Fekete, “Unpublished research interview,” np.

28 O’Neill, “Unpublished research interview with Genosko and Gandesha,” (Toronto, 2001), np.

terested in the western version of Canadian populism presented by the Reform Party/Alliance under Preston Manning and Stockwell Day in the 90s, he was faced with further illusions.²⁹

In my conversation with Piccone, the route that he took to federal populism emerged very clearly through his reflections on prairie populist traditions. He saw in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta brands of populism that broke the left-right mold, even though “they were all over the place ... never able to sustain any kind of systematic critique of Canadian politics. The question of prairie populism is really emblematic. You cannot come up with another liberal party to fight the Liberal party, because Ontario is unwinnable in these terms.”³⁰ He had a dalliance with ‘architects’ of the new right in Canada, Bill Gairdner and Kenneth McDonald, and reviews of their books were published in *Telos* by indefatigable liberal-basher Mark Wegierski. The “idiotic, xenophobic nonsense” that passed for policy doomed this project to failure, as Piccone rightly observed, that the articulation of regionalism in the form of homophobic, religious fundamentalism doesn’t normally play in Ontario (until the much later ascension of the Ford brothers, Rob and Doug, first in municipal, then in provincial politics!). Yet he insisted that the Liberals remain vulnerable in Ontario if social conservatism successfully articulates family and traditional values discourses aimed at immigrant populations, even if the discrepancies of immigrant groups, both historically, and across the country, poses insurmountable particularities: to become Canadian, but not too much. And western populist phantasies of Canadian identity don’t take hold in many places; certainly, prairie populism has a left-wing component as well that seeks to protect itself against the levelling incursions of multinationals (an ambiguous hypothesis in the agricultural sector), yet the capacity to resist seems to depend

29 *Telos* might have looked at the vast array of labour magazines on either side of the border, many of which had a clear vision of two flags-one union, and discovered how labour editors communicate with workers. This would be the example provided by *Borderlines*. See Vivienne Muhling, “Junctures: Labour Mags,” *Borderlines* 14 (88-89): 10-11.

30 Piccone, “*Telos* in Canada,” p. 160.

on the cultural soundness of the groups involved, particularly small farmers, whose numbers are shrinking, and the spectre of ethnic homogeneity continues to haunt the flatlands. Piccone was not impressed with the intellectual rigor of the prophets of the new right in Canada, including Tom Flanagan, “who is better than most, because he senses some of the problems. He always hints at them, but never goes anywhere.”³¹ Piccone rejected the communitarian promise of the anti-globalization campaign of the Battle of Seattle in 1999; he mocked the New Democratic Party’s effort to reconfigure the left under the anti-globalization banner – to organize the organizationless – and considered the efforts of Maude Barlow and the Council of Canadians to be retrograde protectionist nationalism that would apparently “destroy Canada.”

Parallel Lines North of the 49th

Is there a Canadian turn that parallels the experience of *Telos*? A former Toronto *Telosian* and *CJPSTer* (after his long association with the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*) has occupied this space for some time, and attracted the critical attention of one of the finest thinkers of periodicals in the country. Without exaggeration, it is instructive to situate Fekete’s 1994 book *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising* in the position of a Canadian retreat from critical and cultural theory with many of the hallmarks of Picconeian style. Fekete’s book was widely discussed and in particular dismantled in the pages of both cultural studies journals in Canada, *Borderlines* and later *Topia*. In taking aim at an allegedly rigid, over-simplifying, self-damaging, panic-inducing, and aggressive discourse of political correctness based on the “portmanteau formula of ‘race-class-gender’,” Fekete launched an anti-feminist and anti-equity screed aimed squarely at an ascendant biopolitics that he set out to slay or at least rally the troops to keep at bay.³²

For Fekete, biopolitics is really anti-political because in fixing identity within the narrow confines of biological categories and dubious demar-

31 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

32 Fekete, *Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising*, Montréal: R. Davies Publishing, 1994.

cations, it exaggerates differences, promotes excess, panic and fear by trading in scare-mongering about the dangers of violence against women and members of minority groups. Further, he argues through a series of critiques of case studies that bias, distortion, false reporting, fallacious steps, and exaggeration are deployed to cash in on the climate of fear by capturing funds to establish everything from Take Back the Night Marches to Sexual Violence Support Centres, anti-racism training, and equity programs. He is especially concerned with the plight of many academics caught up in the sinister side of political correctness by having their public statements and research findings called into question and put on trial, depriving them of the freedom of inquiry and expression and due process protected under most academic collective agreements for tenured faculty. In this light biopolitics is everything that is wrong with curtailments of expression, especially anything seen through a feminist lens. Biofeminism's lens, he writes, is "cracked" with intolerance and impatience; it is authoritarian "power-tripping" and even "fundamentalist":

... [biofeminism] is prepared to take at face value all mythologies that support its essential group interests and to consider everything that supports its standpoint as objective truth, from patriarchy theory to lesbian utopias.³³

Much of this will sound familiar to those attuned to the periodic outbreaks of the culture wars in which champions of conservatism blame postmodernists or feminists or cultural Marxism for politically correct reductionism and trampling over the rights of free speech by imposing gender neutral pronouns, or requiring anti-oppression training. Fekete claims that he takes very seriously political correctness because it threatens liberal democracy by trading in panic fictions. Biopolitics he thinks has become pervasive in public policy making and in academic administrations. This, Valerie Scatamburlo pointed out in *B/l*, is the ruse he uses to jumpstart his argument:

33 Fekete, *Moral Panic*, p. 334.

... [by] conveniently ignoring the actual existing hierarchical relations of power and privilege in the academy. Presenting those who have had decades of uninterrupted control over the academy as the 'silenced' and the 'policed' enables Fekete to disguise their virtual stranglehold on institutionalized power. He fails to grasp the complex character of contemporary contestations over pedagogical initiatives, canon revision, and campus politics; instead, Fekete presents them in typical binary fashion as simple struggles between fair-minded, pro-free speech scholars and censorship-crazed 'Stalinist' warriors.³⁴

In Fekete's vision biopolitics is a force that demonizes men, drives the violence-against-women industry, with its rhetorical excesses, and dumps on white male professors. He constructs his enemy ("demonizing is Fekete's forte") with as much care as the alleged victims who, naturally, are almost always "beyond reproach."³⁵

Barbara Godard's point of entry into the analysis of Fekete's book is a figural counterforce announced in her first line: "Could Fekete be a Canadian Sade?" The Marquis in question was a specialist in the "patriarchal disciplining" of women's bodies, not to mention "calculated outrage," among other manoeuvres shared by Fekete, including the construction of a "phantasmatic feminism ... which he holds responsible" for such matters as human rights, equity, and prevention of harassment and discrimination: "like Sade, Fekete sets himself up as a martyr to set speech free, in this case to help free women from feminism."³⁶ His claim is that biofeminism speaks instead of women and does not permit them to speak for themselves. Yet he does not believe in women's personal narratives; he debunks their accounts of violence at the hands of male partners, and will not accept challenges by women to authority despite

34 Scatamburlo, "Review of *Moral Panic* and *The War of Words*," *Borderlines* 37 (1995): 50.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

36 Godard, "Pedagogic Fictions: Review of Fekete, *Moral Panic*," *Topia* 1 (1997): 84.

valorizing anti-authoritarianism as long as it is conducted in the name of male professors. There will be no social justice in the pages of *Moral Panic*. No inclusiveness. If there is panic it is Fekete's, Godard points out, and he demands of his reader that they feel it, too. Sagely, Godard wrote elsewhere: "feminists have been conscious of the ease with which feminist discourse can be manipulated to turn an emancipatory discourse for women into an oppressive discourse on woman."³⁷ The role of the reader of *Moral Panic* is to collude in its obfuscations and to trivialize feminist counter-discourses.

Godard remarks on Fekete's desire to present his left-wing credentials, yet we sense a further important element of his rhetorical arsenal; yes, the dialogue of the old leftist Telosian and CJPSTer with Arthur Kroker has undoubtedly encouraged the importation of the term panic as a "psychological mood," a favourite of Kroker and Co. from the late 1980s, a buzzword that had a short shelf life.³⁸ But the key borrowing is from McLuhan: biofeminists live their panic nervousness "in-depth" or mythically. This turns biofeminism into a kind of groupthink, an impulsive, imaginary and instant fixation on categories of belonging. There is always a surplus of panic, its "excess energies" leaning towards hot and away from cold war détente.³⁹ Fekete goes into a Baudrillardian rapture when he describes how living in-depth with the fallacies of biofeminist logic produces the kind of abject pleasure associated with simulacra.

37 Godard, "Feminist Periodicals and the Production of Cultural Value: The Canadian Context," *Women's Studies International Forum* 25/2 (2002): 213.

38 Arthur and Marilouise Kroker and David Cook, eds., *Panic Encyclopedia*, Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1989. A "post-alphabetic description of the actual dissolution of facts into the flash of thermonuclear cultural 'events' in the postmodern condition," p. 15. Performed-presented with multi-media and videotaped by Carol Rowe. This is one possible Canadian source for understanding the post-fact/post-truth universe we currently inhabit. Stan Fogel gets this right in his review, emphasizing both "the frenzied scene of post-facts" that outrages the Krokers and Cook, but also their elitism; "Panic Compendiums: Review of *Panic Encyclopedia* and *Cultural Literacy*," *Borderlines* 17 (1989-90): 40-2.

39 Fekete, *Moral Panic*, p. 203.

There is a right-wing, postmodern McLuhan in circulation that supports Fekete's usage. The figure of conservative Catholic (Thomistic) McLuhan, with his anti-activist stance and pro-life personal beliefs, his fetish of southern American etiquette, once made Canadian thinkers like Fekete and Arthur Kroker cautious about his politics. Living mythically in depth is a way, following the insight of Grant Havers, of entering a "new postmodernist conservative community" that is not defined by liberal individualism, but by conserving the authority of the group. What makes this postmodernist is electric/electronic technology makes it possible for a "tribalist communitarianism" to arise.⁴⁰ In short, biofeminism is a kind of sectarianism that runs afoul of the patriarchal tribal family and the rule of conformity in which the tribe – Fekete's white male professoriat – will lose face and for this reason challenges to it must be suppressed, or at least criticized in a reactionary and disciplinary tone. What seems odd in this usage of McLuhanism is that biofeminism would seem well-adapted to the electric age of interassociation and global intimacy, yet it appears that it has set out on a rogue project and its version of living in-depth inside its abstract categories turns out to be a challenge to the conservative status quo. In short, the drama it wants to live is not permitted on the main stage of the patriarchy.

The usage of living mythically and in-depth by Fekete seems also self-referential in the sense that it returns to his own critique of the concept in *Telos* 15: mythic integrism of disparate details, either through technology, or by means of the social categories of race, class and gender, is purely ideological, ahistorical and veils its own politics.⁴¹ Social categories are universalized, treated as if they were eternal, and endowed with a deterministic power. But the myth of biofeminism in Fekete's account must depart from the harmony narrative favoured by McLuhan. It should be noted that Fekete's astute discussion of a deeply mystified

40 Havers, "The Right-Wing Postmodernism of Marshall McLuhan," *Media, Culture & Society* 25/4 (2003): 519-20.

41 Fekete, "McLuhancy: Counterrevolution in Cultural Theory," *Telos* 15 (1973): 75-123. Biofeminism is guilty of just such a mythic integrism by means of the categories it deploys.

Southern agrarianism (custom, graciousness, naturalized racism) as a failed phase in the emergence of New Criticism might have provided a different and much more well-grounded point of entry into the present discussion: a critique of the roots of modern conservatism rather than a pandering to it.⁴²

What remains to be considered is that the Fekete of *Moral Panic* is a later Telosian, adaptable to the populist-federalist phase of the journal and its unrepentant conservatism. In a review of conservative critic William D. Gairdner's book *On Higher Ground*, his rejections of "feminist chatter" and gay marriage are praised, even if he has lost the key to the conceptual toolbox he needs to reassert the primacy of civil society, a concept he doesn't understand and that actually militates against his goals as it is too liberal, only useful for New Class bureaucrats administering a multicultural society, and already pre-mediated into the system it opposes.⁴³ A few years later another book by a Canadian conservative intellectual, Kenneth McDonald's *The Monstrous Trick*, is reviewed. Here is another version of how federalism was transformed in a "hyper-statist direction" by twenty years of liberalism from the 1960s-80s. Again, multiculturalism, bilingualism, Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and French 'centralism', are to blame, and all are fuel for the politically correct, and other vague postmodern progressives (like Fekete's biofeminists), who wish to inhibit public debate and impede any progress toward traditionalism.⁴⁴ Indeed, the debates on affirmative action in the pages of *Telos* in the early and mid-90s suggest that as a form of artificial negativity, it not only fails to achieve egalitarian results, instead simply redistributing inequalities, but is actually counter-productive because it appears to be a deterrent to hiring qualified minority faculty, and merely extends the regulatory reach of the bureaucracy. This may result in an unintended and uncontrolled genuinely organic

42 Fekete, "The New Criticism: Ideological Evolution of the Right Opposition," *Telos* 20 (1974): 2-51.

43 Mark Wegierski, "Canadian Conservatism and the Managerial State: Review of *On Higher Ground*," *Telos* 108 (1996): 178.

44 *Idem*, "The Canadian Predicament: Review of *The Monstrous Trick*," *Telos* 114 (1999): 187-91.

negativity making universities, especially the University of California, susceptible to “ruinous misfortune from within.”⁴⁵

The Errors of Reform Recapitulate American Failures

Piccone’s effort to cast Canada in a Schmittian light through the political cleavage between liberalism and democracy – the state’s imposition of the former at the expense of the latter, which becomes more and more indirect, and reduced to ratification of the liberal agenda, and use of the courts to resolve pressing issues previously dealt with by elected officials rather than by lawyers and appointed judges.⁴⁶ The imposition of a national narrative and homogenizing policies inevitably leads to regional dissatisfactions and to some form of break-up, partitioning, or succession, at least for Piccone, into multiple political units with reasonably distinct identities. Piccone’s fascination with the challenges of the regional-populist variant of separation, in Canada the emergence in the early 1980s of numerous western conservative parties struggling with issues around distribution and in Québec separatism built around ethno-linguistic nationalism, remained strong despite the fact that Canadian counter-elite thinkers aligned with Reform, some of whom are noted above, did not seem to fare well in the pages of *Telos*. Indeed, Québec fared no better as merely a variant of a particularistic modernization project that rehearsed what was happening elsewhere in the country, constituting another elite at the provincial level which separation of one form or another would not alter: “Canada provides a perfect example of a country where New Class excesses have brought a previously rather stable and peace-loving society to the brink of disintegration.”⁴⁷ When so-called critics of the left chastise the Liberal party for decentralization by stealth, this is for Piccone a welcome situation evolving toward autonomy; yet, the real culprit is the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982,

45 Piccone, “Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe,” *Telos* 86 (1990-91): 134; Emery M. Roe, “Artificial Negativity and Affirmative Action in Universities,” *Telos* 86 (1990-91): 124.

46 Piccone, “Secession or Reform? The Case of Canada,” *Telos* 106 (1996): 23.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

and its “special status” provision that contained a bureaucratic solution to claims around identity of the sort criticized by Fekete, and guaranteed privileges akin to affirmative action, as well as its Americanizing tenets (enhancing judicial powers), not to mention its alleged sloppiness in the form of a notwithstanding clause for overriding Charter provisions. Piccone’s repeated reference to “political elites” is a conservative straw figure upholding a *tight* interventionist federalism rather than a *loose* confederalism of semi-autonomous provinces. The Reform Party under Preston Manning was doomed, argued Piccone, to repeat the errors of earlier American populisms (instrumentalization of Progressivist tenets of popular sovereignty against the influence of elites and corporations), a fatal attraction to a technocratic elite’s ability to actualize a virtual commons (direct democracy by keyboard or telephone), a moribund critique of bureaucratic centralism, and a largely politically undefined proceduralism.⁴⁸ Piccone’s argument requires a rethinking of confederation, because Canada has completed its modernist project and become postmodern. Subsequent events, such as the election of Pierre Trudeau’s son Justin as Prime Minister, and an impressive national red Liberal wave at the polls in 2015, sweeping entire regions, a strong reflux of right-wing populism in 2018 in Ontario, speaking a very Picconean language of anti-elitism (anti-racism and anti-poverty initiatives are symptoms of Liberal overspending reclaimable for ‘the people’, who are white, largely male, suburban and rural), a hard and fast distinction of elected versus appointed officials in criticizing the judiciary, with no fear of using the notwithstanding clause, and a very Feketean nomenclature of anti-special privileges built around identity, right down to the level of threats against universities if they inhibit so-called free speech, which is code word for a condoned racist and fascist politics and shallow dismissal of political correctness or cultural Marxism or postmodernists or biofeminists since they collapse into the same mythical creature, anyway. Nowhere does Piccone and his Telosian colleagues re-introduce McLuhan’s appeals to Woodrow Wilson or George Grant’s ideas in excavating the roots Canadian conservatism: the rights of the unborn, the withdrawal

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

of justice from the aged and dying, the preoccupation with heterosexual sexuality of a procreative type.⁴⁹ Kroker would step carefully around these landmines in his critique of Grant's compromised Nietzschean perspective on technology, which he abandons to secure the transcendent values of his Christianity for justice.⁵⁰ But Fekete, in Picconean bluster, waded into a quagmire of his own making as he imagined a tribal biofeminist menace about to undermine what remained of the freedoms of liberal democracy, the welfare state and its public universities.

Conclusion

The application of Piccone's artificial negativity thesis to Canada has spawned a minor critical literature of its own. Michael McConkey has argued the following with reference to the artificialization of resistant, autonomous negativity of an organic type into the rationalizing process:

Whereas opposition in Canada had historically been dealt with largely through the state's exercise of its monopoly on coercion ... in the 1960s, notwithstanding the continued use of crude repression on occasion, a qualitatively new pattern of response to dissent emerged. Perhaps the prototypical example of this new pattern was the 1965 Company of Young Canadians (CYC): bureaucratic rationality's dry run in artificial negativity vis-à-vis the budding New Left of the Student Union for Peace Action. Here we see the beginning of a pattern in which potentially organic opposition is organized through the incentive of financial support into a mini-counter-bureaucracy that gives voice to oppositional concerns through a channel always moderated by its own self-consciously modest connection with the bureaucracy.⁵¹

49 See Grant, *Technology and Justice*, Toronto: Anansi, 1986.

50 Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind*, pp. 48-51.

51 Michael McConkey, "Paul Piccone as Libertarian? A Canadian Proof and Rothbardian Critique," *The Independent Review* 16/4 (2012): 508. One could add here Scott G. McNall, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Retrospec-

Embedded historically and applied to select examples of federal programs, McConkey convincingly elucidates the problem of accommodation and the cycle of capitulation. Yet the approach I have taken emphasizes the milieu of *Telos's* formation in the downtown neighbourhoods of a pre-gentrified Toronto where some sense of an organic negativity is not yet subjected to overwhelming organization. Indeed, the very existence and survival of *Telos* and the flourishing of the Toronto Telos Group within an independent journal is evidence of some degree of organic opposition to the sterility of philosophy and functionalist sociology practiced in the universities. To use McConkey's terms, bureaucratic rationality was not yet so *out of control* as to dismiss the accomplishments of *Telos* and its burgeoning importance as a venue of choice for a generation of young scholars.

McConkey is also acutely aware of the importance that Piccone ascribed to the Reform Party, but he is also attuned to the irony of his position. Piccone's sympathies for secessionist movements is given, but, his critique of Reform's intellectual naivety and of the party's courting of the New Class intellectuals and bureaucrats as opposed to local activists and community organizers, simply seem ironic when viewed in terms of the Party's electoral successes. In the end, what enabled Stephen Harper to become Prime Minister was the success of this strategy, even though it, from Piccone's perspective, was a betrayal of the promise of populism and its anti-New Class position. Thus, the Reform Party failed in this estimation to become a genuine means for the realization of Piccone's federal populism. As McConkey put it:

To be a genuine vehicle for what Piccone calls "Federal Populism," the Reform Party would have had to transcend the New Class ideology of the left-right divide that made it vulnerable to be co-opted by the very forces it stood objectively against Piccone observed that the conservative wing within the Reform Party, led by Stephen Harper, explicitly sought to pa-

tronize the New Class in order to recruit its members. Piccone believed the time was ripe for a new populism of communities and citizens to reject the bureaucratic centralism of the New Class.⁵²

Nothing fails quite like success. Nothing exudes New Class capitulation as forming a government, making the grassroots' – the 'living people' – access to power more mediated indirectly by multiple political institutions. But Piccone did not live to experience this breakthrough in 2006 by a united right, the Conservative Party. Nevertheless, it may have amounted to no more than the discursive placement of new right populism on national political agendas.⁵³ And, as Fekete noted above, as far as discourse generation was concerned, the artificial negativity thesis was highly productive for the journal, even if its restricted terms made it seem somewhat mechanical.

It was in the wake of the Schmittian turn that more and more effort was expended by *Telos* contributors and editors to explore populism as an extension of the journal's intellectual project, revised or otherwise. The attention paid to Reform in Canada was in itself a further manifestation of the journal's strong Canadian roots and ongoing interests, from the halcyon days of Toronto *Telos*, the site of the First International *Telos* Conference in Waterloo, Ontario, the editorial runs from Toronto down to Piccone's residence in St. Louis for concentrated editing sessions, and the continuity of a contestatory interest in politics, especially aimed at liberalism, north of the border. The Reform Party served as a prism of sorts for the further investigations of the European New Right, and ulti-

52 McConkey, "Piccone as Libertarian?" p. 511.

53 Steve Patten, "The Reform Party's Re-imagining of the Canadian Nation, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34/1 (1999): 44. Patten writes, with some heavy footnoted provisos: "Clearly Reform has not been successful at imposing its conception of Canadian political economy on our collective imagination, but the party has influenced the course of political debate by ensuring increased prominence [not 'enhance the legitimacy of'] for the discourse and ideology of New Right populism."

mately, Alt-Right movements. The minimalist state⁵⁴ of Piccone's federal populism, its anti-liberalism, penchant for looseness in federations and distaste for multiculturalism, which translates into a kind of Feketean critique of identity politics, makes the dalliance – like a cat playing with a caught bird – of the vestiges of critical theory with Reform not only conceptually coherent, but inevitable.

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54 See Robert D'Amico's definition of Piccone's federalism: "The basic insight of federalism is that subunits federate underneath a central state but with significant restrictions on the power of the central state over the federated units and significant autonomy for these communities to develop their own ways of life. The glue that holds the federation together is that the central state functions to defend and protect the units, but no more. For example, military defense and perhaps some control over general conditions of citizenship belong to the central state. Such then are the minimum conditions for a federation." In D'Amico, "What is Federalism? On Piccone's Late Political Philosophy," *Fast Capitalism* 5.1 (2009): http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/5_1/D_Amico.html.

