THE DIALECTICS OF A PANDEMIC:

FROM AUTHORITARIANISM TO UTOPIA?

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Content

1 Goals of the project, hypotheses, and research questions

1.1 Introduction: Outlining the problem

The world is infected. Not only by the COVID-19, but also by coronaphobia, leading to political consequences which could have a dramatic impact on the social, political, and cultural life, not only in Europe, but on a global scale. Since March 2020, from a democracy-theoretical perspective, although there has been no unitary political response to COVID-19, various troubling events have transpired (not just in Europe): The temporal abrogation of democratic rule of law, the restriction of democratic freedom and political rights and the implementation of emergency legislation.

This study has a starting point with the literature-based insight that the COVID-19 pandemic is not a natural, but rather a human-made disaster, caused by deficient global governance on health. The international community of states and the EU have faltered, not least in their failure to react immediately, in the form of a coordinated strategy on the basis of the international health regulations adopted by the World Health Organization in 2005, in the aftermath of the SARS outbreak.[1] The international community of states also neglected to take the structural causes of global health crises into account and to improve the social determinants of health, as already outlined in 1978 at the WHO conference in Alma Ata.[2] Numerous democratic governments are currently inclined to demonstrate their capacity to act and are in danger of falling into a populist hyperactivity, which deals with the symptoms of the current health crisis, but not with their own failures to prevent the global health crisis (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020). Although this is historically not a new phenomenon,[3] it seems even more alarming that legal measures, as in the case of France, have been accompanied by warlike rhetoric[4] (Wiegel 2020) or, as in Austria, are linked to the rhetoric of terror-prevention (those who do not comply with their obligations are branded as a danger to society).[5]

Considering that health narratives in the context of disease control – as prominently worked out by Michel Foucault (2004), but also by Roberto Espositos[6] – always entail a risk of authoritarian abuse, the project addresses the problem that the global health crisis could be instrumentalized by populists. For several decades, various democracies have been confronted by a growing authoritarian backlash and reactionary populism in both national and global contexts (Moffitt 2016; Sauer 2017; 2019; Wodak 2018; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020), which could solidify in the current conditions of contemporary biopolitical crisis management, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[1] See: https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/30-01-2020-statement-on-the-second-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov), accessed December 28, 2020.

[2] The "Declaration of Alma-Ata" from the International Conference on Primary Health in 1978 defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, it is a fundamental human right and that the attainment of the highest possible level of health is an most important world-wide social goal whose realization requires the action of many other social and economic sectors in addition to the health sector" (WHO, 1978). The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national, and local levels.

[3] http://stay-in-touch.org/thykydides-der-peloponnesische-krieg-wiedergelesen; accessed October 14, 2020 http://stay-in-touch.org/bruno-latours-pasteurisation-of-france-wiedergelesen, accessed October 14, 2020; http://stay-in-touch.org/hans-blumenbergs-infektion-als-absolute-metapher-wiedergelesen, accessed October 14, 2020

[4] www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/corona-krise-in-frankreich-macron-erklaert-virus-den-krieg-16682743.html

[5] https://www.falter.at/zeitung/20200415/unser-taeglich-pressebrot-gib-uns-heute/_0f9f3675bc https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/5805859/CoronaPolitik_Opposition-kritisiert-Kurz_Ein-Bundeskanzler-soll

[6] See Harrasser, Karin 2020: Roberto Espositos »Immunitas. Schutz und Negation des Lebens« wiedergelesen, Download October 14, 2020: http://stay-in-touch.org/roberto-espositos-immunitas-schutz-und-negation-des-lebens-wiedergelesen/