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The Postnational Constellation Revisited: Critical Thoughts on Sovereignty.¹

William Outhwaite²

Abstract: ‚Sovereignty‘ has become a shibboleth in the twenty-first century, notably in the US, Russia, Turkey, Hungary and Poland, and in the Brexit débâcle in the UK. This paper traces the way in which Habermas’s concept of the post-national constellation has been developed in more recent work, and takes it as a reference point for the evaluation of the cult of national sovereignty which has become prominent in the present century. The argument outlines two broad responses: one is to ‚transnationalise‘ the concept of sovereignty to reflect the reality of an interdependent world; the other is to reject it as an inappropriate way of thinking about political self-determination under modern conditions.

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- 1 This paper is based on my contribution to a conference organised by Gabriele de Angelis at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa in November 2019. I am grateful to Gabriele and the other participants for their comments, and to Simon Susen (City University, London) for comments on an earlier version of this article. I also presented some of these ideas in an article in a special issue on Max Weber of the *Russian Sociological Review*, Volume 18, Issue 2, 2018. <https://sociologica.hse.ru/en/2019-18-2.html>
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„An epic struggle between globalization and a resurgent nationalism is changing political identities and conflicts across the world.“ (Colin Crouch)³

The argument which Jürgen Habermas developed in ‚The Postnational Constellation‘ (1998) is prefigured in the previous decade in, for example, ‚Volkssouveränität als Verfahren‘ (1988), ‚Staatsbürgerschaft und nationale Identität‘ (1990) and the section of *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen* (1996) with the title ‚Hat der Nationstaat eine Zukunft?‘. This includes an expanded version of an article published in English, ‚The European national State‘, ‚Inklusion-Einbeziehen oder Einschließen‘, and his critique of Dieter Grimm, ‚Braucht Europa eine Verfassung?‘.

In ‚Volkssouveränität als Verfahren‘, he criticises ‚concretistic‘ conceptions of sovereignty and argues that it is now ‚communicatively liquified‘ or ‚set aflow‘.⁴ The shift to a focus on the problematic position of the national state comes between this text and the next, which was of course just the moment when globalisation was becoming a word in common use.⁵ Theories of cosmopolitan democracy (which I consider an advance in democratic political theory comparable to that of social democracy a century earlier) were also soon being developed, notably by one of Habermas’s English publishers, the late David Held. In *Vergangenheit als Zukunft* Habermas (1990) was taking up these themes, as he recalled in 2007.⁶

3 Colin Crouch, *The Globalization Backlash*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 1. See also William Outhwaite, The corruption of markets, knowledge, politics etc. In *Colin Crouch: On Democracy and Capitalism*, ed. Smail Rasic (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2021) and, on EUropean cosmopolitanism, William Outhwaite, "The EU and its Enlargements: 'Cosmopolitanism by Small Steps'". In *Europe and Asia beyond East and West*, edited by Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge, 2006), 193-202.

4 Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), 626. *Between Facts and Norms*, tr. William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

5 Listening to Martin Albrow talking about it on a flight home from Helsinki in 1990, I realised I had to ask him to write an entry for the dictionary Tom Bottomore and I were preparing.

6 Habermas, "Kommunikative Rationalität und grenzüberschreitende Politik:

By 1990 Habermas was already pointing sharply to the implications of European integration which, along with the 1989 revolutions and German reunification, and the flows of migrants and asylum seekers into western Europe, problematised the relation between citizenship and national identity. „...hinter der supranational vollzogenen ökonomischen Integration bleiben die nationalstaatlich verfaßten demokratischen Prozesse hoffnungslos zurück.“⁷ [...the democratic processes constituted at the level of the national state lag hopelessly behind the economic integration taking place at a supranational level.] The way to respond to this was to recognise the *civic* dimension of citizenship: „Die demokratische Staatsbürgerschaft braucht nicht in der nationalen Identität eines Volkes verwurzelt zu sein; unangesehen der Vielfalt verschiedener kultureller Lebensformen, verlangt sie aber die Sozialisation aller Staatsbürger in einer gemeinsamen politischen Kultur.“⁸ [Democratic citizenship does need not be rooted in the national identity of a people. However, regardless of the diversity of different cultural forms of life, it does require the socialisation of all citizens in a common political culture.] Even in a federal Europe, the national states would have to retain ‚a strong structuring capacity‘ (eine starke strukturbildende Kraft...):

Auf dem dornigen Wege zur Europäische Union bilden allerdings die Nationalstaaten weniger ein Problem wegen unüberwindlicher Souveränitätsansprüche als vielmehr deshalb, weil bisher demokratische Prozesse nur innerhalb ihrer Grenzen halbwegs funktionieren. Mit einem Wort: die politische Öffentlichkeit ist bisher nationalstaatlich fragmentiert geblieben. Deshalb drängt sich die Frage auf, ob es eine europäische Staatsbürgerschaft überhaupt geben kann.⁹ [On the thorny

eine Replik" in *Anarchie der kommunikativen Freiheit*. Jürgen Habermas und die Theorie der internationalen Politik, ed. Peter Niesen and Benjamin Herborth (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 406-7.

7 Habermas, *Faktizität*, 632. Translation modified.

8 Habermas, *Faktizität*, 643.

9 Habermas, *Faktizität*, 645.

path to a European Union the national states are a problem less because of ineradicable claims to sovereignty than because democratic processes only function, if imperfectly, within their boundaries. In a word: the political sphere has so far remained fragmented along the lines of national states. The question then arises whether there a European citizenship can exist at all.]

This is essentially still the situation in which we find ourselves, but the sovereigntist backlash has become more virulent.

In *The Inclusion of the Other* Habermas introduced the idea that we are ‚on the uncertain path to postnational societies‘¹⁰ and addressed the tension between nationalism and republicanism.¹¹ Habermas wrote that the national state embodies the tension between universalism and the particularism of a historically formed community: ‚In die Begrifflichkeit des Nationalstaats ist die Spannung zwischen dem Universalismus einer egalitären Rechtsgemeinschaft und dem Partikularismus einer historischen Schicksalsgemeinschaft eingelassen.‘¹² (Habermas 1996: 139) In the other two essays in this section he pursued the idea of a postnational Europe which was not hung up on the idea of the existence or non-existence of a European ‚people‘ (the theme underlying the proposals of a ‚democratic‘ alternative suggested by Bellamy and by Kalypso Nicolaïdis) but grounded in a shared public sphere and political culture. *The Postnational Constellation* continued this line of argument.¹³

I shall not follow through the details of Habermas’s subsequent writings on Europe and the discussions in and around critical theory. It is however worth picking out a few elements of these debates. Overall Habermas has become more pessimistic about the way things are go-

10 Habermas, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 130.

11 See for example Richard Bellamy, *A Republican Europe of States. Cosmopolitanism, Intergovernmentalism and Democracy in the EU* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

12 Habermas, *Einbeziehung*, 139.

13 For another early account of the post-national, see Touraine 1994. See also Vobruba 2012.

ing, as in his 2008 book *Ach, Europa*, translated into English under the title *The Faltering Project*. Speaking near Bonn, he noted that it was there that the Federal Republic achieved the goal of its sovereignty only in close connection with the political unification of Europe,¹⁴ and in *Zur Verfassung Europas* he argued for a transnationalisation of popular sovereignty¹⁵; he returned to this theme in a conference contribution in 2014.¹⁶

If one wants to retain the term sovereignty, this is, I think, a defensible way of doing so, though my own feeling is that it is irremediably discredited. Habermas is of course bilingual in sociology and political philosophy, as well in so many other disciplines (his Habilitation, with *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, was technically in politics, as he recalled in 2007).¹⁷ He has thus been able to transcend a division in which, as Christian Volk (2014: 148) suggests, political theory has generally not caught up with the social scientific responses to transnationalisation.¹⁸ 'Sovereignty thinking', Volk concludes, is state centred and in this way continues to write the history of state rule.' It is thus incompatible with a critical theory of the political.¹⁹ Markus Patberg also explores the invocation of sovereignty, 'the right to dismantle constitutional orders without

14 Habermas, *Europe. The Faltering Project* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 80.

15 Habermas, *Zur Verfassung Europas* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 47.

16 Habermas J., "An Exploration of the Meaning of Transnationalization of Democracy, Using the Example of the European Union". In Penelope Deutscher and Cristina Lafont (eds.), *Critical Theory in Critical Times. Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 3-18. See also Bertrand Badie, *Un monde sans souveraineté* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 109: "D'une souveraineté absolue on passe...à l'hypothèse d'une souveraineté raisonnable..."

17 Habermas, in *Anarchie der kommunikativen Freiheit*.

18 Christian Volk, "Das Problem der Souveränität in der transnationalen Konstellation", in Christian Volk and Friederike Kurtz (eds) *Der Begriff der Souveränität in der transnationalen Konstellation* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014), 148. See also Volk, "The Problem of Sovereignty in Globalized Times", *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (Online First, February 2019), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872119828010>

19 Volk, *Souveränität*, 158-9.

the intention to construct new ones', in the service of European disintegration.²⁰

A volume co-edited by Seyla Benhabib and based on a conference at Yale in 2003 brought together a number of critical theorists addressing issues of cosmopolitan democracy. Nancy Fraser asked how public sphere theory can be 'transnationalized' so as to 'serve as a critical theory in a post-Westphalian world'.²¹ The public sphere, she argued, must satisfy the dual requirements of normative legitimacy and political efficacy, and this requires 'new transnational public powers, which can be made accountable to new democratic transnational circuits of public opinion'. Craig Calhoun addressed the issue of 'Social solidarity as a problem for cosmopolitan democracy', restating his brilliant critique of 'the class consciousness of frequent travelers' and concluding:

Strong Westphalian doctrines of sovereignty may always have been out of date. But just as it would be hasty to imagine that we are entering a postnational era –when all the empirical indicators are that nationalism is resurgent precisely because of asymmetrical globalisation – so it would be hasty to forget the strong claims to collective autonomy and self-determination of those who have been denied both, and the need for solidarity among those who are least empowered to realize their projects as individuals.²²

Over a decade later this was certainly part of the motivation behind the Leave vote in the Brexit referendum. Leave support has remained re-

20 Markus Patberg, "Destituent power in the European Union: On the limits of a negativistic logic of constitutional politics", *Journal of International Political Theory* 15: 1, 82. See also Kolja Möller, "Von der Krise der Volkssouveränität zur transnationalen destituierenden Macht", *Das Argument* 328, 2018, 502-515.

21 Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the public sphere: on the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post Westphalian world", in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovich (eds), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66.

22 Craig Calhoun, "Social solidarity as a problem for cosmopolitan democracy", in Benhabib, Shapiro, and Petranović (eds), *Identities, Affiliations, and Alliances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 302.

markably strong (though since March 2017 in a minority), despite the mounting evidence that secession will be catastrophic for the UK, as well as damaging for the rest of Europe. Theresa May's endlessly repeated mantra of 'taking back control of our money, our borders and our laws' remained powerful, despite the fact that the pound sterling was threatened only by her persistence in the Brexit project. The principle enunciated in the neo-Nazi British National Party's manifesto of 2005 that Britain must 'retain sovereign political control of its borders' is now part of the mainstream.²³ It should also be remembered that May's hostility during her term as interior minister was directed not against EU membership but against the European human rights regime, though withdrawing from the latter would of course have entailed expulsion from the former. It remains quite possible that the Conservatives will reinstate withdrawal from the ECHR as a policy, with the result that the UK would join Belarus as an outsider.

In another variant of theories of sovereignty, there is Putin's doctrine of 'sovereign democracy' (суверенная демократия), inaugurated in 2006. As Mikhail Kasyanov wrote in *Kommersant* in the same year (29.8.06), this involves „...the glorification of populism, the steady destruction of private and public institutions and the departure from the principles of the law, democracy, and the free market.“ Except perhaps for the last of these, the free market, his characterisation applies also to the Polish and Hungarian regimes. In Russia, wrote Ivan Krastev:

The concept of 'sovereign democracy' ...succeeds in confronting the Kremlin's two ideological enemies of choice: the liberal democracy of the West and the populist democracy admired by the rest. It pretends to reconcile Russia's urgent need of Western-type modernization and Russia's will to defend its independence from the West.²⁴

23 Nick Cohen, "'Brexiters' adoption of war language will stop Britain from finding peace", *The Guardian* 13.10.19, 62.

24 Ivan Krastev, "Russia as the 'Other Europe'", *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol 5, No 4, October-December 2007, 70.

To put it briefly, the trend so far this century seems to be towards the combination of nationalism with plebiscitary and often populist appeals to the ‚will of the people‘²⁵, as expressed in often manipulated but semi-democratic elections.²⁶ This cult of the ‚mandate‘ is taken to legitimate attempts to sweep aside legal and/or parliamentary obstacles. There are prominent examples in Hungary (changes to the constitution, subversion of the media) and Poland (attacks on judges) but also in the more established and, until recently, apparently stable democracies of the USA (Trump’s obstruction of justice and declarations of states of emergency) and the UK (Theresa May’s attempts to exclude parliament from the Article 50 notification, with the judges who blocked this trick branded in the gutter press as ‚enemies of the people‘ and one of them suffering a homophobic attack; Johnson’s illegal suspension of parliament).

It is therefore relevant to look more closely at the concept of ‚sovereignty“.²⁷ Briefly, my argument is that it should be distinguished from self-determination or, in more explicitly political terms, the uncontentious Aristotelian principle of being both ruler and ruled (*arkhein*). The Aristotelian citizen is a person who has the right (*exousia*) to participate in deliberative or judicial office).²⁸ Sovereignty, I suggest, is however not a helpful way to think about political self-determination in an interdependent world of ‚multi-level governance‘.

A less loaded way of conceptualising this process is in terms of state power and its uses. A good case for a descriptive conception of sovereignty along these lines is made by Edgar Grande and Louis Pauly. They distinguish four types of state. The ‚cooperation state‘, a term introduced

25 On populism, see in particular Rogers Brubaker, ‚Between nationalism and civilisationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective“, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40, 8, 2017, 1191-1226; Albert Weale, *The Will of the People. A Modern Myth*. Cambridge: Polity, 2018..

26 See Jeffrey Isaac, "Is there illiberal democracy? A problem with no semantic solution". *eurozine* 9 August, 2017. <https://www.eurozine.com/is-there-illiberal-democracy/>

27 The Council of European Studies chose as its 2019 conference theme "Sovereignties in Contention. Nations, Regions and Citizens in Europe".

28 Aristotle, *Politics* III, 1275b, 18–21.

by Ulrich Beck, able and willing to cooperate with other states (for example in the EU) is distinguished from the egoistic state, able but not willing to cooperate (for example the US in many policy areas, or states euphemistically labelled tax havens or paradis fiscaux), the weak state which is willing to cooperate but incapable of ,giving effect to transnational agreements' and the rogue state, criminalised or terroristic.²⁹ Recognising the difficulties of sustaining cooperation, they conclude however on the necessity of ,realistically facing and pragmatically reconstituting political authority transnationally...'.³⁰

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In what follows I address more normative uses of the term. Sovereignty has become a contemporary shibboleth,³¹ for example in the Brexit slogan 'take back control'. A minister who resigned from Theresa May's doomed cabinet cited as her first reason for doing so: 'I do not believe that we will be a truly sovereign United Kingdom through the deal that is now proposed'. The sovereignty shibboleth is not however new. Eli Lauterpacht warned in 1997 against its use by the British Conservative Michael Howard in his attack on the European Court of Justice; the Brexit virus had been incubating for a long time.³² Other examples are Trump's apotheosis of the already well-established US suspicion of multilateral obligations, and the protests of the Polish, Hungarian, Russian and Chinese regimes against external criticism in relation to the rule of law and

29 Edgar Grande and Louis Pauly (eds.), *Complex Sovereignty. Reconstituting Political Authority in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 294-5.

30 Grande and Pauly, 299. See also Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World*. Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992; Michael Goodhart and Stacy Bondanella Taninchev, "The New Sovereigntist Challenge for Global Governance: Democracy without Sovereignty", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 55, Issue 4, December 2011, 1047-1068.

31 Nicolò Conti, Danilo Di Mauro and Vicenze Memoli, "The European Union under Threat of a Trend toward National Sovereignty", *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 14, 3, 2018, 231-252.

32 Eli Lauterpacht, "Sovereignty - Myth or Reality?", *International Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 1, Jan. 1997, 137-150.

human rights.³³ Richard Sakwa has written, in a generally sympathetic discussion of Russian foreign policy, that 'Sovereignty remains the central value, but it is tempered by a commitment to multilateral institutions.'³⁴ (Ukraine might not agree.)

Jack Hayward and Rüdiger Wurzel noted in 2012 that the opposition between sovereignty and solidarity with which their book was concerned played out differently across the EU: 'While some of the economically more prosperous member states have insisted on greater sovereignty in order to be able to practice a higher degree of domestic solidarity, the economically weaker member states have traditionally supported a higher degree of European integration in exchange for greater solidarity from the EU, notably through structural funds.'³⁵ This relation no longer holds, as many eastern member states have also embraced sovereignism while continuing to rely on transfers from the Union. Attila Ágh (2019: 120-121) summarises the situation in East Central Europe (ECE):

Systemic change has...generated the sovereignty dilemma: regaining full sovereignty after the collapse of the Soviet Empire and giving it up – at least partially – in the EU. It has been widely accepted in Europe that shared sovereignty best serves the interests of small nations in the global world...This construct was a relatively good compromise for the power-seeking ECE domestic elites until the global crisis, but less and less so during global crisis management with its emerging economic nationalisms and fragmentations in the EU, and

33 Peter Verovšek gives a more sympathetic explanation of this development: "Between 1945 and 1989: the rise of 'illiberal democracy' in post-Communist Europe." *Social Europe* Nov.9, 2019: <https://www.socialeurope.eu/between-1945-and-1989-the-rise-of-illiberal-democracy-in-post-communist-europe>. On Russia, see for example Helga Blakkisrud and Zaur Gasimov, "Tradition, Nation und der böse Westen. Putin, Erdogan und die Legitimation ihrer Herrschaft", *Osteuropa* 68, 10-12, 2018, 131-146.

34 *Le Monde diplomatique*, English edition, October 2019, 5..

35 Jack Hayward and Rüdiger Wurzel (eds.), *European Disunion. Between Sovereignty and Solidarity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 2.

thus they have turned to active resistance against the EU... Sovereignty-based conflict has been the long-standing basic frame of ECE political communication, with regular offensives against ,enemies'³⁶....

At the EU level, President Macron has invoked ,European sovereignty' for example in an address in March 2019 to representatives of member states' intelligence services, and in September of the same year on ,digital sovereignty'. A report to the Prime Minister the previous year stressed the need for a policy on data and artificial intelligence ,structured around the goals of sovereignty and strategic autonomy...in France and in Europe so that they can avoid becoming just „digital colonies“ of the Chinese and American giants.'³⁷ (Viliani 2018: 22) Heiko Maas, German Foreign Minister, in a speech on June 29th 2020, listed ,sovereignty and solidarity' as the core foreign policy themes for Germany's Council presidency in the autumn of 2020.

The current salience of the concept of sovereignty was brought home to me as I edited a book on Brexit in the autumn of 2016, in which Stefan Auer, the only contributor who saw possible advantages in Brexit, stressed the possibility that Britain might escape from what he and Nicole Scicluna elsewhere described as the ,sovereignty paradox':

...member states have ceded too much control to the supra-national level to be able to set effective policies in important areas independently of each other and of the European institutions. Yet they retain enough initiative to resist compromise and thwart common solutions.³⁸ (Auer 2017: 50)

36 Áttila Ágh, *Declining Democracy in East-Central Europe: The Divide in the EU and Emerging Hard Populism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2019, 120-121.

37 Cédric Viliani C et al., "For a Meaningful Artificial Intelligence. Towards a French and European Strategy". Mission Assigned by the Prime Minister Édouard Philippe, 2018, 22: www.aiforhumanity.fr > *MissionViliani_Report_ENG-VF*

38 Stefan Auer, (2017) "Brexit, Sovereignty and the End of an Ever Closer Union", in *Brexit. Sociological Responses*, edited by William Outhwaite, London: Anthem, 2017, 41-53.

Scicluna (2017: 113-4) illustrates this with the example of the euro crisis:

...national governments cannot succeed alone, yet they struggle to effectively cooperate...the failure to bring EMU fully within the constitutional paradigm in which laws are made following the community method...undermined the ECB's single monetary policy over a number of years, leading to the crisis. The crisis, in turn, has undermined the EU's constitutional balance, insofar as solutions have been sought outside the framework of EU treaty law (e.g. the Fiscal Compact which was adopted as an international treaty, and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which was established as an inter-governmental institution...³⁹

The recent controversy over the relevance of sovereignty has a longer history. One of the first contributions to the British discussion was by Noel Malcolm⁴⁰, currently one of the few academic supporters of Brexit.⁴¹ It is interesting that a defender of state sovereignty, the jurist Dieter Grimm (2009), emphasises the numerous limits put on it by the UN and WTO as well as the EU. For EU member states he sees Neil MacCormick's 'post-sovereignty' as a possible future, but also the disappearance of sovereignty altogether.⁴² For the moment, however, 'sovereignty protects democracy' (Grimm 2015: 128).⁴³ Martti Koskeniemi (2010: 242) also ends his rather sceptical discussion on a positive note: '...sovereignty points to the possibility...that one is not just a pawn in someone else's

39 Nicole Scicluna, "Can the EU's constitutional framework accommodate democratic politics?", *Perspectives on Federalism* 9, 2, 2017, 98-118.

40 Noel Malcolm, *Sense on Sovereignty*. London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1991.

41 <https://www.ft.com/content/e0b30912-1fff-11e9-a46f-08f9738d6b2b> See also MacCormick 1999, Held 2002, Walker 2003, Kalmo and Skinner 2010 and, for a well-argued defence of sovereignty, Duke 2019.

42 Dieter Grimm, *Sovereignty: The Origin and Future of a Political and Legal Concept*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, 117.

43 Grimm, *Sovereignty*, 128.

game.⁴⁴ More sceptically, Arjun Appadurai has deconstructed the myth of 'economic sovereignty, as a basis for national sovereignty' as 'increasingly irrelevant':⁴⁵

In the absence of any national economy that modern states can protect and develop, it is no surprise that there has been a worldwide tendency in effective states and in many aspiring social movements to perform national sovereignty by turning towards cultural majoritarianism, ethno-nationalism and the stifling of internal intellectual and cultural dissent. In other words, the loss of economic sovereignty everywhere produces a shift towards emphasizing cultural sovereignty.

Against this, Appadurai suggests, we need a 'liberal multitude' as an answer to this 'regressive multitude'.⁴⁵

Sergio Fabbrini has suggested plausibly that the rise of nativist populist parties and the opposition between 'sovereignism' and 'Europeanism' in relation to the EU was fostered by the Union's turn in the Maastricht Treaty to intergovernmentalism as a complement and an alternative, initially expected to be temporary but which has now become permanent, to the 'Community method'. This has also reinforced the dominant position of the larger member states and the erosion of European democracy. He proposes a double 'decoupling', both a clearer separation between matters of European concern and those which can be left to the member states and a more radical decoupling of the Union itself into a core (prob-

44 Martti Koskeniemi, "Conclusion: vocabularies of sovereignty – powers of a paradox." In *Sovereignty in Fragments*, ed. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 222-242.

45 Arjun Appadurai, "Democracy fatigue", in *The Great Regression* (ed. H. Geiselberger, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, 2-3. See also Ingolfur Blühdorn and Felix Butzlaff, "Rethinking Populism: Peak democracy, liquid identity and the performance of sovereignty" *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 22, no. 2, May, 2019, 191-211; Klaus Kraemer, "Longing for a National Container. On the symbolic economy of Europe's new nationalism", *European Societies*, published online: 19 Nov 2019: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616696.2019.1694164>

ably corresponding roughly to the membership of the Eurozone and the Schengen area) which would pursue a federal union and, outside this, a periphery of states wishing to participate only in the single market.⁴⁶ Whether or not the proposed cure is feasible, the diagnosis is certainly persuasive.

In relation to Hungary, a country which he has studied throughout his career, Chris Hann (2019) has advanced an argument which has a more general application.⁴⁷ It is, in summary, that liberal urban intellectuals have ignored the concerns of the victims of neoliberal policies – a criticism which most observers would accept to some extent. In the post-communist region, this can be given a further twist by populist parties with the claim that ‘1989’ was not properly implemented, thus animating policies which combine nativist nationalism with generous social measures (such as over €100 a month child benefit in Poland) and a generally ‘leftish’ approach to economic policy (Buštiková 2018).⁴⁸

The fact that a critique of liberal cosmopolitanism along these lines has also been prominent in the rhetoric of Theresa May and Boris Johnson means that we cannot afford to ignore it in the west as well. If antisemitism is, as August Bebel and other social democrats said, ‘the socialism of fools’, a broader-spectrum populist xenophobia seems set to be the most popular contemporary version of socialism across much of the developed world, as traditional centre-left parties weaken. This trend, I think, has not been taken seriously enough. It may of course fizzle out, just as the British disaster has weakened hostility to the EU across the continent.

46 Sergio Fabbrini (2019) *Europe's Future. Decoupling and Reforming*. Cambridge University Press.

Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the public sphere: on the legitimacy and efficacy of public opinion in a post Westphalian world", in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovich (eds), *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 45-66.

47 Chris Hann, "A betrayal by the intellectuals", *Eurozine*, 8 April, 2019) <https://www.eurozine.com/betrayal-liberal-intellectuals/>

48 See Lenka Buštiková, "The Radical Right in Eastern Europe", in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press), 565-81.

Most worrying, perhaps, is evidence that the radical right, at least in Western Europe, has a growing appeal for younger populations of ‘sexually-modern nativists’⁴⁹ who, in Caroline Marie Lancaster’s analysis, now make up nearly half of radical right supporters. Lancaster (2019: 14) writes:

Sexually-modern nativists hold progressive stances on the T questions on tradition, gender and LGBT rights, support strong government, and are strongly opposed to immigration and European integration. They are younger, more highly educated, and more likely to be female compared with other radical right supporters.⁵⁰

Generally in post-communist Europe, radical right parties may not yet have shifted their approach towards this cohort as much as in the west (where some, like the Lijst Pim Fortuyn and its successor, the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), began with this orientation). The shift in opinion is however visible, for example in Poland, where the proportion opposed to the toleration of homosexuality has shrunk from 41% in 2001 to 24% in 2019, while those finding it ‘something normal’ have increased from 5% to 14%.⁵¹ Also in Poland, however, the extreme right party Konfederacja, which attained 7% of the vote in the 2019 elections, is the most popular party among young men (18-35); whereas young women (18-39) see climate change as the greatest threat to Poland, young men cite the LGBT movement.⁵² Juan

49 See Niels Spierings, Marcel Lubbers and Andrej Zaslove, “Sexually modern nativist voters: do they exist and do they vote for the populist radical right?” *Gender and Education*, 29:2, 2017, 216-237. See also Pieter Bevelander and Ruth Wodak (eds.), *Europe at the Crossroads. Confronting Populist, Nationalist, and Global Challenges*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

50 Caroline Marie Lancaster, “Not So Radical After All: Ideological Diversity Among Radical Right Supporters and Its Implications”, *Political Studies*, September 2019. <https://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/KS339UO2HFFN-Q66KRKNI/full>

51 *POLEN-ANALYSEN* NR. 244, 22.10.2019, p.12. <https://www.laender-analyse.de/polen-analysen/244/PolenAnalysen244.pdf>

52 Gavin Rae, “The neoliberal far right in Poland”, *Social Europe* 11 Dec, 2019. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-neoliberal-far-right-in-poland>

Díez Medrano (2020) ends his study of binational couples in western Europe with the disappointing conclusion that ‘many social cosmopolitans are willing to support the populist right, the implication being that while they support European cooperation, they are reluctant to give up national sovereignty.’⁵³ The way the Brexit virus spread in the relatively cosmopolitan society of the UK is another example of this conjunction.

The other virus which was spectacularly lethal in the UK in the first half of 2020 is of course the coronavirus C-19. Luiza Bialasiewicz and Hanna L. Muelenhoff have pointed to the way in which many sovereignists have turned against even their national and local states in the name of a personal sovereignty which rejects health measures perceived as intrusive.

...while right-populist forms of affective mobilization may have explicitly appealed to imaginaries of ‘strong’ states and ‘strong’ rights, they have always been firmly a part – and product – of the neoliberal state and neoliberal conceptions of citizenship, as numerous commentators have argued. In this sense, far-right strategies of affective mobilization have always fallen firmly within the forms of individualized, entrepreneurial citizenship characteristic of neoliberalism. This is what brings them together in this moment with other political forces born of late neoliberalism, ranging from radical-ecologists, to wellness fanatics, and left-populists.⁵⁴

In the US the rejection of compulsory mask-wearing has been particularly striking.

Overall the impact on parties of what we might call the modernisation of nativism fits what Cynthia Miller Idriss, writing on Germany, called

53 Juan Díez Medrano, *Europe, in Love. Binational Couples and Cosmopolitan Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 198.

54 Luiza Bialasiewicz and Hanna L. Muelenhoff, "'Personal sovereignty' in pandemics: or, why do today's 'sovereignists' reject state sovereignty?" *Social Europe* 30.6.20 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/personal-sovereignty-in-pandemics-or-why-do-todays-sovereignists-reject-state-sovereignty/>

'The Extreme Gone Mainstream'.⁵⁵ This is particularly prominent in post-communist Europe where, as Buřtikova stressed, radical right and mainstream parties coexist more often: 'If there is a reversal in liberal democratic governance in Eastern Europe, it will most likely be initiated not by a small radical party but by a large radicalized mainstream party...'⁵⁶ This has now of course come to pass in Poland and Hungary, where state propaganda plays on the theme of national sovereignty suppressed under communism and then sold out by pro-EU liberal elites.

At the other end of the political spectrum, DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) takes sovereignty seriously, as noted by Paul Blokker:

Transnational populism lifts the struggle over popular sovereignty to the transnational level, where the action is...DiEM25 does not deny the national altogether, but rather calls for a democratic strengthening of sovereignty on both the national and transnational levels.⁵⁷

Monnet's warning in 1943⁵⁸ however remains relevant:

Il n'y aura pas de paix en Europe si les Etats se reconstituent sur une base de souveraineté nationale avec ce que cela entraîne de politique de prestige et de protection économique...

Les pays d'Europe sont trop étroits pour assurer à leurs peuples la prospérité que les conditions modernes rendent possible et par conséquent nécessaire.

55 Cynthia Miller Idriss, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream: Commercialization and Far Right Youth Culture in Germany*. Princeton University Press, 2018. See also Miller Idriss, *Blood and Culture: Youth, Right-Wing Extremism, and National Belonging in Contemporary Germany*. Duke University Press, 2009 and Kraemer, "Longing".

56 Buřtikova, "The Radical Right", 575.

57 Paul Blokker, Varieties of populist constitutionalism: the transnational dimension. *German Law Journal* no. 20, 2020, 345; 347.

58 https://www.cvce.eu/obj/note_de_reflexion_de_jean_monnet_alger_5_aout_1943-fr-b61a8924-57bf-4890-9e4b-73bf4d882549.html. See Isikzel 2017: 140-1.

[There will be no peace in Europe if the States are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty, with all that that entails in terms of prestige politics and economic protectionism...The countries of Europe are too small to guarantee their peoples the prosperity that modern conditions make possible and consequently necessary.]

Richard Kuper concluded his analysis of democratic deficits in the European Union: 'The very desperation with which many nation states are clinging on to their "sovereignty" is, I believe, an indication of the extent to which it has already been eroded – from above and below as well as by the emergence of non-state forms of authority...'⁵⁹ Colin Crouch (2019b: 3) agrees: 'Sovereign nationalism can play with flags and anthems, and spend the time hating immigrants, refugees and international organizations, leaving the global economy free.'⁶⁰ Richard Bellamy aptly characterises the way the Brexit government responded to Dani Rodrik's trilemma (the difficulty of combining globalisation, national sovereignty and democracy): 'They have delivered a formal facade of national sovereignty, symbolised by certain immigration controls...combined with a total openness to global economic processes over which they will have little or no democratic control.'⁶¹

The 2020 pandemic starkly illustrates the strength of the nationalist reflex in response to a global threat. The failure of timely coordinated action, even in the US and EU, combined with national and, in the US,

59 Richard Kuper, *Democracy and the European Union*. London Metropolitan University, 1996, 153-4. See also Antonio Negri, "Sovereignty between government, exception and governance", in *Sovereignty in Fragments*, ed. Kalmo and Skinner, 205-221; Turkuler Isiksel, "Square peg, round hole. Why the EU can't fix identity politics", in *Brexit and Beyond. Rethinking the Future of Europe*, edited by Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger, (London: UCL Press, 2018), 239-50; Markus Patberg, "After the Brexit vote: what's left of 'split' popular sovereignty?", *Journal of European Integration* 40: 7, 2019, 923-947.

60 Colin Crouch, "Europe beyond neoliberalism", *Eurozine* April 16, 2019, 3.

61 Richard Bellamy. "Losing control. Brexit and the democratic disconnect". In *Brexit and Beyond. Rethinking the Future of Europe*, edited by Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press), 2017, 228.

subnational initiatives to close borders – a strategy which made sense in Australia and New Zealand but not in the interlocked states of Europe and North America. The right of return for nationals became a *presumption* of return – again obvious enough for tourists but not for transnational residents. In the UK, the Brexit government opted out of EU programmes to procure protective and medical equipment and largely avoided participating in European rescue flights, leaving its nationals stranded across the world. There seemed for a time little prospect of global or European action to support the continents next in line, or the EU member states most seriously affected; they were not surprisingly tempted to look instead to the Chinese dictatorship's self-interested and cynical initiatives to secure diplomatic advantage from the havoc it caused.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the realisation of ideas of European unification which had been present in outline for at least a century. This project was partial, since it included only part of the European sub-continent, still divided into opposed military blocs, but it contained the possibility of extension to the east and the idea that it might serve as a model for initiatives elsewhere in the world in the wake of the dissolving colonial empires. Cosmopolitan democracy later reflected both the recognition of the reality of globalisation and the dream of what Habermas called *Weltinnenpolitik*, global domestic politics. This was always pushing against the gravitational drag of nationalism, not least in the structuring conflict between national and supranational impulses in the emergent European Union, but it seemed to represent an extension of political imagination comparable to way in which the national state form had come to predominate as an alternative to more fragmented or imperial political and economic structures. The abolition of customs barriers between European states sharing a common currency and a common lingua franca (en l'occurrence, English) seemed like an evolutionary advance along the lines of that achieved, often by force, by national states in an earlier period, as they established political and economic structures to manage the necessities of life in the public interest: *Gaz de France*, Royal Mail, British Railways.

In the present century, we are confronted by the paradox that as the national structures have fragmented, with the privatisation of public resources, the fictive national looms ever larger in the imagination of modern citizens. This is still the tension which Marx noted in the middle of the nineteenth century, but we can be less sure than he was that the new would eventually supplant the old. The playing of sovereignty games as any prospect of effective self-determination fades away seems set to be the dominant entertainment as Europe and the world burn.

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The Contemporary Authoritarian Personality: Critical Theory and the Resurgence of Rightwing Authoritarianism

*Geoff Boucher and Madeleine Schneider*¹

Abstract: This paper examines the authoritarian personality in contemporary society, from a standpoint influenced by Habermas. It focuses on critical-theoretical analyses of the Trump presidency that refer to the classical work of the Frankfurt School, as a test case for its position. We survey the classical theory and recent extensions of the original research on the authoritarian personality, concluding that the concept of an authoritarian personality remains a valid social-psychological construct. However, the classical framework directs contemporary researchers working on authoritarianism today to look in the wrong directions. From the classical perspective, authoritarianism is seen as a symptom of a dark underside to the personality structure of the modern individual that becomes activated by economic insecurity. The sociological and psychological evidence suggests something very different is happening. Authoritarian populism in the Western world is a result of cultural backlash rather than economic insecurity. Furthermore, the parenting patterns that produce authoritarian personalities are in relative decline today. From the perspective of recent critical theory, it is not surprising that authoritarian forces concentrate on culture wars. Their agenda is to restore the cultural coordinates that once protected social stratification, the denial of rights and prejudices against excluded groups. It is the agenda of a privileged minority who no longer pretend to represent the “silent majority,” but know themselves to be an archipelago of hardline attitudes in a rising sea of liberal values. This has to be connected with the crisis tendencies of contemporary capitalism, which—at present—involve the displacement of crises into legitima-

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tion and motivation problems. The political positions adopted by authoritarian populists such as Trump have a functional role to play in managing system crises. They seek to engineer a return to forms of socialisation based on obedience to authority and plebiscitary acclamation instead of democratic engagement. The threat to democracy is real and likely to increase; Trump might have lost the election, for instance, but authoritarianism in America has gained a constituency. Understanding the roots of contemporary authoritarianism and its relation to culture wars is a crucial part of grasping what is new in authoritarian populism today, and how it might be stopped.

1. *The Authoritarian Personality in Contemporary Debates*

The present worldwide rise of authoritarian populism has provoked a resurgence of interest in the classical Frankfurt School theory of the authoritarian personality, especially Theodor Adorno's sections.² This is evident in the way that, for many commentators, the contemporary importance of Adorno's formulations from *The Authoritarian Personality* has been underlined by the Trump presidency.³ However, the Putin administration, the Bolsonaro government, and the "illiberal democracy" of Orban have also attracted descriptions as "authoritarian populist" regimes, led by "authoritarian personalities".⁴ Recent books such as *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* (2018) analyse the Trump presiden-

2 Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Wiley, 2019), 603-783.

3 Christian Fuchs, "Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism," *tripleC* 15, no. 1 (2017): 64-65; Peter Gordon, "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited," in *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, ed. Wendy Brown, Peter Gordon, and Max Pensky (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); John Abromeit, "Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Persistence of Authoritarian Populism in the United States," in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018); Bert Rockman, "The Trump Presidency-- What Does It Mean?," *Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften (ZSE)* 14, no. 4 (2016).

4 Jeremiah Morelock, "Introduction: The Frankfurt School and Authoritarian Populism – A Historical Outline," in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018); Peter Gordon, "Introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*," in *The Authoritarian Personality*, ed. Theodor Adorno et al. (London; New York: Verso, 2019).

cy and other authoritarian movements using Adorno and co-thinkers' framework. Re-evaluations of the arguments of the original survey have also surfaced, with Peter Gordon discussing the theory in his section of *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (2018). Additionally, Robyn Marasco recently edited a special edition of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (SAQ) on the authoritarian personality (117(4), 2018). Thinkers within Critical Theory are worried, and the shape of their concerns is fleshed out by the authoritarian attitudes identified in that study.

In its original formulation, as part of *Studies in Prejudice*, the concept of the authoritarian personality was a part of an answer to the research question of whether fascism could happen in America. As is well known, the "F-scale," used to evaluate an individual's potential for fascism through measuring authoritarian tendencies, had nine items.⁵ These included rigid conventionalism, authoritarian submission (towards established authorities), authoritarian aggression (towards violations of convention) and lack of imagination and empathy, and identification with power. Additionally, high scorers on the F-scale regarded the world as a chaotic and dangerous place, dealt with this through superstition and stereotyping, had a destructive attitude to humanity, and were inclined to believe that sexual depravity was rampant in society. The classical work, Peter Gordon writes in his introduction to the study:

represents one of the most sophisticated attempts to explore the origins of fascism, not merely as a political phenomenon, but as the manifestation of dispositions that lie at the very core of the modern psyche. For this reason alone, it merits our attention—especially today, when insurgent fascist or quasi-fascist political movements seem once again to threaten democracies across Europe and the Americas. ... The authoritarian personality does not always turn fascist; its politics may remain dormant ... this thesis offers an important corrective to those who prefer to see fascism as discontinuous with liberal democratic

5 Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 228.

political culture: ... [fascism] is the modern symptom of a psychopathology that is astonishingly widespread and threatens modern society from within.⁶

Yet, despite the renewed interest in the classical problematic, the enthusiasm of thinkers working within Critical Theory for the theses of *The Authoritarian Personality* is surprisingly tepid.⁷

It is worth briefly reviewing some of the contributions to the special issue of SAQ in order to get a sense of what the problem actually is. The first cluster of reservations emerges around the link between the strict father and the authoritarian personality. Barbara Umrath's feminist reading of *The Authoritarian Personality* brings out the pro-feminist, anti-authoritarian agenda of the text, while voicing the concern that the sociology of the

6 Gordon, "Introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*," xxiii-xxiv.

7 Notice that this set of concerns is very different to the standard methodological objections of mainstream sociology. The study was initially criticised for methodological circularity. See: Herbert Hyman and Paul Sheatsley, "The Authoritarian Personality: A Methodological Critique," in *Studies in the Scope and Method of The Authoritarian Personality*, ed. Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (Glencie, IL: Free Press, 1954).. It also neglected the possibility of leftwing authoritarianism. See: Edward Shils, "Authoritarianism: 'Right' and 'Left'," in *Studies in the Scope and Method of The Authoritarian Personality*, ed. Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1954).. Later commentators have returned to the methodological attack onto its contradictions and confusions. See: John Levi Martin, "The Authoritarian Personality 50 Years Later: What Lessons are there for Political Psychology?," *Political Psychology* 22, no. 1 (2001).. This includes use of the controversial discourse of psychoanalysis. See: M. Brewster Smith, "The Authoritarian Personality: A Re-Review, 46 Years Later," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 1 (1997).. Further, critics allege a questionable construction of politics. See: Franz Samuelson, "The Authoritarian Character from Berlin to Berkeley and Beyond: The Odyssey of a Problem," in *Strength and Weakness: The Authoritarian Personality Today*, ed. William F. Stone, Gerda Lederer, and Richard Christie (New York; Berlin: Springer, 1993).. Nonetheless, the study has also been vigorously defended right from the start and continues to have supporters. See: Jos Meloen, "The Fortieth Anniversary of *The Authoritarian Personality*," *Politics & the Individual* 1, no. 1 (1991).. They provide substantial evidence for its influence, especially in social theory. See: Josef Smolik, "The Influence of the Concept of the Authoritarian Personality Today," *Středoevropské politické studie* 10, no. 1 (2008). None of these concerns is animating the ambivalence that we are speaking about here.

family may now be dated.⁸ Likewise, Robyn Marasco critically focuses on the thesis that “the authoritarian personality indicates a pathology of the bourgeois family,” specifically, “a rigid hierarchy of sex”.⁹ The study, despite the generality of its thesis that patriarchal authority in the middle-class family generates the authoritarian personality, never fully clarifies the scope of application of the concept. The second group of issues is visible around the problem of whether the authoritarian personality is supposed to designate a stratum of highly-prejudiced persons or the latent potentials of the modern individual. That concern emerges in Robert Hullot-Kentor’s contribution, around the question of fascist propaganda and its activation of political anxieties. To invoke Freud in an interpretation of the transformation of someone with authoritarian attitudes into a fascist supporter is to suggest that there is no orthodox path to fascism, that fascist propaganda activates irrational thoughts. But despite invoking an Oedipal relation to the strict father, “Adorno excludes much of what psychoanalysis recognises as psychic life”.¹⁰ This is perhaps because the latency/activation paradigm is premised on a model of essence and expression, rather than a truly Freudian theory.

Gordon sums the problem up when he acknowledges that the anthropological interpretation of the authoritarian personality is the most radical perspective that it is possible to adopt on populist politics today.¹¹ That is because it is a blanket indictment of capitalism and modernity as the generative matrix for authoritarianism. The grounds are that the “new anthropological type” detected by the study—the bearer of the sado-masochistic character structure that determines the authoritarian personality—is, in fact, the modern individual.¹² No wonder that Gordon

8 Barbara Umrath, “A Feminist Reading of the Frankfurt School’s Studies in Authoritarianism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2018).

9 Robyn Marasco, “There’s a Fascist in the Family: Critical Theory and Anti-Authoritarianism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2018): 794, 807.

10 Robert Hullot-Kentor, “Metric of Rebarbarisation,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2018): 744.

11 Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited,” 57.

12 Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited,” 61-63.

is ambivalent about the critical traction of the original study, suggesting that Adorno's radical denunciation of the modern individual has less explanatory purchase than his study of the social conditions that generate authoritarianism.¹³

The basic problem with *The Authoritarian Personality*, then, is that Adorno wants to inflate the syndrome discovered in a minority of the population into a new anthropological type, based on the idea that the study has discovered a personality structure that is latent in the modern individual. In technical terms, the authoritarian personality is a durable syndrome, that is, a cluster of relatively fixed and covariant attitudes, such that high scores on several items on the F-scale predict high scores on the rest. The highest scoring 25% of the sample population exhibited this syndrome and therefore represented *potential* fascists because of their *actual* authoritarianism, as contrasted with the lowest scoring 25% who were also studied as a baseline.¹⁴ The middle-scoring 50% of "moderates" were not studied at all, and the study concludes by reassuring the reader that "the majority of our subjects do not exhibit the extreme ethnocentric pattern".¹⁵ But, having reported this, Adorno then promptly generalises the authoritarian personality across the majority of the population.

2. The Problem with *The Authoritarian Personality*

In his introduction to the study, Adorno warns darkly that "personality patterns that have been dismissed as 'pathological' because they were not in keeping with the most common manifest trends ... have, on closer investigation, turned out to be but exaggerations of what was almost universal below the surface".¹⁶ The thinking behind Adorno's somber hint is brought out in his subsequent reflections on the project, where

13 Gordon, "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited," 71-73.

14 Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 25-26.

15 Ibid., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 976.

16 Ibid., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 7.

he suggests that the items on the F-scale were based on the “Elements of Anti-Semitism” chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.¹⁷ There, anti-Semitism is grasped through a Freudian logic, as the return of the repressed in post-Enlightenment modernity, and described through the characteristic generalisations of a philosophical anthropology. The implications of this new anthropology are fully visible in the related chapter, on “Juliette, or Enlightenment and Morality,” where Adorno and Horkheimer read Kant with Sade. “In psychological terms,” they write: “Juliette embodies neither unsublimated nor regressive libido, but intellectual pleasure in regression, *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the joy of defeating civilization with its own weapons”.¹⁸ The aim of the chapter is not just to suggest that moral formalism can be consistent with substantive immorality, but also to imply that Sadeian perversion is the repressed content of the Kantian subject. Since, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the Kantian subject is the modern individual, this brings us to Erich Fromm’s concept of the sado-masochistic character as the foundation of the bourgeois personality.¹⁹ Adorno’s remarks indicate that this is also the template for the authoritarian personality:

[The authoritarian personality] follows the “classic” psychoanalytic pattern involving a sadomasochistic resolution of the Oedipus complex, [as] pointed out by Erich Fromm under the title of the “sadomasochistic” character. According to Max

17 Theodor Adorno, “Remarks on *The Authoritarian Personality*,” in *Platypus 1917* (Aarhus; Frankfurt; London; New York; Paris: The Platypus Affiliated Society, 23 December 2019 2016). <https://platypus1917.org/2016/11/08/remarks-authoritarian-personality-adorno-frenkel-brunswick-levinson-sanford/>.