1.2 Aims of the project

The main goal of this transdisciplinary project is to demonstrate that psychoanalysis can be amplified as critical theory, which has the potential to advance research on authoritarian populism dealing with the impact of the corona crisis (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020). The aim of this contribution is to exert Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Freud 2000a–d; Lacan 2005) and critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Adorno 1966; 1970; 1974; 1985; 1995; Adorno and Horkheimer 2008; Marcuse 2008) as a political theory, which can explain the emergence of authoritarian desires and to make it fruitful for utopian-theoretical considerations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expectation which is central to the project is that a psychoanalytically informed critical theory can, like no other social theory, inform us about the affectual and unconscious societal dynamics triggered by COVID-19. This is to consider that the experience of disaster, such as a global pandemic, has traumatic effects which can cause destructive societal reactions. To put it in a nutshell, it seems feasible that the experience of a disaster forms a fertile soil for the development of regressive desires and affects, potentially destabilizing social and political order. In a context of contingency and of potential loss, where people are confronted with a threat to life or bodily integrity, a psychoanalytically inspired critical theory can not only enlighten us about individual and collective defence mechanisms, such as modes of denial and pathic projections, but also how these affects could be instrumentalized by populists. To analyse these reactions in an ideology-critical perspective and to reflect on the *political* consequences of socio-psychological dynamics, caused by crises and disaster, is a meta-analytical alignment that is unique to critical theories, inspired by the psychoanalytical tradition of the early Frankfurt School (Brunner, Lohl and Wirth 2019). Against this backdrop, the broader research interest of the study is to understand, in a social-theoretical and ideology-critical perspective, how authoritarian populism works as a discursive governmental strategy and why it is finding growing support in many democratic societies. The topic to be discussed is whether we are confronted with a general crisis of critique and of societal confusion in times of multiple crises (Demirović 2013), which could be intensified by the populist abuse of the global health crisis. Regarded from this viewpoint, the global health crisis works like a pair of binoculars for the present social and political crises, caused by great transformation processes inherent in the globalization of neoliberal governance (Atzmüller et al. 2019). At the same time, seen from a dialectical perspective, the global health crisis can provide an opportunity for political and societal learning processes. Accordingly, the project further aims to investigate theoretically, in what sense and under what conditions the COVID-19 pandemic could re-open spheres of utopian imagination based on societal critiques (on this point, see also Žižek 2020).

1.3 Research questions

The project seeks clarification from an ideology-critical perspective:

a) Whether the COVID-19 pandemic increases authoritarian desires in society and the populist crisis of (neo)liberal democracy.

b) If the coronavirus crisis leads to a new form of ideology, which could be classified as *necropolitical* populism.

c) How authoritarian populism works as a discursive governmental strategy and why it is finding growing support in numerous democratic societies?

d) What kind of civic scandalization practices counteract these dynamics and in what sense can they be distinguished from populist interpellations, based on apocalyptic scenarios and conspiracy theories, not only in a governmental, but also in a civic context?

e) To what extent can the global health crisis provide an opportunity for political and societal learning processes, in a context of great transformation, based on concrete-utopian imagination capable of overcoming authoritarian desires?

1.4 Hypotheses

This study formulates the following working theses, suggesting that:

f) psychoanalytically inspired critical theory can reveal and challenge ideological power structures, which play a role in the political management of the global health crisis;

g) psychoanalytically inspired critical theory can shed light on the affectual dimension of populism;

h) psychoanalytical perspectives can inform research on populism about the emergence of authoritarian political desires, based on denial and projection;

i) by reflecting on partly unconscious desire-structures, psychoanalytically oriented critical theory can offer new perspectives for understanding the dynamic interplay between ideological interpellations and political subjectification, leading to societal regression, but also processes and practices of collective emancipation in the context of COVID-19.