18 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 74.

19 Erich Fromm, “Sozialpsychologischer Teil,” in *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Lüneburg: Dietrich zu Klampen, 1963); Erich Fromm, “Psychoanalytic Characterology and its Significance for Social Psychology,” in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx and Social Psychology*, ed. Erich Fromm (New York: Holt & Reinhart, 1991).

Horkheimer's theory ... in order to achieve "internalization" of social control which never gives as much to the individual as it takes, the latter's attitude towards authority and its psychological agency, the superego, assumes an irrational aspect. The subject achieves his own social adjustment only by taking pleasure in obedience and subordination. This brings into play the sadomasochistic impulse structure both as a condition and as a result of social adjustment. In our form of society, sadistic as well as masochistic tendencies actually find gratification. The pattern for the translation of such gratifications into character traits is a specific resolution of the Oedipus complex which defines the formation of the syndrome here in question. Love for the mother, in its primary form, comes under a severe taboo. The resulting hatred against the father is transformed by reaction-formation into love. This transformation leads to a particular kind of superego. ... In the psychodynamics of the "authoritarian character," part of the preceding aggressiveness is absorbed and turned into masochism, while another part is left over as sadism, which seeks an outlet in those with whom the subject does not identify himself: ultimately the outgroup.²⁰

The problem with Adorno's reading of the authoritarian personality is that it is located within a set of sociological generalisations about the adjustment of populations to capitalist modernity. This emerges full-blown in the reference text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the subject of enlightenment under mature capitalism discovers within themselves a "Sadeian" response to the "archaic terror ... fascistically rationalized" of modern practical reason.²¹

The underlying logic of the connections between the bourgeois individual, the sado-masochistic character and the authoritarian personality

20 Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 759.

21 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 68.

is clearly exhibited in Horkheimer's major statement on Critical Theory and anti-Semitism, "The Jews and Europe" (1939), which articulates the background to the anti-Semitism chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer declares that "whoever wants to explain anti-Semitism must speak of National Socialism," before shifting to the main focus, which is that "whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism".²² The central thesis, then, is that "fascism is the truth of modern society".²³ Correlatively, Horkheimer implies that the sado-masochistic character is the characteristic subjectivity of the bourgeois epoch.²⁴ He maintains that psychoanalysis shows that bourgeois society provides "social prohibitions that, under the given familial and social conditions, are suitable for arresting people's instinctual development at a sadistic level or reverting them back to this level".²⁵ Just as fascism is the truth of modernity, then, the authoritarian personality is the dark secret of the autonomous individual, something that developments in state capitalism and the culture industry have brought to the surface. The project of *The Authoritarian Personality* is therefore directed away from investigation into a social-psychological phenomenon detectable in a small minority of the population, and towards a "frontal assault" on the pathologies of capitalist society as a whole.

It is this intention which also explains the otherwise strange way that Adorno routinely reduces the authoritarian personality to a cluster of three elements—"rigidity, lack of cathexis, stereopathy"—which omits authoritarian aggression and authoritarian submission.²⁶ Adorno's se-

22 Max Horkheimer, "The Jews and Europe," in *Critical Theory and Society*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), 77.

23 Horkheimer, "The Jews and Europe," 78.

24 Max Horkheimer, "Egoism and the Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 103.

25 Horkheimer, "Egoism and the Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," 104.

26 Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 751.

lection is driven by the interpretation of the authoritarian personality as arising from a sado-masochistic resolution to the Oedipus Complex that is sociologically generalised. Adorno thinks that the socially normative resolution of the Oedipus Complex involves a family environment of emotional coldness, a disciplinarian father and distant mother, and an atmosphere of obedience to arbitrary rules.²⁷ He further thinks that the authoritarian family of the middle strata is exemplary for this normative resolution, because the role of autocratic tyrant is imposed on the father by the economic pressures on this potentially downwardly-mobile layer. Accordingly, thinkers in Critical Theory for whom *The Authoritarian Personality* is the central reference are driven towards the idea that the political anxieties triggering fascist activation are economic, because the syndrome is structurally caused by economic pressures, refracted through familial arrangements. They are also oriented in the direction of the idea that the emergence of authoritarian movements is evidence for a problem with normative individuality, because authoritarianism is socially symptomatic of capitalist society. In a way that resonates with Adorno, the analysis of the authoritarian personality is therefore less an urgent political problem than an exemplification of a social-theoretical generalisation. We see this logic at work in the efforts of critical theorists to grapple with the Trump Presidency.

3. The Trump Presidency as Test Case

Following a provocative article in 2016 that demonstrated that possession of authoritarian traits was the only statistically significant predictor of support for Donald Trump's presidential candidacy, authoritarian personality research has been central to many discussions of his subsequent incumbency.²⁸ Discussions of the Trump Presidency within Critical Theory that have deployed the authoritarian personality as an explanatory

27 Ibid., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 751.

28 Matthew MacWilliams, "Who Decide When the Party Doesn't? Authoritarian Voters and the Rise of Donald Trump," *Political Science and Politics* 49, no. 4 (2016).

factor include two entries by Christian Fuchs, several by Douglas Kellner, one by John Abromeit, one by Peter Gordon and one by Panayota Gounari. As you would expect from this list of names, these are subtle analyses of the Trump phenomenon and we are not going to be able to do justice to their complexity, focusing instead of how the classical problematic motivates two key theses. The first of these is the “economic insecurity thesis,” the idea that what triggers the political activation of individuals with an authoritarian personality is anxiety, caused by impending loss of economically-derived positional status within a relatively privileged layer of the middle strata. The second of these is what we call the “symptomatic syndrome thesis,” the idea that the personality structure of the leader or the followers condenses and expresses a global problem with capitalist society.

Trump’s psychopathology has fascinated many thinkers since his emergence as a presidential candidate, and many now agree that Trump is an authoritarian character, surrounded by figures who espouse authoritarian views, and supported by a political mobilisation populated by authoritarian personalities. In his analysis of Trump as an authoritarian populist, Kellner states his conviction that Trump fits the theoretical model provided by Erich Fromm of an authoritarian character, exhibiting “necrophiliac” and “destructive” forms of the authoritarian personality.²⁹ Fuchs represents Trump as a classical example of the authoritarian personality as described by Adorno and agrees with tracing this syndrome back to the Frommian sadomasochistic character.³⁰ Gounari maintains that Trump exhibits characteristics of the authoritarian personality as described in the classical work, and provides a comprehensive list of personality features in agreement with the F-scale.³¹ Trump’s

29 Douglas Kellner, “Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis,” in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed. Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), 71.

30 Fuchs, “Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism,” 71.

31 Panayota Gounari, “Authoritarianism, Discourse and Social Media: Trump as the ‘American Agitator’,” in *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*, ed.

support base is likewise described as populated by authoritarian personalities, as described by the classical study. Gounari, for instance, proposes that Trump has unlocked a “secret electorate” of authoritarian followers. She draws from research by Mac Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler in 2009 on the authoritarian values of the Republican Party. This suggests that the Republican Party has gradually aligned itself with the values of Americans with authoritarian attitudes, and that this constituency was revealed in the 2016 election when it found its leader. Gounari suggests that by putting traditional values, law, and order at the forefront of the Republican party’s identity, the party attracted bipartisan Americans with authoritarian tendencies, and Trump was the social dominator they were looking for: the “American Agitator”. So far, so good: we think so too; at least, in post-classical terms (to be explained soon).

The economic insecurity thesis and the symptomatic syndrome thesis emerge when researchers turn to base-and-superstructure frameworks to explain why Trump’s particular version of authoritarian populism has flourished in the United States. Fuchs, for instance, argues that American governing institutions have latent authoritarian potential and that exclusively focusing on Trump’s psychopathology rather than the dysfunctions of the system only increases this potential.³² He systematically links the authoritarian personality to the crisis tendencies in American capitalism, proposing that Trump represents the totalitarian potentials of a social-media driven corporate authoritarianism. Fuchs further emphasises that the transformation of “millionaire government” into “billionaire government” has rendered the existence of the working class and the middle strata extremely precarious, raising the spectre of “proletarian racism”.³³ This analysis of political economy is then supplemented: “Wilhelm Reich (1972) argues that authoritarianism has not just

Jeremiah Morelock (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), 221.

32 Fuchs, “Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism.”

33 Fuchs, “Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism,” 25-32, 36.

political-economic, but also ideological and psychological foundations. Reich was especially interested in the question how authoritarian operates with emotional, unconscious and irrational elements and why it does so successfully".³⁴ Fuchs analyses the leadership principle, nationalism and patriarchy as the key components of authoritarian ideology and describes the friend-enemy scheme as its main psychological mechanism. "Erich Fromm (1936) characterises the authoritarian personality as sadomasochistic character type that feels pleasure in both submission to authority and the subjection of underdogs. Authoritarian societies would foster sadomasochistic personalities. Authoritarian personalities therefore show 'aggression against the defenceless and sympathy for the powerful'".³⁵ Kellner's approach is to use Trump's psychopathology as the focus for a slashing analysis of media spectacle in American politics, reading this as symptomatic of the late capitalist cultural industry. He argues that the simplification, polarisation and vilification that characterise Trump's interventions originates not in the President, but in the media apparatus that made his rise possible.³⁶ Both Kellner and Fuchs have extended and deepened their analysis in subsequent works, without jettisoning the classical authoritarian personality from the synthesis, or the symptomatic syndrome argumentative strategy.³⁷

To avoid misunderstanding, we should state clearly the dialectical nature of the argument that we intend to present. Neither of these theses is wrong, but they are limited. We think that *in today's conjuncture* (which may change, as we potentially enter a global depression following COVID-19) the economic insecurity and symptomatic syndrome ar-

34 Fuchs, "Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism," 60-61.

35 Fuchs, "Donald Trump: A Critical Theory-Perspective on Authoritarian Capitalism," 70.

36 Douglas Kellner, *America Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle and Authoritarian Populism* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 3-6.

37 Christian Fuchs, *Digital Demagogue: Authoritarian Capitalism in the Age of Trump and Twitter* (London: Pluto Press, 2018); Douglas Kellner, *American Horror Show: Election 2016 and the Ascent of Trump* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2017).

guments elevate to primacy causal factors that are secondary. Authoritarian populism—under Trump, for instance—is not produced mainly by economic insecurity, but within a culture-war context. The emergence of an authoritarian movement is not symptomatic of an underlying sado-masochistic character in the general population. Instead, while its success may well have something to do with media spectacle, it indicates a cultural crisis tendency that involves a failure of cultural liberalisation. We are now going to argue these theses, beginning with a brief review of contemporary, as opposed to classical, research on the authoritarian personality.

4. Rightwing Authoritarianism Today

Although we are highly critical of the theoretical framework that informs Adorno's and Horkheimer's contributions to the project, there is no doubt that the authoritarian personality represents an important finding in social psychology. Specifically, the study discovered a small, yet solid, support base of anti-democratic attitudes in the population, rooted in a durable personality structure that springs from a syndrome.³⁸ That research has now been placed on a robust foundation in the work of Bob Altemeyer and cothinkers, through the Right-Wing Authoritarian (RWA) scale.³⁹ Several decades of study have shown that at least 10% of the sample population of Canadian students have consistently scored high on all three RWA measures.⁴⁰ The RWA scale emerges from a critique of *The Authoritarian Personality*⁴¹ and it is worth noticing that Altemeyer's scale foregrounds a different cluster of attitudes than the Oedipal ones suggested by Adorno:

38 Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 228, 34.

39 Bob Altemeyer, *Rightwing Authoritarianism* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1981); Bob Altemeyer, *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (Mississauga: Jossey-Bass, 1988); Bob Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Bob Altemeyer, *The Authoritarians* (free online ebook: theauthoritarians.org, 2006), <https://www.theauthoritarians.org/options-for-getting-the-book/>.

40 Altemeyer, *Rightwing Authoritarianism*, 177.

41 Altemeyer, *Rightwing Authoritarianism*, 170.

1) *Authoritarian Submission* – a high degree of submission to the authorities who are perceived to be established and legitimate in the society in which one lives; 2) *Authoritarian Aggression* – a general aggressiveness, directed against various persons, which is perceived to be sanctioned by established authorities; and 3) *Conventionalism* – a high degree of adherence to the social conventions, perceived as being endorsed by society and its established authorities.⁴²

Altemeyer's findings have since been corroborated in numerous surveys of sample populations in North America and Western Europe. His research indicates that rightwing authoritarians in the developed world are characterised by an attitudinal cluster of strong valorisation of unquestioning obedience to social authorities, high levels of aggression towards social inferiors and designated out-groups, and prescriptive adherence to rigidly-defined conventional values.⁴³ Karen Stenner's work extends the range of Altemeyer's team by using World Human Values survey data as the basis for cross-cultural comparisons.⁴⁴ Hence, the insight that a relatively durable 10%-15% of the population around the world have authoritarian social attitudes helps to explain the persistence of authoritarian political movements.

Altemeyer insists that the RWA scale is a cluster of co-variant attitudes rather than a personality structure, thus refusing the nomenclature of an "authoritarian personality". However, Altemeyer's point is methodological, rather than substantive, and research exploring high RWA scorers through updated versions of the "big five" personality traits reveals that RWA is predicted by low openness to experience in combination with conscientiousness.⁴⁵ Stenner proposes that persons with authoritar-

42 Altemeyer, *Rightwing Authoritarianism*, 148.

43 Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter*, 93-113 and 216-34.

44 Karen Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 316-19.

45 Chris Sibley and John Duckett, "Personality and Prejudice: A Meta-analysis and Theoretical Review," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12, no. 3

ian dispositions are “simple-minded avoiders of complexity rather than closed-minded avoiders of change”.⁴⁶ She brings a range of psychometric and personality testing instruments to bear on her conclusion that there is a personality structure beneath it all.⁴⁷

We need to mention that recently a complex debate has emerged about the extent to which attitudes of authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission and rigid conventionalism are co-variant. Indeed, the three factors in the RWA scale appear to be somewhat independent, rather than having linear covariance, and the proportion of the three factors, even among high scorers, varies.⁴⁸ A sophisticated literature, essaying refinements to the RWA scale, has arisen in the field of social psychology. The Aggression, Submission, Conventionalism (ASC) scale is perhaps the best improvement, but we shall not make use of it here because the research remains contested.⁴⁹ Empirical research has been conducted in North America on “authoritarian followers,” scoring highly on submission, conventionalism *or* aggression, but moderately on the rest. The findings indicate that authoritarian followers are relatively indifferent to government injustices committed against unconventional subgroups, and may represent 20%-25% of the population.⁵⁰

Now, the notion that 10%-15% of the national citizenry of the industrialised democracies are potentially the “enemies of freedom” is striking

(2008).

46 Karen Stenner and Jonathan Haidt, “Authoritarianism is not a Momentary Madness, but an Eternal Dynamic within Liberal Democracies,” in *Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America*, ed. Cass R. Sunstein (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), 185.

47 Stenner, *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, 143-73.

48 Friedrich Funke, “The Dimensionality of Right-Wing Authoritarianism,” *Political Psychology* 26, no. 2 (2005).

49 Philip Dunwoody and Friedrich Funke, “The Aggression-Submission-Conventionalism Scale: Testing a New Three Factor Measure of Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 4, no. 2 (2016).

50 J. Christopher Cohrs, Thomas Petzel, and Friedrich Funke, “Authoritarian Personality,” in *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, ed. Daniel Christie (Berlin: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).. See also: Bob Altemeyer, “The Other “Authoritarian Personality”,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 30 (1998).

ing and—in view of phenomena such as the Trump Presidency⁵¹ and the growth of the Alt-Right⁵²—disturbing. Yet the impression that the pro-authoritarians are just sitting there, in one reactionary lump, waiting for the detonator to go off, is highly misleading. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that the vagueness of “10%-15% of the population” is not solely an artefact of the different survey instruments used. Altemeyer’s research acknowledges that the proportion of the population displaying high-scoring RWA traits changes historically, something that Altemeyer explains in social learning terms.⁵³ From Altemeyer’s perspective, the percentage of authoritarians in society may change because of transformations in child-raising or because unquestioning obedience to authority becomes uncommon. Some empirical correlations seem to support this hypothesis.⁵⁴

The second is that religious fundamentalism and political authoritarianism seem to be in competition for recruits from the same pool.⁵⁵ Many individuals seem to choose between these two options (religion versus politics), apparently on the basis of differing attitudes towards the degree of aggression that is appropriate towards “violators” of conventions.⁵⁶ Authoritarian politics offers RWA high-scorers a set of political positions designed to enforce obedience, aggression, and conventionalism. These

51 Nancy Love, “Back to the Future: Trendy Fascism, the Trump Effect, and the Alt-Right,” *New Political Science* 39, no. 2 (2017).

52 George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

53 Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter*.

54 Lauren E. Duncan, Bill E. Peterson, and David G. Winter, “Authoritarianism and Gender Roles: Toward a Psychological Analysis of Hegemonic Relationships,” *PSPB: Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23, no. 1 (1997).

55 Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, “Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 2 (1992).

56 Megan K. Johnson et al., “Facets of Right-Wing Authoritarianism Mediate the Relationship Between Religious Fundamentalism and Attitudes Toward Arabs and African Americans,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012).

include the elevation of socio-political leaderships above the law, harshly punitive social measures, and state-supported moral reforms.⁵⁷ However, the religious fundamentalist worldview presents a threatening conception of reality, encourages submission, and provides a traditionalist basis for conventionalism.⁵⁸ This indicates that an authoritarian political mobilisation or a religious fundamentalist movement will likely be populated by numerous persons with authoritarian personalities. But religious fundamentalism may, or may not, involve political mobilisation, thus potentially removing a proportion of the “authoritarian pool” from political circulation.

Finally, it is important to notice that Altemeyer’s research also identifies a tiny set of individuals with rightwing authoritarian attitudes in combination with what he calls the “social dominance orientation”.⁵⁹ “Double high” social-dominance authoritarians score highly on both the RWA test and the SDO test, combining the traits of both personalities and comprising about 5%-10% of high scoring RWAs.⁶⁰ “Double-highs” want to dominate as the strong leader, rather than follow the strong leader, and their self-righteousness sets them apart from RWAs. “Double-highs” are also extremely prejudiced, unusually religious or strongly ideological, and believe the world is dangerous, making them particularly appealing leaders to the RWA followers. These “double high” authoritarians therefore seem to be the stuff of which totalitarian leaders are made: in simulation games of world politics salted with “double high” individuals, those with a social dominance orientation deliberately engineered famines in the developing world, launched wars of aggression and/or triggered nuclear catastrophes in every iteration of the game.⁶¹

57 Altemeyer, *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism*.

58 Altemeyer, *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism*, 139-40.

59 Bob Altemeyer, “Highly Dominating, Highly Authoritarian Personalities,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 144, no. 4 (2004).

60 Altemeyer, “The Other “Authoritarian Personality,”” 177.

61 Bob Altemeyer, “What Happens When Authoritarians Inherit the Earth? A Simulation,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 3, no. 1 (2003).

The implication of these findings is that the research programme developed initially by the Frankfurt School has, albeit with transformed methodologies and assumptions, successfully detected the psychological type who populates the cadre organisations of authoritarian mobilisations and fundamentalist movements. It is therefore all the more striking that no mention of Altemeyer's work is made in the critical-theoretical literature on authoritarian populism and the Trump Presidency, despite a wealth of references to classical sources such as Reich, Fromm and Adorno.

5. Cultural Backlash and Authoritarian Parenting

We think that transcendence of the limitations of the economic insecurity and symptomatic syndrome theories involves: (1) provincialising the symptomatic syndrome thesis; and (2), demotion of the economic insecurity thesis to a secondary status. By "provincialisation," we mean, relocating the authoritarian personality, from an underlying sado-masochistic character structure latent within all modern individuals, to a specific social pole containing some individuals, which lies in a complex landscape. Studies of authoritarian parenting help to frame this insight and provide a plausible mechanism for social learning processes that perpetuate, or undermine, authoritarianism. The familial bases for the authoritarian personality have significantly eroded since the interwar generations. A rising tide of liberalisation of domestic socialisation has swamped most of the territory formerly held by the strict father. Furthermore, today's residual archipelago of authoritarian parenting styles is not specific to any particular social stratum. Additionally, investigations of support for authoritarian populism reveal that it is primarily driven by "cultural backlash," and only secondarily by "economic insecurity". What many supporters of Trump, for instance, are responding to, is less the fact that their livelihoods have become precarious, than their perception that they are now "strangers in their own country". Their conventional expectations, partly shaped by generational factors and family background, have been challenged by a raft of social and cultural re-

forms that they do not accept or even, sometimes, understand. We want to briefly consider both of these findings, because they point towards the need for a theoretical explanation of the relation between culture wars and the authoritarian personality today.

First, we want to review the literature on authoritarian parenting. Following the influential theoretical model proposed by Diana Baumrind to explain her empirical findings on socialisation outcomes in the postwar era, and subsequently developed by Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin, there are four basic parenting styles.⁶² The construct is the result of coordinating “demandingness and undemandingness” with “responsiveness and unresponsiveness”. This yields a matrix of authoritative (demanding, responsive), authoritarian (demanding, unresponsive), permissive (undemanding, responsive) and disengaged (undemanding, unresponsive) styles. Numerous studies have successfully correlated these styles (and some later sub-types) with educational (under-)achievement and social outcomes (especially delinquency), indicating that they have empirical traction as explanatory factors in social behaviour. Although the cross-cultural appropriateness of the category boundaries is contested, there is good reason to think that the contrast between authoritative and authoritarian is cross-culturally sound as a predictor of worse educational and poorer social outcomes (for authoritarian styles).

But despite the tendency for authoritarian parenting to result in inferior educational outcomes, there is only weak evidence for a correlation between authoritarian parenting and family location in the lower middle strata. Although economics determines parenting priorities, parenting style is a cultural question that is only indirectly related to structural shifts and class strata, and much more related to religion and ideology. However, metrics for these categories, such as directive control (includ-

62 Zygmunt Baumann, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Diana Baumrind, “Child Care Practices Antecedent Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior,” *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75, no. 1 (1967). Eleanor Maccoby and John Martin, “Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-Child Interaction,” in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, ed. Paul Henry Mussen (New York: Wiley, 1983).

ing corporal punishment), emotional regulation and the conventionality of parental roles, are close to categories of authoritarian attitudes from the political field. A correlation between authoritarian parenting styles and authoritarian political attitudes can indeed be established. Marjorie Gunnoe's recent survey of spanking and authoritative parenting indicates a distribution in her 2013 North American sample population of 23% permissive, 36% authoritative, 24% authoritarian and 16% disengaged parenting styles.⁶³ As might be expected, longitudinal analysis from Sweden indicates that the generational cohorts from 1981 and 2011 experienced far less authoritarian parenting than the generational cohort from 1958, and there is no reason this should not also be true for North America.⁶⁴

What all this this means is that the potentially authoritarian children of authoritarian parenting styles are, today, distributed into an archipelago that is strewn across the social landscape. This is an archipelago determined mainly by generational cohort and cultural preferences, especially ethnic identification ("race") and gender-belonging ("sex"), and only secondly by educational disadvantage and class membership. Yesterday, however, this archipelago was a mountain range that dominated the social landscape, and the castaways who find themselves isolated on these islands are as mad as hell about the rising waters of social liberalisation and cultural transformation.

Accordingly, second, we want to survey the evidence that points to cultural backlash as the primary motivation in authoritarian political activation today. The cultural backlash thesis, developed by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, suggests that the rise of authoritarian populism is the reaction by a conservative and privileged minority in society to

63 Marjorie Gunnoe, "Associations between Parenting Style, Physical Discipline, and Adjustment in Adolescents' Reports," *Psychological Reports* 112, no. 3 (2013).

64 Tatiana Alina Trifan, Håkan Stattin, and Lauree Tilton-Weaver, "Have Authoritarian Parenting Practices and Roles Changed in the Last 50 Years?," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76, no. 4 (2014).

the 'silent revolution' in cultural values since the 1960s.⁶⁵ These groups have become culturally marginal because their value set, focused on traditional norms and economic self-interest, is less and less relevant to the 'post-material values' that make social diversity and cultural pluralism possible. Empirical studies using survey instruments and world human values data strongly suggest that current economic factors are secondary. Norris and Inglehart theorise that economic downturn deepens cultural backlash and demonstrate that populations suffering from economic crisis do correlate with authoritarian-populist voting patterns. Nonetheless, although economic indicators, such as occupational class and subjective financial insecurity, were statistically significant correlates of voting preferences for authoritarian populist parties, there are relatively weak predictors, with cultural values explaining more.⁶⁶

Interestingly, Norris and Inglehart do not position race and immigration centrally in their argument, claiming that racial tension is "an important *part* of the explanation for support for authoritarian populism — but, by itself, this is over-simplified, because xenophobic, racist, and anti-Islamic attitudes are linked with a broader range of socially conservative values. The authoritarian reflex is not confined solely to attitudes towards race ... but also to the rejection of the diverse life-styles, political views and morals of 'out-groups'".⁶⁷ They conclude that the estrangement of majorities-turned-minorities, such as members of rural communities and members of the interwar generation, is the leading cause of the "authoritarian reflex" against an increasingly liberal-progressive so-

65 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*, 2016, Faculty Research Working Papers, John F. Kennedy School of Government Harvard University, Boston; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017); Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Populist Backlash* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

66 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Cultural Backlash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 21.

67 Inglehart and Norris, *Cultural Backlash*, 19.

ciety.⁶⁸ We will return to the connections between cultural backlash and the culture wars in a moment, but it is also important to note that Norris and Inglehart close their analysis by remarking that many Western democracies have experienced a long-term erosion of trust in political institutions, along with growing dissatisfaction with democratic performance. This crisis of legitimacy and its connections with the rise of authoritarian populism is most strongly marked in the USA, where trust in government is at a historic low, but it is also present, in a more muted form, in Western Europe.⁶⁹

6. The Structural Drivers of Authoritarian Mobilisation

From the classical perspective, the cultural backlash that leads to identitarian politics and culture wars is sometimes grasped as a distraction and sometimes as a reflection of economic antagonisms. This is linked to a tendency in Critical Theory (and beyond) to think about class struggle and culture wars in terms of the classical logic of base-and-superstructure. We want to gesture towards an alternative interpretation, founded on grasping the functional logic of the capitalist system in terms of relatively autonomous sub-systems, which are related through global resource exchanges. Such a perspective is outlined in Habermas's work on *Legitimation Crisis* (1975 [1973]) and his extension of this into a critique of functional reason, in *The Theory of Communicative Action (Volume II)* (1987 [1981]).⁷⁰

According to Habermas, the postwar period witnessed the development of a series of steering mechanisms in the economy and administration, which suppressed the classical economic and juridical crisis-tendencies characteristic of capitalism. These mechanisms were partly designed to prevent the recurrence of a 1930s-style economic depression from rais-

68 Inglehart and Norris, *Cultural Backlash*, 21.

69 Inglehart and Norris, *Cultural Backlash*, 25.

70 Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

ing the mortal threats to liberal democracy of communist revolution or fascist dictatorship.⁷¹ “On the basis of a class compromise,” Habermas writes, “the administrative system gains a limited planning capacity, which can be used, within the framework of a formally democratic procurement of legitimation, for purposes of reactive crisis avoidance”.⁷² He points towards managed capitalism, the welfare state, tripartite bargaining and the neutering of the public sphere, together with civil privatism and technocratic ideology, as the keys to postwar stabilisation.⁷³ But the key to the thesis proposed in *Legitimation Crisis* is that suppressed economic and administrative crisis potentials become displaced onto legitimation difficulties and then motivational crises. This is because what is functionally rational, from the perspective of the corporations and the state, is socially irrational from the perspective of democratic citizens and persons seeking to lead meaningful lives.⁷⁴

In legitimation difficulties, democratic parliaments struggle to contain the effects of economic disturbances and administrative irrationality, because their capacity for action is constrained by perceptions of the legitimacy of government measures. “As long as motivations remain tied to norms requiring justification,” Habermas argues, “the introduction of legitimate power into the reproduction process means that the ‘fundamental contradiction’ can break out in a questioning, rich in practical consequences, of the norms that underlie administrative action”.⁷⁵ In short, functionalist proposals to sever the connection between administration and legitimation by means, for instance, of a shift from democratic pluralism to plebiscitary acclamation, run up against the difficulty that the norms regulating state intervention are culturally produced. In the modern cultural context, arbitrary authority is no longer regarded as

71 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 162-63 n1.

72 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 61.

73 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 33-60.

74 Habermas also discusses rationality crises, resulting from the anarchic tendencies of capitalist production, within the state administration. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 61-67.

75 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 69.

valid, and administrative interference or efforts to manipulate consensus only aggravate the situation, once exposed.⁷⁶ Should the democratic state persist in economic or social interventions that lack legitimacy, a full blown legitimization crisis—that is, a pre-revolutionary situation—is likely to erupt. It is in exactly this context that Habermas asks whether an authoritarian solution to the legitimization difficulties of late capitalism might not resolve the problem. His conclusion is that this would only succeed if modern socio-cultural expectations were replaced by a return to a culture of unquestioning obedience, supported by belief in the legitimacy of social institutions on some basis other than universal moral principles and democratic sovereignty.⁷⁷ In the 1970s, that was unnecessarily “expensive,” since late capitalism could address many legitimization difficulties through the corrosion of democracy, based in a transfer of power from the legislature to the executive and the judiciary, and by means of displacing the problem onto the cultural sphere.

In a motivation crisis, “the socio-cultural system changes in such a way that its output becomes dysfunctional for the state and for the system of social labour”.⁷⁸ A scission manifests between the normative socio-cultural expectations generated within the domestic sphere, civil society and cultural life, on the one hand, and the needs of the state, the education system and workplace command hierarchies, on the other hand. What normally prevents this from becoming generalised is that the ‘syndromes’ of civil apathy and familial-vocational privatism, which direct citizen interest towards administrative performances, rather than democratic participation, and invest cultural value into career and family, predominate. These syndromes are alloys of attitudes consistent with functional role performances, together with orientations to traditional authority that are not in overt conflict with capitalist society. Habermas’s example is the work ethic, which combines the performance principle of corporate capitalism, with a foundation in religious belief that has

76 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 70-71.

77 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 74-75.

78 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 75.

been relieved of its solidaristic implications.⁷⁹ Provided that these frameworks of tradition remain insulated from critical attack, the effects of a motivational crisis can be delegated onto the anomic individual or onto psychopathological developments, or defused through counter-cultural movements that expend their energies on cultural struggles without raising structural questions. But Habermas thinks that in fact the modern demand for rational justifications rules out the longterm persistence of these insulating traditional frameworks.

Now, although Habermas discusses the relation between legitimation and motivation synchronically, as a structural diagram, we think that there is scope to interpret the thesis diachronically, as a historical sequence. The displacement from rationality crises, to legitimation difficulties and then to motivation crises is not something registered cybernetically by a functional centre, or an automatic consequence of market mechanisms, but the result of political decisions arising from emergent forms of consensus amongst social actors. What is displaced is the locus of contradictions, which implies that legitimation and motivation become sites of struggle, rather than just locations where functional band-aids are applied to the system. These things take time before decisions are implemented or struggles are resolved, and so it makes sense to see this as happening historically.

7. Culture Wars as a Solution to Motivational Crisis?

Accordingly, we propose that the displacement of crisis tendencies onto legitimation and then motivation crises provides the template for an historical narrative. This clarifies why the terrain of popular mobilisation has shifted, from the 1960s through to 2020, from political protests to cultural struggles. The situation of the 1960s through to the 1980s was characterised by scission between protracted stagflation, mandating radical economic reforms, and rising political protests, from a spectrum of social mobilisations generally described as the “new social movements”.

⁷⁹ Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 77.

The contradiction between anti-democratic functional imperatives and popular democratic desire for reforms generated a series of legitimation problems for the state. Consistent with Habermas's analysis, the Trilateral Commission lamented a "crisis of governability" caused by "excessive democratic expectations," leading to a loss of "prestige and authority" by government institutions.⁸⁰ At the same time, neoclassical economic proposals gained the intellectual ascendancy because their monetarist formulae focused on a depoliticisation of the economy, market solutions to the rationality crisis of the state, and unloading the legitimacy burden on democracy by shifting to government by regulation. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, a series of neoliberal governments, beginning with Reagan and Thatcher, partially solved the legitimation problem through draconian anti-democratic regulations, especially around strikes and protests.⁸¹ A decisive shift away from the exercise of popular sovereignty through the legislature, combined with the atomisation of solidarity as new competitive pressures to do with globalisation and financialization were unleashed, was enacted. Nonetheless, the period deposited an impressive array of social rights whose continuum reflects the diversity of social movements that fought for them,⁸² including some crucial rights to control over one's own body, sexual self-expression and gender election that are some of today's "hot button" topics for the Right.

The situation of the 1990s through to 2020 has been characterised by the "privatisation of hope," combined with a dramatic shift to the pathologisation of individuals who fail to competitively adapt. This has been accompanied by widespread withdrawal, loss of meaningfulness and po-

80 Samuel Huntington, Michael Crozier, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: On the Governability of Democracies* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 113, 70.

81 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, vol. Oxford University Press (Oxford, 2005), 9-10, 19-31.

82 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).. See also: Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, eds., *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London and New York: Verso, 2003).

litical apathy. These are the symptoms of a motivational crisis, in which (in the absence of meaningful possibilities for political reform) a massive gap opens up between functional performances, and the motivations, orientations and aspirations of persons who seek fulfilment, justice and recognition. The “culture wars” begin when neoconservative administrations and traditionalist social mobilisations seek to resolve motivational crises by “correcting” the orientations and motivations of individuals. This has happened through educational counter-reforms, seeking the imposition of conservative communal values, especially religious values, and the cultural valorisation of conventional success. Andrew Hartman’s recent social history of the culture wars in the United States interprets this complex landscape in terms of the conservative movement’s reaction to the progressive mobilisations of the 1960s.⁸³ By widening the scope of James Davison Hunter’s original analysis—which focused especially on the antagonism between conservative Christianity and secular culture—Hartman adds depth around gender and race to the analysis of religion.⁸⁴

Additionally, the sites of struggle have included the family, school, culture, political parties and workplace regulations designed to ameliorate command hierarchies by providing employees with some protections against arbitrary authority and social prejudices. Indeed, these social and cultural changes within the lifeworld have transformed many aspects of everyday life—albeit in an uneven way, because they have been actively resisted by religious fundamentalists, neoconservative actors and those with conventional moral or traditional motivational perspectives. The fact that they have been transformative is crucial, however, because this deep recalibration of social life among large segments of populations, we argue, is a key driver of cultural conservative backlash. Both Hunter and Hartman think that after the 1990s, cultural questions have become intertwined with class stratification, especially reflected in

83 Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

84 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

the way that educational level is a predictor of culture-war alignment. Furthermore, according to Hartman, a recent survey “shows that one of the principal effects of persistent and worsening polarization is a crisis of legitimacy: an overwhelming majority of Americans are disaffected with government and other elite institutions, including media and higher education”.⁸⁵

From this perspective, authoritarian mobilisation today is the attempt to provide a radical resolution of the fundamental problem identified by Habermas, that modern socio-cultural expectations are inconsistent with those frameworks of traditional authority that support pro-system motivations. That involves a radical alteration to democratic and liberal socio-cultural expectations, to bring them back into line with work and the state, by demolishing the political and cultural legacies of successful rights and recognition struggles. In short, from the perspective of rightwing authoritarianism, the social and cultural conditions that generate the authoritarian personality have to be restored, in order to “make the nation great again”. The situation, in other words, is exactly the opposite of what *The Authoritarian Personality* might lead us to believe. It is not that a tiny group of authoritarian cadres intend to activate the latently authoritarian dispositions of the majority of the population, through evoking political anxiety, in order to expel an “alien minority” who are the target for aversive prejudices. Instead, a tiny minority of authoritarian personalities, expressing their political anxiety about the impending extinction of their aversive prejudices, intends to mobilise for a militarisation of politics, because this is their last chance to impose their cultural vision on the majority of the population.

8. A Morbid Crisis of Traditional Authority?

For both Hartman and Hunter, albeit from different locations in the debate, what is fundamentally at stake is the way that cultural mean-

85 Andrew Hartman, “The Culture Wars are Dead--Long Live the Culture Wars!,” *The Baffler*, 2018, <https://thebaffler.com/outbursts/culture-wars-are-dead-hartman>.

ings define the moral foundations of social order, and especially, how a post-Enlightenment vision rejects transcendent and authoritative traditions. From a Habermasian perspective, this clarifies why the post-1960s liberalisation of society results in a crisis of traditional authority. In his critique of functional systems logic in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas suggests that since the late 1970s, patterns of authority and socialisation in the industrialised democracies have undergone two kinds of polarisation.

The first polarisation is between developments towards rational *parental* authority and efforts to restore traditional *paternal* authority. For Habermas, the autocratic father has been significantly challenged as the socially normative model for parental authority. The context for this is the influx of what Habermas calls “cultural rationalisation,” which for present purposes means, liberalisation, into the family and parenting. At least three trends relevantly contribute to this development: the liberalisation of parenting; the pluralisation of the family model, with the emergence of post-nuclear familial networks; and, victories for women’s rights and economic independence. According to Habermas, the shift from classical hysterias to narcissistic pathologies:

confirms the fact that the significant changes in the present escape socio-psychological explanations that start from the Oedipal problematic, from an internalization of societal repression which is simply masked by parental authority. The better explanations start from the premise that the communication structures that have been set free in the family provide conditions for socialization that are as demanding as they are vulnerable.⁸⁶

Communicative reciprocity in familial socialisation implies a kind of education through dialogue in which authority is grounded in reasoned arguments, rather than in the assertion of unquestionable traditional strictures. Borrowing the term from Baumrind, this “authoritative” par-

86 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, 2, 388.

enting is demanding, insofar as it supposes shifts to conventional and then post-conventional morality during ego development. Habermas's source, Lawrence Kohlberg, admits that only a small proportion of the population arrive at a post-conventional stage of moral reasoning, which implies that most parenting involves conventional (i.e., traditional) arguments from group moralities or law-and-order perspectives. Such positions are vulnerable to universalist critiques, such as those visible in critiques of racial and gender assumptions, which, however, imply forms of moral reasoning that are too demanding for most individuals. Furthermore, Habermas, drawing on the social psychology of Gertrud Nunner-Winckler and Rainer Döbert, suggests that what Baumrind would call "disengaged" parenting—Habermas calls it "subtle neglect"—is a likely response to the potential overloading of parenting.⁸⁷ Accordingly, traditional authority, especially paternal authority, cannot go on in the old way, but at the same time, in the absence of a public sphere capable of supplementing parental authority with reasoned dialogue, it also cannot die out. This "morbid crisis" is the context for efforts to restore paternal authority, visible in phenomena such as the men's movement, and religious fundamentalist insistence on traditional gender roles.

The second centres on familial socialisation and it concerns the gap between home and work, once the family ceases to be the locus of both civic socialisation and occupational socialisation. The divestment of the family of its role in preparation for work has been a protracted historical development during the twentieth century. It creates a contradiction between moral autonomy, fostered by a culture of questioning, and obedience to superiors, necessitated by functional command hierarchies. Indeed, it amplifies the rationalising potential of liberal parenting because it takes away from the family a functional task that might force parental authority to adopt a conformist line. Habermas argues that the polarisation between the liberal household and the authoritarian workplace is exacerbated by bureaucratic interventions in the socialisation process,

87 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, 2, 388.

which aim at preserving deference in occupational socialisation.⁸⁸ They are also affected by the corporatisation of the public sphere, which results in the blocking of rational dialogue and tendencies towards cultural infantilisation.⁸⁹ It is worth emphasising in this context that since the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, the democratisation of the workplace achieved in the postwar period has been significantly eroded, with “managerialism” (i.e., obedience) replacing “negotiating” in most employees’ experience of work. The historical literature on the culture wars suggests that the education system is a key battleground between ideals of school for civic responsibility and school as job preparation. In the absence of a social-democratisation of work and the state, this creates the conditions for a widening gulf between adolescence and adulthood, where:

there is a tendency toward disparities between competences, attitudes, and motives, on the one hand, and the functional requirements of adult roles on the other. ... When the conditions of socialization in the family are no longer functionally in tune with the organizational membership conditions that the growing child will one day have to meet, the problems that young people have to solve in their adolescence become insoluble for more and more of them.⁹⁰

Habermas claims that such disorders result from the combination of a competitively individualistic and success-oriented institutional world with rational norms in the household context that appear to have no traction whatsoever in the public sphere. It is almost as if when authoritative parenting succeeds, what happens is apathetic withdrawal from a disappointing public world which does not live up to the rational expectations promoted in the household. Forced and traumatic adaptation to

88 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, 2, 388-89.

89 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, 2, 389-91.

90 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*, 2, 388.

the workplace then leads to nostalgia for traditional authority, where it is imagined that a restoration of authority will result in better adjusted social individuals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have argued that the insights that the Frankfurt School presented in *The Authoritarian Personality* can be developed by utilizing Habermas's more nuanced understanding. Habermas does not commonly come to mind when researching authoritarianism, yet his three-dimensional model of society provides startling insights into the "culture wars" driving authoritarian movements today, and can be brought into contact with recent psychological and sociological findings. We propose that instead of thinking about the authoritarian personality as the repressed inverse of the liberal individual, as argued by Adorno and co-thinkers, the authoritarian personality should be considered as a durable disposition that is generationally transmitted through social learning processes, which are centred on traditional forms of paternal authority. Although the displacement of social contradictions away from political economy and onto legitimation crises and motivational problems has resulted in a demobilisation of workplace struggles and reforms to the state, the shifting locus of contestation in contemporary society has resulted in many social rights and forms of cultural recognition. Combined with the liberalisation of parenting, despite contradictory realities surrounding this development, this has led to a significant cultural challenge to the social bases of the authoritarian personality, resulting in a strong polarisation between authoritarian and democratic personality-types. Yet the potential transformation of the authoritarian personality into something moderate cannot be successfully completed, because of the situation of a "morbid crisis of traditional authority," in which neoconservative and authoritarian forces seek to resolve motivational crises by forcing socialisation to adapt to functional imperatives, rather than democratic desires. In that "culture war" context, moderate authoritarians can easily be recruited into supporting authoritarian populist movements, which

are populated in the main by authoritarian personalities, because authoritarian propaganda can appeal to cultural backlash motivations.

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Authoritarian Populism and the Dialects of Desire. Perspectives of psychoanalytical Ideology-Critique.

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Abstract²: In the last few years there has been increasing popular support in various European democracies, but also in Latin and North America for right-wing populism. This paper questions the origins of this populist turn from a psychoanalytically inspired perspective. It argues that research on populism in political science-based investigations could profit from a psychoanalytically informed ideological-critical perspective, which focuses on the relation between the emergence of authoritarian affects, desires, and ideology. The paper reflects on the role of political desires for recognition in the context of subjectification, which - according to a central thesis - can articulate itself in various ways, but has so far been given too little consideration in debates on the crisis of democracy. The aim of this paper is to clarify in a theory-generating and ideological-critical perspective the ideological causes of authoritarian desires. This article claims that reflecting the relation between crises and desires for recognition and the unconsciousness in the horizon of subjectivity, constituting political interpellations can offer a new perspective for understanding the growing societal support for right-wing ideologies. Following Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical account, I discuss the concept of *jouissance* as a political-theoretical tool for understanding the emergence of authoritarian desires. Referring to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Wiesenthal Adorno it is argued that authoritarian desires can be understood as pathetic projections in which an "othered" subject is constructed as a scapegoat that has to fulfill the dissipation of frustration caused by neoliberal interpellations and its inherent socio-economic structural transformations.

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 - 2 This article goes back to research that was supported by the Johannes-Kepler-University.

Introduction

In February 2020, in a democracy-theoretical perspective, two troubling events transpired: The Democratic Party failed in their impeachment of US President Donald J. Trump and for the first time since the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship, a German state leader was elected into office as a State Minister of Thuringia (East Germany) with the aid of votes from a radical right-wing party; Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). The latter event has caused a political earthquake in Germany because the (liberal) FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich received votes from the Thuringian branch of the AfD, which is assigned to the racial-nationalist wing of the party. Björn Höcke, who is the founder of the extreme-right in the AfD (“der Flügel”) and who is under observation by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, managed to organize a coup, insofar as he lured Thuringian liberal and conservative parliamentarians to break with the traditional taboo and politically co-operate with the AfD. For Germany, where the events of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the NSDAP through coalitions are always remembered, this is a turning point, but at the same time this is a development that points to a general failure of the liberal and conservative camp to distance itself from the so-called “new right”. Furthermore, it seems plausible that events such as those in the US and Germany are representative of a more general deficiency in present democracies to respond adequately to contemporary crises in politics. Right-wing populism is not a new phenomenon, but in the last few years there has been increasing popular support in multiple European democracies, but also in Latin and North America,³ which in-

3 See Birgit Sauer, „Gesellschaftstheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotenzial der Kategorie Geschlecht“ in: Politische Vierteljahresschrift, 58 (1), 2017, 1-20; Birgit Sauer, „Anti-feministische Mobilisierung in Europa. Kampf um eine neue politische Hegemonie?“ in: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft, 13(3), 2019, 339–352; Ruth Wodak, „Vom Rand in die Mitte – „Schamlose Normalisierung“.“

dicates that we are facing an authoritarian backlash.