1.5 Research goals

The goals of the project are:

j) to clarify if and in what sense psychoanalysis can innovate and supplement research that deals with authoritarian populism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;

k) to demonstrate if and in what sense psychoanalysis can be unfolded as critical theory and to elucidate in what sense it has the potential to renew critical theory (of the early Frankfurt School) in the view of current problem diagnoses (COVID-19);

l) to problematize that poststructuralist perspectives, which have appropriated psychoanalytic figures of thought, have been the focus of critical analysts in recent years, while the psychoanalytic tradition of the early Frankfurt School has receded into the background. The expectation of the study is that a re-reading of the early Frankfurt School can not only enrich poststructuralist approaches, but that new insights for current research on populism in the context of COVID-19 can be gained from the synthesis of both approaches;

m) to expose in what sense critical psychoanalytical theorizing can shed light on the affectual and phantasmagoric dimension of political subjectification and to clarify in what sense these considerations can be applied as heuristic framework for the analysis of ideological interpellations;

n) to demonstrate how critical theory based on psychoanalyses can uncover the relationship between populist interpellations and necropolitics, by reflecting on collective forms of sadism, aggression, and destructiveness;

o) to reflect on the possibility in what sense psychoanalytically oriented critical theory can be unfolded as political philosophy.

2 Reference to the relevant international scientific landscape and degree of innovation

2.1 State of the art and research gap

Since the study intends to reveal the populist pitfalls of current pandemic policies, a reconstruction of the international populism debate is necessary. The first aspect which must be recognised is that populism is still a contested concept (Moffitt 2015; 2016; Decker 2006; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Salzborn 2018; Beyme 2018; Birsl 2018; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020). As before, the debate revolves around fundamental questions: How should populism be classified?

Should it be framed as discourse about political strategy or ideology? And if it is an ideological phenomenon (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020), should it be categorized as thick, thin, or distinct ideology (Stanley 2008; Moffitt 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Birsl 2018)? Or should it be framed as performance or political style (Moffitt 2015; 2016; Brubaker 2017a–b; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020)? 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, populists 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 position (Wodak 2018, 328–30). Often this antagonist framing is based on anti-establishment, anti-pluralistic, ethno-nationalist and anti-gender rhetoric, historical revisionism, and conspiracy-theories (Sauer 2017; Ajanovic, Mayer and Sauer 2018). This project has a point of departure in discussing populism as a symptom of authoritarianism (Crewe and Sanders 2019) and follows authors who outline that populism is part of a neoliberal crisis management (Demirović 2013; 2018; Hall 2014).

So far there are 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, which have caused a variety of experiences of collective deprivation and anxieties (Brähler and Decker 2016; Heitmeyer 2018; Manow 2018). Others accentuate collective forms of alienation due to the loss of cultural orientation (Inglehardt and Norris 2019) and a third group point to a general crisis of political representation and of the political (Lacan 2005; Jörke and Selk 2017; Mouffe 2018). All of these explanations have their value in understanding the rise of authoritarian thinking as an articulation of discomfort with neoliberal globalization. Nevertheless, although some authors also refer to psychoanalytical concepts (Mouffe 2005; Heitmeyer 2018), what is still missing in the context of research on authoritarian populism is a systematic, psychoanalytical analysis of the structural relationship between ideological interpellations and the formation of partly unconscious desire-structures in the context of crises.

2.2 Innovative aspects

2.2.1 Reflections on the relationship between desires and partly unconscious effects of ideological interpellations

What is new about this project is that it addresses processes of political subjectification in the context of COVID-19 and seeks to theorize the partly unconscious effects of ideological interpellations (this idea is inspired by Althusser 1977) on the formation of desires for recognition and its inherent phantasies and affects (this idea is inspired by Hegel 1986, 149; Lacan 2005). The most innovative turn of the study is that it seeks to demonstrate that psychoanalysis can be understood as a political and critical *theory* (on this point see Stavrakakis 2020) and as ideology-critical *method*, capable of deconstructing ideological interpellations in the context of COVID-19 crisis management. The expectation is that reflecting on partly unconscious desires for recognition not only allows one to grasp the origins of the authoritarian backlash in its structural depth dimension, but also to identify social processes that counteract these dynamics.