This paper questions the origins of this authoritarian turn from a psychoanalytically inspired perspective. Thus, there seem to be three major explanations, discussing populism as an effect of deep structural changes inherent in neoliberal globalization processes. A first group of researchers outline the impact of socio-economic and political transformations that have caused a variety of experiences of collective deprivation and anxieties⁴, others accentuate collective forms of alienation due to the loss of cultural orientation⁵ and a third group points to a general crisis of political representation and of the political.⁶ So far, all these explanations have a value in understanding the rise of authoritarian thinking as an articulation of discomfort with neoliberal globalization. Nevertheless, this paper argues the above-mentioned research on populism, especially in the context of political science-based investigations, could profit from a psychoanalytically informed ideological-critical perspective, focussing on the relationship between the emergence of authoritarian affects, desires and ideology.

This article reflects on the role of political desires for recognition in the context of subjectification, which - according to a central thesis - can articulate itself in various ways, but has so far been given too little consideration in debates on the crisis of democracy. The aim of this paper is to clarify, in a theory-generating and ideological-critical perspective, the ideological causes of authoritarian desires. For this purpose, the social

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- 4 Elmar Brähler and Otmar Decker, (eds.) *Flucht ins Autoritäre*. (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2018); Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritäre Versuchungen. Signaturen der Bedrohung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018); Philip Manow. *Die Politische Ökonomie des Populismus*. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018)
- 5 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: University Press, 2019)
- 6 Dirk Jörke and Veith Selk, *Theorien des Populismus zur Einführung*. (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2017); Ernesto Laclau, *On populist reason*. (London: Verso, 2005); Chantal Mouffe, *Für einen linken Populismus*. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

and political relevance, the origin and the partly unconscious structures of political desires and their inherent affects are to be worked out with reference to concepts of psychoanalytical social psychology.⁷ My central claim is that there is general but *diffuse*⁸ and *partly unconscious* societal discomfort with neoliberal ideologies, which has been instrumentalized by right-wing movements and parties. This article claims that reflecting the relations between crises and desires for recognition and the unconsciousness in the horizon of subjectivity, constituting political interpellations can offer a new perspective for understanding the growing societal support for right-wing ideologies. Following Žižek⁹ and Lacan¹⁰, I discuss the concept of *jouissance* as a political-theoretical tool for understanding the emergence of authoritarian desires. Referring to Horkheimer and Adorno¹¹ it is argued that authoritarian desires can be understood as pathetic projections, in which an “othered” subject is constructed as a scapegoat, tasked with fulfilling the dissipation of frustration caused by neoliberal interpellations and its inherent socio-economic structural transformations.

The idea is to combine psychoanalytical reflections on desires for recognition and the concept of *jouissance*¹² with research on the authori-

7 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, The seminar. Book 7, 1959-1960.* ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. Dennis Porter. (London: Routledge, 1992); Jacques Lacan, *Meine Lehre.* (Wien: Turia & Kant, 2005).

8 Alain Bieber, “Gesellschaftliche Utopien. Oder: Wie politisch ist die Kunst? In Politik trifft Kunst. Zum Verhältnis von politischer und kultureller Bildung”. in Anja Besand. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2012), 83–93

9 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

10 Jacques Lacan, *Meine Lehre.* (Wien: Turia & Kant, 2005); Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, The seminar. Book 7, 1959-1960.* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter. (London: Routledge, 1992).

11 Theodor Adorno/Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente.* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2008), 183.

12 Jacques Lacan, *Meine Lehre.* (Wien: Turia & Kant, 2005); Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, The seminar. Book 7, 1959-1960.* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter. (London: Routledge, 1992).

tarian crises in (neo-)liberal post-democracies.¹³ The general aim is to develop a psychoanalytically inspired critical theory, dealing with the dialectic of political desires and formations of subjectivation, which can be located in the field of critical social research.

In a first step, it is argued that right-wing populism can be understood as an outcry against the effects of processes of neoliberal globalization (Heitmeyer, 2001/2018).¹⁴ Regarded from this perspective it is plausible to interpret right-wing populism as articulation of a diffuse discomfort and that it would be short-sighted to disconnect this trend from the current crisis of (neo-)liberal democracy. Moreover, it will be outlined that there is a structural relationship between (neo-)liberal and authoritarian thinking, insofar as both negate the political. In the second part of the paper I will refer to Adorno and Horkheimer's ideology-critical reflections on authoritarianism, which I synthesize with psychoanalytical reflections on the relationship between desires, jouissance, shame and de-tabooing and normalization. But before doing so let us begin with some basic considerations on the concept and phenomenon of populism.

13 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1966): Suhrkamp; Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung nach Auschwitz*. In G. Kadelbach (Ed.), *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit: Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969* (92-109) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970); Theodor W. Adorno. *Studien zum autoritären Charakter* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Theodor W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2008); Markus Brunner, Jan Lohl and Hans-Jürgen Wirth (eds.), *Rechtspopulismus Psychoanalytische, tiefenhermeneutische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge*. *Psychosozial*, 42 (156) (2019), 1-144; Oliver Nachtwey, *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft. Über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); Oliver Nachtwey, *Rechte Wutbürger. Pegida oder das autoritäre Syndrom*. *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 60 (3) (2015) 81-89.

14 Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritärer Kapitalismus, Demokratieentleerung und Rechtspopulismus. Eine Analyse von Entwicklungstendenzen*, In Wilhelm Heitmeyer & Dietmar Loch (eds.), *Schattenseiten der Globalisierung. Rechtsradikalismus, Rechtspopulismus und Regionalismus in westlichen Demokratien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 497-534; Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritäre Versuche. Signaturen der Bedrohung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

Populism – serving as a democratic wake-up call?

Although populism is still a contested concept¹⁵ there seems at least to be a consensus that *right-wing* populism is based on an antagonist framing that divides democratic societies into two hostile camps: On the one hand they point to betrayed masses and on the other to corrupt political elites, abusing democratic procedures and policies, in order to increase their own privilege and position¹⁶. Often this antagonist framing is based on anti-establishment-, anti-pluralistic-, ethno-nationalist and anti-gender rhetoric, historical revisionism, and conspiracy-theories¹⁷.

Another aspect is how the term right-wing populism should be categorized: is it a phenomenon that addresses political parties only or is it related to social movements of the extreme right, such as the US-American “Alt-Right”, the Austrian “Identitäre Bewegung” or the German “Reichsbürgerbewegung” and PEGIDA-movement? Taking a socio-theoretical standpoint, I argue that present right-wing populism should be understood as a societal phenomenon that should be analysed beyond a party-centric and institution-centred view. This includes questioning if right-wing populism is an (thick or thin, but distinct) ideology¹⁸. Should it be framed as a philosophical approach that is ambivalent in its con-

15 Ursula Birsl, Die Demokratie und ihre Gegenbewegung: eine kritische (Selbst-)Reflexion zu Begriffen und Referenzrahmen in der Rechtsextremismusforschung. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 59 (2018), 371-318; Cas Mudde and Cristobal Kaltwasser, *Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Samuel Salzborn, Was ist Rechtspopulismus? Einleitung der Redaktion zum PVS-Forum. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*. 59(2), (2018), 319-321.

16 *ibid.*, Ruth Emily Wodak, Vom Rand in die Mitte – „Schamlose Normalisierung“. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 59 (2018), 323–335.

17 Edma Ajanovic, Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer, Intersections and Inconsistencies. Framing Gender in Right-Wing Populist Discourses in Austria. *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 22 (4) (2014), 250-266; Birgit Sauer, Geschlechtertheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotential der Kategorie Geschlecht, in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 58 (1) (2017), 1-20

18 Ursula Birsl (2018); Cas Mudde and Cristobal Kaltwasser (2017); Ben Stanley, The thin ideology of populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1) (2018), 95-110

tents, but nevertheless rests on certain political ideas such as specific state theories and concepts of society¹⁹ or should it be framed as performance or political style?²⁰ In line with Ruth Wodak²¹, I want to outline that right-wing populism should not only “be regarded as a rhetorical style or as a pure media performance phenomenon” although “the medial staging should not be underestimated”.²²

Instead, I suggest with reference to Slavoj Žižek’s²³ and Lacan’s psychoanalytical writings²⁴ that contemporary right-populism should be categorized as a *new form* of ideology. This ideology not only performs in a flexible way, in the sense that it manages to arbitrarily relate to a set of often contradictory normative positions and to empty or reverse their original meaning, but that this flexibility expresses an *ideological innovation that is inherent in neoliberal ideologies and is now pushed by right-wingers in order to re-establish a non-democratic social order*. To give an example: In Germany and Austria right-wing populists regularly denounce feminism as gender ideology, but simultaneously gender rhetoric is (ab)used for legitimizing anti-egalitarianism; in particular racist, anti-Muslim storytelling in the public sphere.²⁵

Various authors outline that although populism seems to be a societal reaction to a general disappointment, insofar as liberal democracy does

19 Karin Priester, *Populismus: Historische und aktuelle Erscheinungsformen* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007), 9.

20 Rogers Brubaker, Why populism? In *Theory and Society* 46, (5) (2017), 357-385; Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism. Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2016).

21 Ruth Emily Wodak (2018).

22 author’s translation, *ibid.*, 327

23 Slavoj Žižek, *Auf verlorenem Posten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009); Slavoj Žižek, *Die Tücke des Subjekts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010)

24 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, The seminar. Book 7, 1959-1960. ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992); Jacques Lacan, *Meine Lehre* (Wien: Turia & Kant.Lacan, 2005).

25 Gabriele Dietze, Das “Ereignis Köln”, *Femina Politica*, 25(1) (2016), 93-102; Birgit Sauer, Geschlechtertheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotential der Kategorie Geschlecht, in: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 58 (1) (2017), 1-20.

not fulfil its promises, it should not be moralized.²⁶ Some authors suggest that populism should be reflected in the context of critical theory as an intrinsic aspect of representative democracy²⁷, which could even take the form of a wake-up-call²⁸. Other authors outline that the doctrine of the so-called “third way” has led to a post-political neo-liberal hegemony, suggesting that there are no political alternatives and that this post-democratic agenda has been fuelled to some extent by political theories that focus on consensual deliberation, prominently represented by Jürgen Habermas²⁹ and John Rawls³⁰. Deliberative models of democracy are thus criticized to underestimate the agonist nature of the political and therefore, democracy-theoretical reflections should not condemn populism, but rethink it as a vital part of the political that could serve in overcoming the neoliberal hegemony.³¹

Following Adorno and Horkheimer’s “*Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*”³², this paper takes a sceptical view of populism, arguing that although it can be regarded as a stylistic element that has to some extent always been inherent in democratic politics, it seems that democratic societies are confronted with a new quality of *destructive* populism – a populism that expresses *and* increases authoritarian desires in the form of phantasies for salvation and rigid, even dictatorial leadership. One of the central claims of this piece is that contemporary

26 Jörk Dirke and Selk Veith (2017)

27 Jan-Werner Müller, Was ist Populismus? In *Zeitschrift für Politische Theorie*, 7(2) (2016), 187-201

28 Karin Priester, Populismus und kein Ende, In *Zeitschrift für Politische Theorie* 7, (2) (2016), 209–219, 218

29 Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998).

30 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971); John Rawls, *Political Liberalism. The John Dewey Essays in Philosophy*, 4. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

31 Ernesto Laclau, *On populist reason* (London: Verso, 2005); Chantal Mouffe, *Für einen linken Populismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

32 Theodor W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2008).

right-wing oriented populism should be deconstructed in *ideology-critical perspective* as a governmental strategy³³ that intends to stimulate authoritarian societal regressions in order to disguise structural failings in the contexts of neoliberal politics on the one hand and to instrumentalize the societal discomfort with neoliberalism in order to establish a new (non-democratic) political order on the other.³⁴ Therefore it would be reductive to consider the phenomenon of right-wing populism in isolation. Rather, my thesis is that the current threat to democracy does not stem exclusively from the existence of right-wing populists, but from the inability of *existing democracies* to clearly *distinguish* themselves from right-wing populist discourses *in the context of crisis-solving*. The disturbing discovery is that right-wing populists in Germany and other European countries, but also in the United States, have succeeded in shifting the public debate as a whole to the right³⁵; right-wing populists may thus encounter enabling conditions that are inherent in (neo-)liberal democracy itself. What seems to be troubling in particular is the inability of liberal democracies to distance themselves clearly from right-wing chauvinist appeals that have a particular effect on the situation of groups who are structurally marginalized, such as migrants and refugees, but also on gender relations.³⁶

33 *ibid.*; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Herbert Marcuse, Repressive Toleranz, In Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds.), *Kritik der reinen Toleranz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 91-128.

34 Alex Demirović, Autoritärer Populismus als neoliberale Krisenbewältigungsstrategie, In *PROKLA. Zeitschrift Für Kritische Sozialwissenschaft*. 48(190) (2018), 27-42.; Samuel Salzborn, *Angriff der Antidemokraten. Die völkische Rebellion der Neuen Rechten* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2017).

35 Ursula Birsl, Die Demokratie und ihre Gegenbewegung: eine kritische (Selbst-)Reflexion zu Begriffen und Referenzrahmen in der Rechtsextremismusforschung, In *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 59 (2018), 371-318; Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritäre Versuchungen. Signaturen der Bedrohung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018); Ruth Emily Wodak, Vom Rand in die Mitte – „Schamlose Normalisierung“, In *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 59 (2018), 323–335.

36 Birgit Sauer, Geschlechtertheoretische Überlegungen zum europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Zum Erklärungspotential der Kategorie Geschlecht, In: *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 58 (1) (2017), 1-20; Birgit Sauer, Anti-feminis-

Authoritarianism, populism, and the crisis of the political

The paper's central thesis is that a psychoanalytically inspired critical theory is capable of deconstructing political interpellations by reflecting how far unconscious phantasies structuring desires motivate political action. Consequently, it relates to theoretical debates that revitalize the writings of the Frankfurt School on authoritarianism³⁷ in order to examine the origins, impact and communication strategies of the new right.

I want to start with the argument *that authoritarianism is a symptom of a general crisis of the political*³⁸. For several years now, in many liberal democracies a new right has been formed that – despite regional differences – is motivated by authoritarian aggression against societal groups that seem to disturb an imagined substantial homogeneity of society³⁹. Against this background some authors have outlined that a central feature of authoritarian populism is to simplify and mythologize societal and political conflicts on the basis of friend/enemy and scapegoat-con-

tische Mobilisierung in Europa. Kampf um eine neue politische Hegemonie? Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft, 13(3) (2019), 339–352.

- 37 Alex Demirović, Multiple Krise, autoritäre Demokratie und radikal-demokratische Erneuerung. In *PROKLA*, 43(2) (2013), 193-215; Alex Demirović, Autoritärer Populismus als neoliberale Krisenbewältigungsstrategie, In *PROKLA. Zeitschrift Für Kritische Sozialwissenschaft*. 48(190) (2018), 27-42; Jeremiah Morelock (ed.), *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018); Oliver Nachtwey, *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft. Über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); Oliver Nachtwey, Rechte Wutbürger. Pegida oder das autoritäre Syndrom, In *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 60 (3) (2015), 81-89.
- 38 Alex Demirović (2013); Alex Demirović (2018); Stuart Hall, Populardemokratischer oder autoritärer Populismus, In Stuart Hall, *Populismus, Hegemonie, Globalisierung (Ausgewählte Schriften 5)* (Hamburg: Argument, 2014), 101-120; Slavoj Žižek, *Auf verlorenem Posten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).
- 39 Dietmar Loch and Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Schattenseiten der Globalisierung - Rechtsradikalismus, Rechtspopulismus und separatistischer Regionalismus in westlichen Demokratien* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001); Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritäre Versuchungen. Signaturen der Bedrohung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

structions, often taking the form of conspiracy theories.⁴⁰ Up to this point, there seems to be a consensus in the contemporary critical research in the social sciences that deep structural changes in democratic societies caused by globalization processes and its inherent neoliberal ideologies have led to multiple crises⁴¹ in many regions of the world, giving grounds for collective regressions.⁴² In this sense, I want to point to an internal connection between neoliberalism and authoritarian populism⁴³. It is stated by several authors⁴⁴ that global capitalism has an authoritarian structure which generates manifold losses of individual, social and political control.

Along with this development, growing parts in democratic societies have a fear of becoming de-integrated and of losing status, and it is obvious that not only lower social classes, but also the so-called middle classes are affected by growing uncertainties in regard to their societal status and their future perspectives.⁴⁵ Such growing uncertainty causes a loss of trust in the crisis-solving capacities of liberal democracy and leads finally to the expropriation of democracy.⁴⁶ In the context of the long-term study of the so-called Bielefelder Studie examining the situation

40 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 2008), 180, 182-184; Markus Brunner, Jan Lohl and Hans-Jürgen Wirth (eds.), *Rechtspopulismus Psychoanalytische, tiefenhermeneutische und sozialwissenschaftliche Zugänge*. In *Psychosozial*, 42 (156) (2019). 1-144; Elmar Brähler and Oliver Decker, (eds.), *Flucht ins Autoritäre* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2016); Rolf Haubl, *Die Angst, persönlich zu versagen oder sogar nutzlos zu sein. Leistungsethos und Biopolitik*, In *Forum Psychoanalyse*, 24, (2008), 317–329; Samuel Salzborn (2017).

41 Alex Demirović (2013)

42 Heinrich Geiselberger (ed.), *Die große Regression. Eine internationale Debatte über die geistige Situation der Zeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017); Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Autoritäre Versuchungen. Signaturen der Bedrohung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

43 Alex Demirović (2018), 27-42; Bob Jessop, *Authoritarian Neoliberalism: Periodization and Critique*, In *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 118 (2) (2019), 343–361.

44 *ibid.*

45 Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2018)

46 Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2001); Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2018)

in Germany⁴⁷, it is for example illustrated that hostility and malevolent attitudes are not necessarily a symptom of radicalized milieus, but have also become normalized due to a general climate of contempt towards socially marginalized groups such as refugees and migrants but also the unemployed, homeless people, or in particular social movements aiming to scandalize intersectional forms of discrimination. In the next section I aim to demonstrate that this general *climate of contempt* has already been legitimized in the context of neoliberal ideology and is now pushed by authoritarian movements towards a general contempt for democracy. This trend is also accompanied by a structural change in the public sphere⁴⁸ that has been fuelled not least by the emergence of social media.

Neoliberal ideology as an enabling condition for authoritarian populism and anti-democratic ideologies

With reference to the Frankfurt School first generation, I now aim to illustrate that authoritarian desires and destructive passions do not come out of the blue⁴⁹, but are plausibly the result of governmental strategies veiling the power-structural and ideological causes of discomfort in neoliberal culture. Due to specific interpellations⁵⁰ that mythologize social and political conflicts for recognition, which take the form of an ideological conflict negation, it seems plausible that the societal reflection on the origins of discomfort is hampered.

Accordingly, I now want to exemplify this by referring to the con-

47 Elmar Brähler, Oliver Decker and Johannes Kiess, *Die enthemmte Mitte. Autoritäre und rechtsextreme Einstellung in Deutschland. Die Leipziger Mitte-Studie 2016* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2016); Daniela Krause, Beate Küpper and Andreas Zick, *Gespaltene Mitte – Feindselige Zustände. Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016).

48 Michael Müller and Jorn Precht (eds.), *Narrative des Populismus: Erzählmuster und -strukturen populistischer Politik* (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 2019); Samuel Salzborn (2017).

49 Theodor W. Adorno (1966); Theodor W. Adorno (1995); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008).

50 Louis Althusser, *Ideologie und ideologische Staatsapparate. Aufsätze zur marxistischen Theorie* (Hamburg: VSA, 1977).

cept of regressive neoliberalism⁵¹, that neoliberal ideologies subsequently tend to undermine potentially emancipatory practices. This involves outlining that the neoliberal ideology is an anti-political project, as it questions collective forms of political action and the constitutive role of the democratic state as the prior institution assigned to organize societal relations.⁵² My central claim at this point is that the authoritarian shift in democratic societies results from the ideological fabrication of unconsciousness⁵³ in the context of specific interpellations, that put a ban on the imagination of democratic alternatives to the status quo. That is to say, neoliberalism presents itself as progressive⁵⁴, but on the latent level it remains repressive and prepares the ground for the authoritarian desires in the horizon of right-wing populism.

This indicates to problematize the supposed anti-ideological orientation of neoliberal ideology, as it conceals ideologically induced conflicts over recognition and thus makes it more difficult to address the power-structural causes of discomfort in neoliberal culture in an emancipatory manner.⁵⁵ In other words: Neoliberal ideologies and neoliberal culture-techniques in particular negate the social as a sphere of political action and, by declaring themselves as post-ideological, they tend to make counter-hegemonic interventions from civil society that could contribute to revitalization of democratic concepts, practices and institutions invisible and are thus reluctant to conceptual self-criticism.⁵⁶ This also seems to be a major reason why, for example, feminist forms of pro-

51 Ursula Birsl (2018), 378

52 Eva Kreisky, Die maskuline Ethik des Neoliberalismus - Die neoliberale Dynamik des Maskulinismus, In *Kurswechsel*, 4, 76-91 (2001), 38

53 Erdheim, Mario, *Die gesellschaftliche Produktion von Unbewusstheit. Eine Einführung in den ethnoanalytischen Prozess* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984)

54 Nancy Fraser, Progressive Neoliberalism versus Reactionary Populism: A Choice that Feminists Should Refuse, In *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 24 (4) (2016), 281-284.

55 Andreas Hetzel and Gerhard Unterthurner (eds.), *Postdemokratie und die Verleugnung des Politischen* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016); Slavoj Žižek, *Die Tücke des Subjekts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2010), 272ff.

56 Alex Demirović (2018), 27-42; Slavoj Žižek (2009); Slavoj Žižek (2010).

test, resistance and self-organization which politicize the discomfort in neoliberal culture, are often marginalized in public debates⁵⁷ or can even be denounced as gender ideology.⁵⁸

Paradoxically, the neo-liberal appeal suggests manifold chances for self-realization, which are regularly and necessarily disappointed - for example with regard to phenomena of precarization in the world of work.⁵⁹ Subjects identifying with the ideology of self-optimization and personal entrepreneurship in the context of neoliberal governmentality are confronted with the permanent demand to be flexible, self-disciplined and to improve the self:

“People are addressed as entrepreneurs of their own selves in the most diverse contexts, and they are susceptible to this interpellation because orienting themselves on its field of force leads to basic social recognition. Indeed, in a marketized world, acting entrepreneurially is the very condition of participation in social life. Moved by the desire to stay in touch and the fear of dropping out of the society of competition, people answer the call to be entrepreneurial by helping to create the very reality it already presupposed. [...] The individual has no choice but to balance out in her own subjective self the objective contradiction between the hope of rising and the fear of decline, between empowerment and despair, euphoria and dejection.”⁶⁰.

The hidden but powerful “dirty” message of this interpellation is that a subject has manifold chances, but if it fails, failure is its own fault; thus,

57 Brigitte Bargetz, Eva Kreisky and Gundula Ludwig (eds.), *Dauerkämpfe. Feministische Zeitdiagnosen und Strategien* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2017)

58 Brigitte Bargetz, Eva Kreisky and Gundula Ludwig (2017)

59 Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self. Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (London, Los Angeles, New Delhi: Sage, 2016); Alain Ehrenberg, *Das erschöpfte Selbst. Depression und Gesellschaft in der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt, 2008)

60 Ulrich Bröckling (2016), VIII

the societal and political conditions that might have caused that “failure” are made invisible and in this sense also *unconscious*. It seems plausible that the liberal idea of personal freedom becomes transformed into a regulating and disciplining dispositive and when subjects identify with these interpellations, this often leads to various forms of self-exploitation and burnout.⁶¹ Simultaneously, the subject is forced to suppress the anger and frustration caused by these repressive interpellations and at the same time this generates feelings of guilt and shame. Later on I will point out that feelings of guilt and shame due to dialectical dynamics in the context of subjectification caused by ideological interpellations convert into a phantasmatic belief that enjoyment has been stolen by an “Other”.

Another typical neoliberal interpellation is the apparently pragmatically enlightened (i.e. supposedly unideological) recognition of diversity and multiculturalism. However, this is an apolitical pseudo-recognition of manifold life plans and chances for self-realization.⁶² At this point, I now want to turn to Nancy Fraser’s concept of the hegemony of progressive neoliberalism, which she developed with reference to the situation in the US:

“Progressive neoliberalism developed in the United States over the last two to three decades. Its hegemony was ratified with Bill Clinton’s election to the Presidency in 1992. He was the principal engineer and standard-bearer of the “New Democrats”, the US equivalent of Tony Blair’s “New Labour”. In place of the New Deal coalition of unionized manufacturing workers, African-Americans, and the urban middle classes, he forged a new alliance of “symbolic workers” and entrepreneurs, suburbanites, and new social movements, all proclaiming their modern, progressive bona fides by embracing diversity, multiculturalism, and women’s and LGBTQ rights. [...] These liberal-individualist understandings of “emancipation”

61 Alain Ehrenberg (2008), 34, 305; Rolf Haubl (2008), 318

62 Slavoj Žižek (2009), 36-37

had gradually replaced the more expansive, anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, class-sensitive, anti-capitalist understandings that had flourished in the 1960s and 1970s.”⁶³

Seen in this light, the promises of recognition that come with it are therefore anti-social, as they negate the collective as a sphere of political action and are only cursory and, as a consequence, not particularly resilient in the event of societal dissent, conflict and crisis. And it is precisely this post-ideological promise for recognition, that has contributed to the fact that concrete-utopian and radically emancipatory approaches⁶⁴ in a climate of repressive tolerance⁶⁵ are increasingly devoid of meaning. Furthermore, in a context of neo-liberal governmentally strategic references to originally emancipatory ideas, such as personal freedom, are made in order to legitimize the neoliberal project, but at the same time it is obvious that these ideas are repressively re-staged and implemented.⁶⁶ From this point of view, the neo-liberal suggestions of recognition are a phantasmatic fiction which takes the form of a secular religion.⁶⁷

The problem, however, is that the difficulty of addressing the discomfort within neoliberal ideology does not remain without consequences. As outlined in the context of the Frankfurt School⁶⁸ and psychoanalytical approaches⁶⁹, this reinforces political feelings of powerlessness, guilt and

63 Nancy Fraser (2016), 282

64 Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung. Chapter 1-32. 3 Volumes* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985).

65 Herbert Marcuse (1966), 95-97

66 Angela Mc Robbie, *Top Girls. Feminismus und der Aufstieg des neoliberalen Geschlechterregimes* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 29; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

67 Eva Kreisky, Die maskuline Ethik des Neoliberalismus - Die neoliberale Dynamik des Maskulinismus, In *Kurswechsel*, 4 (2001), 76-91.

68 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008); Theodor W. Adorno (1966); Theodor W. Adorno, Erziehung nach Auschwitz, In Gerd Kadelbach (ed.), *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit: Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969 (92-109)* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001).

69 Jacques Lacan, J. (1992); Jacques Lacan, *Meine Lehre*. (Wien: Turia & Kant,

shame in the mainstream of societies and forms the foundation of what Theodor W. Adorno once described as pitiless anger toward structurally marginalized groups⁷⁰; and this anger, caused by real *and* conceited precarization, is increasingly directed against groups such as refugees and migrants.⁷¹

I now want to come to the point that neoliberal ideologies, while presenting themselves as anti-ideological, therefore make an offer to the subject to suppress working through repressive effects that are caused through the identification with interpellations inherent in neoliberal ideologies. But as long as ideological effects are suppressed, self-reflection is blocked, which is a fundamental requirement for processes of emancipation and collective self-empowerment.⁷²

This form of ideology is dangerous because it is pseudo-progressive and, as I want to show in the next section, it ties in with already existing, but latent or unconscious resentments and invites projection of sadistic desires and phantasies of punishment caused by feelings of powerlessness to a phantasmatic object (scapegoats), without causing moral progressive guilt.⁷³ Analogous to this, the phenomenon of normalization and removal of taboos appears in the context of right-wing populism.⁷⁴ This indicates, from a psychoanalytical perspective, that suppressed ideological conflicts give ground for regressive processes of subjectivation, *leading to identification with authoritarian populism and right-wing ideologies.*⁷⁵

2005); Rolf Haubl (2008)

70 Theodor W. Adorno (1970), 94

71 Rolf Haubl (2008), 381; Andreas Hövermann, Eva Groß and Andreas Zick (2015). „Sozialschmarotzer“ – der marktformige Extremismus der Rechtspopulisten, In Beate Küpper & Andreas Zick (eds.), *Wut, Verachtung, Abwertung. Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz, 2015), 95-108, 107; Daniela Krause, Beate Küpper and Andreas Zick (2016)

72 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008)

73 Theodor W. Adorno (1995), 45

74 Ruth Emily Wodak (2018), 324

75 Adorno & Horkheimer 2008; Jacques Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen. Politik und Philosophie* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2006); Jacques Rancière, Über den Nihilismus in der Politik, In Alain Badiou and Jacques. Rancière (eds.), *Poli-*

From shame to shamelessness and jouissance

So far, I have argued that subjects are willing to identify with neoliberal imperatives of permanent self-optimization and the neoliberal praise of competitiveness and enhanced performance because there is an ideological promise of recognition. This includes questioning what phantasies and affects inherent to these identifications prepare the motivational ground for developing authoritarian desires which are hostile to democratic conflict-resolution, based on the idea of egalitarianism. In a social-theoretical perspective, it would be reductive to assume that feelings of shame and fears of disintegration are constitutive for all members of society.⁷⁶ But as sociological studies, such as the “Bielefelder Studie”, investigating group-focussed enmities have empirically shown⁷⁷, there is a strong tendency that those subjects who are attracted to neoliberal interpellations, such as economic competition and individual enhancement, are particularly vulnerable to regressive forms of crisis-solving when they experience that the neoliberal promise of recognition and a better life is not fulfilled.

I now come to the point that feelings of guilt and shame due to dialectical dynamics in the context of subjectification caused by ideological interpellations can convert into a phantasmatic belief that the enjoyment (in the form of a better life) was stolen by an “Other”. That is to outline “that ideology works upon us not simply as a system of representation or a mode of discourse, but in the currency of enjoyment, as a type of visceral gratification”.⁷⁸

Following Lacan’s psychoanalytical ideology-critique, this means to emphasise that subjects are constituted by the desire to be recognized by

tik der Wahrheit (Wien: Turia & Kant, 1997), 123-146.

76 Jan Lohl, Hass gegen das eigene Volk. Tiefenhermeneutische Analysen rechtspopulistischer Propaganda, In *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik: Die Neue Rechte*, 41 (3/4) (2017), 9-40, 31

77 Daniela Krause, Beate Küpper and Andreas Zick (2016); Andreas Hövermann, Eva Groß and Andreas Zick, (2015). 107; Rolf Haubl (2008), 381

78 Derek Hook, What Is “Enjoyment as a Political Factor?” In *Political Psychology*. 38(4) (2017), 605-620, 606.

others and this is why subjects identify with ideological interpellations in the context of a symbolic order.⁷⁹ Lacan refers here to an idea he labels *symbolic castration*⁸⁰, i.e. the fact that we, as subjects depending on recognition, cannot avoid identifying with (social, cultural, political) norms inherent to specific ideological settings because the subject position is produced by them.⁸¹ But at the same time in any speech act there is a surplus, something that is implicit (unconscious), something that cannot be symbolized and therefore although the subject is interpellated, there remains a fundamental rift, a constitutive void⁸² that is veiled by phantasies which function as a “way of defending oneself against castration, against the lack in the Other”.⁸³ The idea here is that subjects aim to compensate the rift and to mask the irretrievable loss of completeness which the individual has experienced by entering into the symbolic order. In other words: Subjectification in the context of symbolic castration always has a traumatic dimension; it stands for a fundamental loss of a symbiotic entity (with the mother, the primary object of reference) and complete, direct satisfaction (*jouissance*) that has to be suppressed (“Urverdrängung”)⁸⁴ ⁸⁵.

To express it with Žižek: ‘What we conceal by imputing to the Other the theft of enjoyment is the traumatic fact that we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us: the lack (“castration”) is originary, enjoyment constitutes itself as “stolen”’⁸⁶.

79 Jacques Lacan (2005), 50.

80 *ibid.*, 50-51.

81 *ibid.*, 35, 46.

82 *ibid.*, 52, 63.

83 Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 61.

84 Jacques Lacan (1992); Jacques Lacan (2005), 56.

85 The basic idea is that individuation starts when a child realizes in the mirror stage to be separated from the primary object of reference and develops a desire to be recognized (to be desired) by another subject.

86 Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 203.

As mentioned before, the dark side of identifying with neoliberal interpellations in the context of self-optimization is that it puts all the burden on the subject. Subjects tend to identify with these ideological ideals because the promise of recognition goes along with the desire for narcissistic gratification.⁸⁷

But as long as subjects identify with an ideology based on demands for self-optimization in a context of permanent competition, the subtle message is that whoever fails to adopt this mind-set is superfluous and can be replaced by someone who can perform better⁸⁸ (Haubl, 2008). On this point Adorno states: “Whoever is hard on himself buys the right to be hard on others and takes revenge for the pain he was not allowed to show, which he had to suppress”⁸⁹.

In a situation where the subject cannot adopt these ideological demands, which have become part of what in psychoanalytical theory is labelled as an ego-ideal⁹⁰, this not only causes partly unconscious feelings of shame but also of being humiliated or in Lacanian terms of being castrated by someone who now is potent, but should be impotent:

“The Lacanian thesis is that enjoyment is ultimately the enjoyment of the Other, i.e. enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other, and that, conversely, the hatred of the Other’s enjoyment is always the hatred of one’s own enjoyment, is perfectly exemplified by this logic of the theft of enjoyment (Žižek, 1993, p. 204). [...] Do we not find enjoyment precisely in fantasizing about the others enjoyment in its ambivalent attitude towards

87 Rolf Haubl (2008); Jan Lohl (2017); Nadja Meisterhans, *Der Amoklauf als entfremdeter und androzentrischer Anerkennungswunsch*, In Markus Brunner and Jan Lohl (eds.), *Normalungetüme: School Shootings aus psychoanalytisch-sozialpsychologischer Perspektive* (Gießen: PsychoSozial Verlag, 2013, 35-58).; Nadja Meisterhans, *Wider dem Tod der feministischen Utopie. Zum emanzipatorischen Potential radikal-feministischer und postkolonialer Ansätze in Zeiten des autoritären Backlashs*, In *Femina Politica*, (1) (2019), 72-84.

88 Rolf Haubl (2008).

89 my translation, Theodor W. Adorno (1970), 97.

90 Rolf Haubl (2008).

it? [...] is the anti-Semitic capitalist's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of excess that pertains to capitalism itself, i.e. of the excess produced by its inherent antagonistic nature?"⁹¹

Jouissance thus expresses a fundamental ambivalence, it addresses the ambivalent and paradoxical self-relation of a human being, which in a context of social malaise⁹² can lead to the willingness to identify with right-wing populist interpellations that present a bogeyman (refugees, migrants, leftists, feminists etc.) for the loss of control, but also a rescuer and saviour in the context of a constructed state of exception.⁹³ My point is that these interpellations can take effect because they dock on suppressed feelings of powerlessness and shame, but also lead to a situation in which latent resentments such as colonial stereotypes, in which the occident and the orient are put into hierarchical dichotomy⁹⁴ become manifest. In the speeches of German PEGIDA-movement leaders for example, migrants and refugees are stereotyped with a conspiratorial inflection as inferior subjects, as personified antithesis and as a threat to western enlightenment and the Occident.⁹⁵

The systematic point following Lacan and Žižek is that jouissance expresses a dialectic between pleasure and unpleasure, and that is the enjoyment of something that is disliked.⁹⁶ Recent studies in psychoanalytical social psychology show that in rallies organized by PEGIDA in Germany⁹⁷ or by Donald Trump in the US⁹⁸ the disliked and stereotyped

91 *ibid.*, 206.

92 Leo Löwenthal, *Falsche Propheten. Studien zur faschistischen Agitation. Schriften. Band 3*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 11-176, 30.

93 Theodor W. Adorno (1995), 45.

94 Stuart Hall, The Work of Representation, In Stuart Hall (ed.): *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 15-61.

95 Jan Lohl (2017).

96 Jacques Lacan (1992), 184; Slavoj Žižek (1993), 204.

97 Jan Lohl (2017), 10, 25-27.

98 John Abromeit, Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the Persistence of Authoritarian Populism in the United States, In Jeremiah Morelock (ed.), *Critical*

Other build a projection foil for an excessive and obscene enjoyment that is marked by a growing shamelessness and de-tabooing in the degradation of otherness. Suppressed feelings of shame and the fear of failure now return as a sadistic enjoyment of the othered and conspiracy-based interpellations of right-wing populists enable denial of the complexity of reality⁹⁹, i.e. the deep impact on personal lives that go along with the structural transformation caused by neoliberal globalization. And while presenting a scapegoat upon which the unease of neoliberalism can be projected, right-wing populists offer a perspective of conformist rebellion¹⁰⁰ that fixes subjects to sadistic desires in the form of obscene enjoyment. Therefore, it seems plausible that in various democracies, in the context of bourgeois coldness¹⁰¹ and repressive tolerance¹⁰² inherent to neoliberal ideology, a general contempt in regard to certain forms of otherness has been rationalized, normalized and legitimized as a neoliberal and post-democratic governmental technique¹⁰³. This general contempt is now enforced by right-wing populists in order to establish a non-democratic order. As a consequence, structurally marginalized groups and social movements that scandalize neoliberalism in a counter-hegemonic and emancipatory attitude are ideologically abused as a *phantasmatic object*¹⁰⁴ that are accused of disturbing the completeness and homogeneity of the social and political order¹⁰⁵.

Theory and Authoritarian Populism (London: University of Westminster Press, 2018), 3-27, 18-19; Nils Kumkar, Realitätsverlust und Autoritarismus: Das Krisenerleben des klassischen Kleinbürgertums und die Attraktivität Donald Trumps, In *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik: Die Neue Rechte*, 41 (3/4) (2017), 87-108, 91-94

99 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008), 181

100 Oliver Nachtwey (2015); Oliver Nachtwey (2016); Jan Lohl (2017).

101 Theodor W. Adorno (2012); Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008); Andreas Stückler, Gesellschaftskritik und bürgerliche Kälte, In *Soziologie*, 43(3) (2014), 278–299.

102 Herbert Marcuse (1966).

103 Alex Demirović (2018); Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2018); Nadja Meisterhans (2019).

104 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008), 181; Jacques Lacan (2005).

105 Wilhelm Heitmeyer (2018).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to demonstrate that combining Lacan's psychoanalysis focussing ideology-critically on the relationship between desires, affects and ideology with critical studies on authoritarianism could provide some new insights when it comes to understanding why authoritarian interpellations work in the public discourse and what effects they have on subjectification. It seems that individual and societal identifications with devaluating interpellations stand for a distortion of concrete-utopian imagination in the context of neoliberal de-politization and political passivation based on the TINA-principle: There is no political alternative to neoliberalism.¹⁰⁶ Regarded from this angle, authoritarian populism not only represents a fundamental attack on democracy that is capable of destroying democracy in the long run, as it disavows the legitimacy of democratic principles, practices and institutions and the democratic rule of law, but also a new type of ideology that cynically refers very different normative positions such as authoritarian leadership as prominently represented by Carl Schmitt's anti-liberal state-theory¹⁰⁷ on the one hand and on emancipatory concepts such as gender-theories on the other, in order to disguise the anti-democratic agenda. At the same time, it can be demonstrated that growing authoritarian desires in liberal-democratic societies are not phenomena that simply come out of the blue, but go back to neoliberal interpellations that have an effect on political subjectification. As long as these ideological effects of neoliberalism are suppressed due to specific interpellations, it is likely that these effects turn back in a destructive manner and thus create desires for rigid leadership in order to regain social and political control.

With reference to right-wing-based political movements and parties, such as the European or US-American "new right", this includes a reflection that civil-society interventions are not emancipatory per se. In contrast, it seems plausible that they can also be the expression of de-

106 Nadja Meisterhans (2019).

107 Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004).

structive desires for political and social recognition *stabilizing* hegemonical (i.e. asymmetrical) power-structures that have caused the discomfort in the first place. Following Lacan, it was demonstrated that destructive desires can be repatriated to the subject's unconscious denial of a fundamental loss motivated by an impulse to re-install a symbiotic entity and complete *jouissance* in a context of political crises caused by neoliberal globalization processes.

From a psychoanalytical and democracy-theoretical perspective, this implies that working through the trauma of symbolic identification (symbolic castration) in a counter-hegemonic intention is an essential societal precondition for avoiding pathetic projections¹⁰⁸ and salvation phantasies projected to certain forms of authoritarian leadership and crisis-management. Concurrently, as subjectivity constituting interpellations are to some extent vague and implicit, involving a wide range of possible interpretations, and due to the fact that in any speech act there is a (partly unconscious and therefore implicit) surplus in the form of implicit and unconscious imaginations and phantasies, which can be never totally captured¹⁰⁹, this opens a sphere of imagination and of resignification. Consequently, following Judith Butler's reinterpretations of Lacan's writings¹¹⁰, it can be argued that counter-hegemonic scandalizations in the context of civil society-based interventions, such as the feminist global "women's marches", not only negate the ideological status quo but could take the form of a deconstructive ideology-critique.¹¹¹

This indicates that *these* kinds of social political movements are capable of dialectically negating the status quo in a counterhegemonic intention.¹¹² Moreover, it can be argued that these civil society-based critiques negate the ideological status quo and in contrast to political movements

108 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2008), 196.

109 Jacques Rancière (2006); Louis Althusser (1977).

110 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

111 *ibid.*

112 Theodor W. Adorno (1996).

such as the “new right” are not fixed to pathetic projections, but are motivated by latent, i.e. not yet conscious, utopian desires that could be imaginatively translated into manifest concrete utopias.¹¹³

This implies, at least in a perspective of radical democracy¹¹⁴, that counter-hegemonical interventions that address the discomfort in neo-liberal ideology, can open up new perspectives on the critique of power in an emancipatory and solidarity-based intention that could not only contribute overcoming the current legitimacy-crisis of (neo)liberal post-democracies, but also stimulate theoretical reflections on democracy in the academic field. The political task of present democracies would then be to recognize these movements as vital contributions to renew the democratic project, as they inspire societal reflections on the causes of suffering caused by neoliberal ideology and while doing so, these reflections build the foundations for imagining a democratic alternative to the status quo.

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¹¹³ Ernst Bloch (2018); Judith Butler (1990).

¹¹⁴ Andreas Hetzel and Gerhard Unterthurner (2016); Chantal Mouffe (2018), Jacques Rancière (2006).

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The Orbán Administration's Class Politics and the Spread of COVID-19

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Abstract: It has been investigated in this article that contrary to the assessment of other commentators, the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis did not bring on or finalise the authoritarian turn in Hungary.² Rather the conditions for authoritarian rule preceded the crisis and were certain to define how the government would respond to the crisis. It is beyond question that by introducing the so-called Enabling Act,³ which grants absolute power to the Prime Minister, the Orbán government has become an authoritarian political system.⁴ Evidently this represents a substantial danger to the European Union, one that has existed for some time but became heightened in the context of a fresh eurozone crisis. Nevertheless, the unholy use of the coronavirus situation is just the latest stage of exceptional government in Hungary. The main social and political outcome of this permanent state of exception is the subjection of society to the forces of neoliberalism. Along with the new Enabling Law the neoliberalization of public services also put the Hungarian society in an incredibly difficult position to handle the threat of the epidemic. Moreover, the main cause behind the emerging Fascism is the class politics of the political system, which is based on the compromise of the upper middle-class and national bourgeoisie. I propose here that the main aim of Orbán is to maintain the post-pandemic world by the unnecessary extension of state of exception. During the epidemic crisis Orbán has achieved all the neoliberal goals that have always defined his authoritarian policy. So, a new period of the system is in the making and Orbán is interested in the deepening of the crisis.

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 - 2 Anne Applebaum. "Creeping Authoritarianism Has Finally Prevailed In Hungary, the pandemic was just an excuse," *The Atlantic* accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/hungary-coronavirus-just-excuse/609331/>.
 - 3 Ibid.
 - 4 Attila Antal. "Orbán's Enabling Act: Ruling the Post-Pandemic World," accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.brexitblog-rosalux.eu/2020/04/07/orbans-enabling-act-ruling-the-post-pandemic-world/>

1 The Class Politics of Historical Fascism

To examine the effects of the social crisis on the coronavirus and how this could contribute to the intensification of the Fascist tendencies inherent in the Orbán administration (which do not manifest themselves in repressive dictatorship, rather in deliberately operating state power against the poorest members of society), it is worth first referring to the class relations that point to the fundamental peculiarity of Fascism(s) throughout history. In his book, *Fascism and Dictatorship*, Nicos Poulantzas examined the emergence of Fascism in Italy and Germany between the two World Wars, with reference to the class relations that created these systems.⁵ Poulantzas, who argues that the Fascist state is an exceptional capitalist state, assumes that there is a bloc of power in the functioning capitalist state, in Gramscian sense, by which the capitalist class or a faction thereof exercises hegemony. Fascist regimes are embedded in the political disintegration of the dominant German and Italian classes (i.e. neither the bourgeoisie, in possession of the means of production, nor the working-class have succeeded in gaining hegemony in society, and thus this hegemony has disintegrated) and the fact that a revolutionary breakthrough of the working-class has failed, the bourgeoisie had not been defeated before the Fascist takeover. This double failure liberated smallholders, traders, and paid employees, that is the petty bourgeoisie, to function as an autonomous social force in Fascist parties.⁶ For Poulantzas, then, Fascism is the political organization of petty bourgeoisie that restores the hegemony of monopoly capital – in several phases: in the first period, Fascist forces form loose alliances with individual members of dominant classes; then comes the alliance of petty bourgeoisie and monopoly capital; and then, under the Fascist forces that come to power, petty bourgeoisie becomes the dominant class, while real power falls into the hands of monopoly capital, which eventually

5 Nicos Poulantzas. *Fascism and Dictatorship. The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London, New York: Verso, 2018).

6 Ibid., 237-268.

becomes the ruling class of society.⁷ Thus, according to Poulantzas, the Fascist party becomes the organizational tool of petty bourgeoisie (from which much of the party's personal apparatus comes from) as they become disillusioned with the previously supported social democracy after World War I, which did not represent their interests effectively. As petty bourgeoisie gradually separates from the working class, it begins to approach the big capitalists more and more. Thus, in Poulantzas's analysis, "the historical role of fascism was to achieve an alliance between big capital and petty bourgeoisie"⁸ Finally, it is worth pointing out the rather contradictory economic relationship between Fascism and petty bourgeoisie, as by displacing the interests of big business, Fascism causes real harm to petty bourgeoisie, and the Fascist state counterbalances the pressure of capital concentration by expanding employment.⁹

2 The Emerging Fascism before the COVID-19 Crisis

I am arguing here that the emergence of Fascism is based on two main factors: on the one hand, the class politics of the Orbán administration which is based on the compromise between the national bourgeoisie created by the system and the upper middle-class supported by the government; on the other hand, the permanent state of exception which has been in place since the migration crisis in Hungary. Even though, the Hungarian political system cannot be seen as a pure Fascist dictatorship, due to the class compromise analysed here and the permanent state of exception, there is clear and present danger of the emergence of Fascism. At this moment, the ruling party, Fidesz-KDNP is not a Fascist party in the classical sense, but the high degree of centralization and the Enabling Act indeed offer Orbán the opportunity to create a totalitarian party.

2.1 The Class Compromise of the Orbán Administration

The potential Fascist threat inherent in the Orbán system has unfolded gradually, and this, as is was pointed out in the January 2012 workshop

7 Ibid., 87.

8 Ibid., 250.

9 Ibid., 257.

of *Eszmélet* [Consciousness], was embedded in the 2010 authoritarian turn.¹⁰ Behind the administration there is a socially formed and politically coerced class compromise, like those described by Poulantzas. Before analysing this, let me briefly examine the social philosophy behind the class politics of the Orbán system. The social policy of the administration (tax policy, family policy, family support systems, reduction) is based on an unprecedented redistribution of public goods in favour of the middle-class and upper middle-class, to the detriment of the poorest.¹¹ Nor could this be changed... They can't, but they don't want to work, and the job market doesn't ask for them either.... And for these people we also have something to say. Viktor Orbán sees this trap, he just can't talk honestly about reality. It cannot be revealed that, unless a miracle happens, a cruel future awaits them in order to keep those who still have a chance."¹² This approach thus conceals a very serious class politics, which was described by another ideological constructor of the system, Gyula Tellér: "The political leadership, which (by shifting focus of the redistribution) creates stronger-than-usual remuneration-performance-remuneration cycle and by successfully applying this continuously increases the part of the performing society, must protect this otherwise fair way of redistribution..."¹³ The Orbán administration expects unconditional political and social loyalty from supported classes.

10 Péter Szigeti and Tamás Krausz and György Wiener and Eszter Bartha and György Földes and Gábor R. Kállai. "A társadalmi, gazdasági és politikai rendszer jellege a 2010 utáni Magyarországon – Műhelykonferencia," ["The Nature of the Social, Economic and Political System in Post-2010 Hungary – Workshop conference,"]. *Eszmélet* [Consciousness] 93 (2012) 53-83. accessed November 4, 2020, https://epa.oszk.hu/01700/01739/00079/pdf/EPA01739_eszmelet_2012_93_tavasz_053-083.pdf.

11 Attila Antal. *A populista demokrácia természete. Realizmus és utópia határán* [The Nature of the Populist Democracy. Between the Border of the Realism and Utopia] (Budapest: Napvilág Publishing, 2017).

12 László L. Illisz. "Túlfosztott világ. Interjú Bogár Lászlóval," ["Over-pillaged World. Interview with László Bogár,"] *Heti Válasz* accessed November 4, 2020, <http://valasz.hu/itthon/tulfosztott-vilag-59207>

13 Gyula Tellér. "Született-e »Orbán-rendszer« 2010 és 2014 között?" [Was the »Orbán System« Born Between 2010 and 2014?"] *Nagyvilág* 2014, 346-367.

Authors on the class politics of the Orbán government have confirmed that behind the system's capital accumulating state there is a social conglomerate like the alliance of big capital and petty bourgeoisie described by Poulantzas.¹⁴ This is nothing more than an alliance between the "national big capital" faction and the upper middle class. Eszter Bartha recognized this very early: "Thus, strong doubts were expressed among Hungarian workers about both the regime change and the new democracy. However, these doubts did not point in the direction of a general critique, but rather in favour of a specific Hungarian path, where the state plays a kind of balancing role between, between the multinational companies and domestic producers on the one hand and the interests of the working-class and capitalists on the other. The spectacular exclusion of the working-class from politics and the weakness of advocacy may also have contributed to the majority hoping only for a state..."¹⁵ In the 26th issue of *Fordulat*, Márk Éber and his co-authors state: "The government transformed class relations in Hungary along the capital accumulation regime to be established. The basis of the new social structure is that in the economic transition of the regime change... weakened national capital fractions were to be repositioned by targeted regulation and redistribution in certain areas of the economy, reorganization of ownership and property relations..."¹⁶

This "unholy" alliance would not have been possible without the (neo) liberalizing left, which has increasingly lost its support for workers. It is no coincidence that Poulantzas also strongly criticizes the left of the interwar period, especially the Third International, which tragically misinterpreted Fascism and assumed it was a temporary episode, a positive sign

14 Márk Áron Éber and Ágnes Gagyí and Tamás Gerócs and Csaba Jelinek. "2008–2018: Válság és hegemónia Magyarországon," ["2008–2018: Crisis and Hegemony in Hungary,"] *Fordulat* 26 (2019) 28-75. Gábor Scheiring. *The Retreat of Liberal Democracy Authoritarian Capitalism and the Accumulative State in Hungary* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

15 Szigeti et al. (2012), 57.

16 Éber et al. (2019), 47-48.

of the weakening bourgeoisie, or a necessary step towards socialism.¹⁷ The Hungarian political left, because of its liberal and neoliberal orientations and pathological compliance constraints, did not represent the interests of working-class, and from the second half of the 2000s, workers began to orient towards the (far)right.¹⁸ Gábor Scheiring is arguing that due to the absence of a left-wing political project it was possible for national and local political entrepreneurs to channel the frustration, fear of the future and slippage of the working-class people through the strategic application of historically prepared cultural narratives. This gave the political right the opportunity to mobilize the fears of the working-class abandoned by the left.¹⁹ It is worth clarifying that the workers did not at all legitimize the authoritarian turn in their ultimate despair; the operation of authoritarian capitalism relates to the state appointment and conquest of the national capital class.²⁰ The 'neo-feudal' class of national capital has no interest in democratizing the work, instead "[c]ompanies participating in labour-intensive production, or production that does not require technology, have a vested interest in an institutional structure that enhances the vulnerability of the labour force and decreases the tax burden, as they do not require skilled labour, nor do they use complicated technology."²¹ The danger of Fascism emerging under the Orbán administration can be seen in the reallocation of enormous social resources in favour of national big capital and its allied upper middle class, while these resources were taken away from the most vulnerable social groups,

17 Poulantzas (2018), 49-50.

18 The Hungarian coalition of left-liberal parties (the Hungarian Socialist Party and the former Alliance of Free Democrats) represented in the '90s and 2000s the politics of austerity and made pacts with the IMF. The left-liberals implemented the austerity measures hurting the working-class people irretrievably. This aimed that the political left lost its social base, and this opened a door for the nationalist and far-right narrative.

19 Scheiring (2020), 187-216.

20 Attila Antal. *Orbán-bárkája. Az autoriter állam és a kapitalizmus szövetsége* [Orbán's Ark. *The Alliance of the Authoriter State and the Capitalism*] (Budapest: Noran Libro Publishing, 2019a).

21 Scheiring (2020), 327.

whom the system literally abandoned. In addition, the government made a pact with the international capital and financial sphere, which also provided huge subsidies to the expense of Hungarian society.²²

Moreover, this situation justifies the neoliberal nature of the European Union,²³ because on the surface there were/are several critiques and legal procedures against the Orbán administration, nevertheless European big capital is constantly supporting the Hungarian government.²⁴ The EU was unable to restrain the emerging autocracy in Hungary after 2010, and now it has also proven ineffective in dealing with the state of exception. The main reason behind this is the interest of the European capital embedded into and served by the system.

The class compromise behind Fascist regimes is not at all unprecedented in contemporary politics. Similar social and political pattern, as Jeffery R. Webber, argues, has shown in Brazil "... in Brazilian neo-fascism, it was international capital, together with segments of big Brazilian capital and the upper middle class, that rallied to Bolsonaro after their traditional representative, the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), proved incapable of properly contesting for presidential office in 2018..."²⁵

So even before the outbreak of the epidemic, significant progress had been destroying the lower middle-class and other social groups lagging behind. The Orbán governments after 2010 is, in fact, based on the dual recognition that, on the one hand, the Eastern European semi- peripheral form of global capitalism can be operated in an authoritarian way, and on the other hand, the capitalist system of the centre will contribute to this. Orbán's concept can be seen as the most serious assassination of society, as people are simultaneously exploited by the national bourgeoisie

22 Antal (2019a), 56-80.

23 Wolfgang Streeck. "Heller, Schmitt and the Euro," *European Law Journal* 21.3 (2015) 361-370.

24 Antal (2019a), 127-131.

25 Webber, J. R. "Late Fascism in Brazil? Theoretical Reflections," *Rethinking Marxism* 32.2 (2020) 151-167.

and global big capital, while all of this is legitimized by the upper middle class, and the system seeks to pacify abandoned social groups with institutional hatred. The destruction of workers' interests, trade unions, the right to strike, and the new Labour Code, which serves the interests of employers,²⁶ are related to the positioning of the national capital class and the international capital. This was argued in the editorial resolution in *Eszmélet* [Consciousness] 124: "The essence of the new far-right is socially similar everywhere: traditional anti-capitalist leftist tendencies have been replaced by forces competing with and subordinate to global big capital, but also protecting 'national capital', in the name of 'national resistance'. Their declared goal is to broaden their voting base in order to retain and gain power, also addressing those social groups that, after World War II, traditionally formed the social base of the left."²⁷ Basically, we can say that the Fidesz took over the far-right political position of Jobbik.

As Poulantzas described in connection with petty bourgeoisie, Fascist regimes can only be organized and survive in the interest sphere of big business. Accordingly, the Orbán model is also based on the betrayal and extreme exploitation of workers, as "Viktor Orbán came to power in 2010 in the wake of the countermovement of the working class, yet the measures of the accumulative state alienated much of the working class and poorer segments of society while benefiting the economic elite and big business."²⁸

2.2 *The State of Exception as a Long-Lasting Reality in Hungary*

According to Giorgio Agamben there is a seminal transformation in conjunction with the idea of government, "which overturns the traditional hierarchical relation between causes and effects. Since governing the causes is difficult and expensive, it is safer and more useful to try

26 Antal (2019a), 64-69.

27 A Fidesz – az új szélsőjobb. [The Fidesz is the New Far-Right.] *Eszmélet* [Consciousness] 124. sz. (2019) 183-184)

28 Scheiring (2020), 294.

to govern the effects.”²⁹ Authoritarian populist regimes have started to manage the effects of the crisis made by them and this is a considerable change not just in the concept of government, but also in penal politics. The emergency measures under normal circumstances are far from being unknown in Hungary. During its biopolitical hate campaign against refugees and migrants the government introduced and prolonged the formal state of exception. The Orbán government is constantly using these extraordinary measures since 2015 to maintain its political power.³⁰ This puts the current Enabling Law upon the pandemic case into a different light, because the real danger, in my view, is not merely the indefinite power of Orbán and the rule by decree, granted by the new regulation, but also the fact that he gained nearly half a decade of experience in exceptional governance. What is worrisome in this situation are the dangerous way the government handles the epidemic crisis and made a political crisis from it, and the neoliberal measures applied before and during the crisis.

3 The Authoritarian Crisis Management

3.1 Making a Political Crisis

Beyond doubt the Orbán administration did not expect such a crisis, on 28th February the Prime Minister revealed that the virus attracted all attention, but the historical challenge was still migration itself and “we must prepare for migrant flows, we must prepare for regular mass attacks at the Hungarian border fence.”³¹ Orbán and his political staff had

29 Giorgio Agamben. “From the state of control to a praxis of destituent power,” *ROAR Magazine* accessed November 4, 2020, <https://roarmag.org/essays/agamben-destituent-power-democracy>

30 Attila Antal. *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime* (United Kingdom, North America, Japan, India, Malaysia, China: Emerald Publishing, 2019c).

31 Viktor Orbán. “We must prepare for regular attacks at Hungarian border fence,” February 28, 2020a. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/we-must-prepare-for-regular-attacks-at-hungarian-border-fence>.

planned an entirely different political season and timetable for the spring and for the upcoming election of 2022, they were about to create a new chapter of hate campaign against refugees, the judicial system and the opposition forces. Although, Orbán was able to change his political strategy and started taking the epidemic seriously, the main reason was not his political instincts, but the exceptional pressure from his own ruling party and its smaller coalition partner, the Christian Democrats. This delay, and the explosion of the epidemic in Hungary at the same speed as in Western Europe, could have been fatal. For a few moments, he proved unable to switch strategy, as it is very hard to accept a new state of emergency, when the government has been operating in state of exception for five years. Nevertheless, Orbán has found the political potential in the epidemic and started managing it in a military and policing way. The Prime Minister saw higher political risk in economic and less in epidemiological consequences, that is why the introduced measures are about to protect the economy and not the workers first. Orbán argued that “We should fight against this crisis by not giving up our goals... the workfare economy and the possibility of a proud life.”³²

The government has kept tight control over the publication of infection data from the outset, moreover, control over communication on epidemiological measures has been decisive. On 6th March, Orbán spoke of migration and the coronavirus as equal challenges³³ then on 10th March he argued “there is a clear link between illegal migration and the coronavirus epidemic.”³⁴ After that there was a tipping point, as Orbán and his communication strategists perceived the fear of the Hungarian people and the fractions behind the government. This proved to be crucial, because people realized that there was no link between immigration and

32 Viktor Orbán. “Let’s not give up our goals,” April 2, 2020b. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/let-s-not-give-up-our-goals>.

33 Viktor Orbán. 2020c. “Order is the basis of freedom,” March 6, 2020c. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/order-is-the-basis-of-freedom>.

34 Ibid.

the epidemic. On 11th March the government declared state of exception due to the coronavirus situation, restricting mass events, visits to institutions and decided to increase border control. From this point Orbán has been positioned as the ultimate leader of the defensive acts, and the crisis was managed from policing and political communication aspects. By this time Fidesz along with the Christian Democratic fraction started a conversation with the opposition political groups in the Hungarian parliament and this created a constructive atmosphere. The most delicate issue was the closure of schools and Orbán was put under pressure by the people, the opposition parties and even his own political allies. It was remarkable that on the morning of 13th March the Prime Minister argued “public education institutions weren’t closed because the virus does not seem to infect children... if schools are closed... teachers would have to go on unpaid leave”³⁵ and then schools got closed the coming Monday.³⁶

By the intervention of Orbán, negotiations with the opposition were interrupted. Everyone understood that the administration was preparing for ceasing total power without any political or time constrain and against critiques the weapon of communication will be used. The most dangerous element of this blame game was the moment when the opposition parties, who did not vote for the Enabling Law on 30th March, were labelled irresponsible and the propaganda misleadingly argued that “many measures to combat the virus will not be in force.”³⁷ It is

35 Viktor Orbán. “Prime Minister Viktor Orbán: Elderly should avoid contact with others; we must protect our parents and grandparents,” March 10, 2020e. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/prime-minister-viktor-orban-elderly-should-avoid-contact-with-others-we-must-protect-our-parents-and-grandparents>.

36 Viktor Orbán. “We have organised containment effort on four fronts; further small businesses granted tax exemption,” March 23, 2020g. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/we-have-organised-containment-effort-on-four-fronts-further-small-businesses-granted-tax-exemption>.

37 Gergely Gulyás. “Measures taken to combat virus to expire due to opposition’s irresponsibility,” accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/measures-taken-to-combat-virus-to-expire-due-to-opposition-s-irresponsibility>.

to be clarified that the government would have all the political power and legal instruments by the renewal the state of exception. Instead of this Orbán made a trap and choose the emergency power without any restrictions, meanwhile the opposition was blamed for the lack of national unity. The Enabling Law was necessary for Orbán, not just for the restriction of the opposition, but much more to regulate and sustain his insecure and fearful political fractions.

3.2 *The Embedded Neoliberalism*

It is to say that the direct help of working people is not the priority of the Orbán government at all. The main explanation behind this are the mentioned workfare concept and the neoliberalization of public services of the past years. This neoliberalization goes hand in hand with the ultimate political power, because the emergency power is required to maintain the neoliberal agenda which characterizes the Orbán system.³⁸ As it has been argued here, the government has always been much more afraid of the economic consequences of the crisis than of its epidemiological ones. The neoliberal and state-capitalist approach have always been decisive after 2010: strengthening the private health sector, a significant withdrawal of funds from public health, downsizing the epidemiological administration (a large number of Hungarian doctors and nurses work abroad), in addition, the system began to dismantle the universal insurance system and expelled the poorest from the healthcare services. These are well-known phenomena and reveal how neoliberalism intensifies deep social-economic problems.

This “embedded” neoliberal atmosphere remained essential from the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis and most of the government’s economic measures are to save the employers and capital, instead of protecting the workers.³⁹ States are helping with wage subsidies to avoid

38 Antal (2019a)

39 Dorothee Bohle and Béla Greskovits. “Neoliberalism, embedded neoliberalism and neocorporatism: Towards transnational capitalism in Central-Eastern Europe,” *West European Politics* 30. 3 (2007) 443-466. Adam Fabry. “The origins of neoliberalism in late »socialist« Hungary: The case of the Financial

mass unemployment across Europe, except Hungary. In most countries, at least half of the wages are taken over by the state, in many places 80 percent or more is paid. It seems that the Orbán' administration waits till the last minute to help people (health workers will receive a one-time wage supplement so far). This attitude has already sparked significant social tensions and contributed to the hopelessness of people who lost their jobs due to the virus. The tax exemption for small businesses⁴⁰ and the moratorium on loans will hardly be enough to save the hundreds of thousands of Hungarian workers who became unemployed and have no savings.⁴¹ While this rigor may be surprising, it fits exactly into the system's neoliberal workfare concept, which has been introduced by Orbán in 2014 as a counter-concept of social-welfare systems, and it seems to be that the epidemic crisis is an excellent opportunity to eliminate the remnants of the welfare state.⁴²

Epidemiological, health and social destruction shows the increasingly authoritarian nature of the system, but the economic crisis management program put together by the Orbán government is just as tragic. The essence of this is a neoliberal policy with the main goal of directly helping capital and large corporations, while the state provides direct help to workers only as a last resort. Behind this is the rather hypocritical, wild capitalist statement of Orbán that "there is no going back to a social aid-based economy". Thus, in an authoritarian system serving the interests

Research Institute and »Turnabout and Reform«, *Capital & Class* 42.1 (2018) 77-107.

40 Viktor Orbán. "We have organised containment effort on four fronts; further small businesses granted tax exemption," March 23, 2020g. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/we-have-organised-containment-effort-on-four-fronts-further-small-businesses-granted-tax-exemption>.

41 Mihály Varga. "Further relief measures for debtors," March 25, 2020. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-national-economy/news/further-relief-measures-for-debtors>

42 Viktor Orbán. "The era of the work-based state is approaching," July 29, 2014. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/the-era-of-the-work-based-state-is-approaching>)

of capital, any help for working-class can only reach workers through the filter of capitalists. This is exemplified by the 70 per cent wage support for part-time work announced on 7 April 2020,⁴³ but this measure represents only about 10 to 35 per cent of public wage subsidies in terms of total wage costs. “In return”, the Orbán system introduced the Slave Act in the event of an epidemiological emergency by providing employers with a freely ordered 24-hour working time frame (meaning that anyone can be required to work overtime in telework at any time). Thus, neoliberal tendencies continue to strengthen in all areas.

Conclusions:

The Administration is Addicted to its Own Class Politics

The authoritarian turn of the Orbán government is not the acceptance of the Enabling Act in Hungary. The “embedded” neoliberal character of the administration unfolding in the last years strongly determined how the Orbán is trying to deal with the pandemic situation. This does not mean that the Enabling Act is not a fundamental turning point, it indeed put Hungarian society into a political quarantine. The situation is extremely paradox, because every social uprising can weaken the epidemic control, but without a strong protest movement the permanent Enabling Act will define the post-epidemic era. This is the greatest danger of the situation, through the Enabling Act Orbán is able to maintain the state of emergency even when it is no longer required. Orbán has found a way to accomplish all his political aspirations, these do not serve to tackle the epidemic, but help build a post-epidemic world. That is why the administration started implementing its political agenda amid epidemiological measures: stripping powers from mayors (which was eventually withdrawn); forcing the continuation of a debated construction investment project in Budapest. As part of the ongoing cultural war the government occupies theatres; classifies public data about a Chinese-funded railway for a decade (in

43 Source: “Main points of the economy protection action plan,” accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/news/main-points-of-the-economy-protection-action-plan>.

which Orbán's most important oligarch, Lőrincz Mészáros got involved); continues to place state universities into foundations; financially plunders the opposition parties and municipalities in a rather hypocritical way; denies state recognition of gender transition. The government started carrying out its neoliberal healthcare reforms and before the epidemic peaked, the government emptied nearly 36,000 hospital beds and pushed the seriously ill people and their families in a hopeless situation.⁴⁴

However, based on what has been said so far, we can rightly say that when Orbán is worried more about the economic consequences than the epidemiological effects of the crisis, he fears that the class compromise behind his system, built for a decade, will collapse. The Orbán administration transformed the class relations in Hungary in the most remarkable way after the regime change and created an alliance of the national capital class and the upper middle class. Measures taken in parallel with the outbreak show that there is a risk of Fascism, as the government is determined to help the capitalists and not the most vulnerable groups in society and to pass on the costs of the crisis essentially to workers. The reason behind this is the fact that Orbán system cannot and does not want to move away from the compromise of the capitalist-upper middle class, because if it did so, it would give up the class base of the administration. Because of this, the government is taking inhumane measures and not making many life-saving decisions. In fact, nothing is too expensive to preserve the capitalist foundations of the system.

The government has reached a point from which there is hardly a way back: the freezing class relations can now be preserved both during the epidemic and in a post-epidemic world only by continuing the exceptional legal and political order. Orbán is aware of this, that is why the "Enabling Act" was passed. Orbán chose this tool because, even in a normal state, the class compromise threatened to shatter the society, as all subordinated social groups have to serve the ruling classes.

44 Viktor Orbán. "Hope for the best, prepare for the worst," April 17, 2020h. accessed November 4, 2020, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/hope-for-the-best-prepare-for-the-worst>

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The lively voice of Critical Theory

Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

Therefore, we are planning to link the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt school to the problems of our age. This means that we are looking for original and high-quality articles in the field of critical theory. To reach our goals, we gathered some of the leading scholars of critical theory in our editorial board to select the best articles for this journal.

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