The study takes a socio-theoretical standpoint grounded in psychoanalytical reflections on the individual, but also societal unconsciousness (Freud 2000a–d; Erdheim 1984; Lacan 2005). It argues that present authoritarian populism can be understood as a societal phenomenon, which should also be analysed beyond a party-centric and institution-centred view (on this point see also Meyer and Wilde 2018).

2.2.2 Socio-theoretical perspectives on populism: Considerations on the interplay between governmental interpellations and civic counter-movements

As the study focuses on a socio-theoretical perspective, it furthermore takes a democracy-theoretical view, which emphasizes the role of civil-society-based critiques as a vital part of democratic politics (Rancière 2006; Hetzel and Unterthurner 2016; Mouffe 2018), but simultaneously problematizes that civil-society based critiques and movements are not emancipatory per se. In this regard, it raises the question of how to distinguish emancipatory forms of societal critique from repressive-destructive forms. Consequently, it theoretically analyses the interplay between governmental interpellations in the context of the corona-crisis-management and political movements which aim to oppose these interpellations. It formulates the thesis that psychoanalytical reflections that have also inspired the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008; Marcuse 2008) can serve to comprehend the underlying affectual dynamics that explain the growing societal support for authoritarian governmental populism, but also the emergence of social movements that can be both: emancipatory, but also destructive (Mouffe 2005). The claim is thus that the recourse to psychoanalytical considerations can help in a notable way to evaluate social scandalization practices in their utopian contents: If they serve as defensive formations based on desires for narcissistic gratification (Lohl 2017), it seems plausible that they are fundamentally antithetical to social self-enlightenment, based on civil-society based engagement.

Against this backdrop the study aims to reason if and in what sense populist interpellations not only lead to a new quality of ideology and societal acceptance of authoritarian governance, but also provoke societal reactions, which in turn are driven by destructive desires and affects which could be traced to the death drive and the denial of symbolic castration.

2.2.3 A new quality of destructive populism?

One of the main questions in the context of research on populism is whether populism is a threat to democracy, or if it should be regarded as an intrinsic aspect of democratic politics. Various authors have outlined that although populism seems to be a societal reaction to a general disappointment, insofar as (neo)liberal democracy does not fulfil its promises, it should not be moralized (Jörke und Selk 2017). In this sense, some authors suggest that populism should be reflected in the horizon of critical theory as an intrinsic aspect of representative democracy (Müller 2016), which could even take the form of a wake-up-call (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Priester 2016, 218). Some even go so far as to stress that although populism should be regarded as a symptom of social and political crisis, it should be recognized that populist discourses themselves are constitutive for the performative construction of crisis (Moffitt 2015, 190). Finally, it is outlined that the scandalization of populism can also be part of a populist strategy, that aims to delegitimize certain forms of critique (Jörke und Selk 2017).

Others 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 underestimates the agonistic nature of the political (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2005; 2018). In this debate, it is argued that democracy-theoretical reflections should not condemn populism (Canovan 2004) but rethink it as a vital part of the political, that could serve in overcoming the neoliberal hegemony (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). In this regard, authors of the so-called Essex School of Discourse Analysis in particular (ibid.) and some of its followers (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020) have criticised Eurocentric perspectives in contemporary research, which often reduce populism to the radical right not recognizing the historical and contemporary democratic potential of populist movements, for example in Latin America or Southern Europe (Stavrakakis et al. 2018).

As the study aims to follow Adorno and Horkheimer's psychoanalytically informed ideology critique (2008), it takes a skeptical view of populism. Although populism can be regarded as a stylistic element that to some extent has always been inherent in democratic politics, it is questioned with reference to authors who outline the global formation of a New Right (Caiani and Kröll 2015; Wodak 2018; Morelock 2018), if democratic societies are confronted with a new quality of destructive populism in the context of the pandemic. Against this backdrop, it questions whether contemporary right-wing oriented populism should be deconstructed as a governmental power-strategy 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 (Demirović 2018).

The project builds upon the insight that authoritarian desires are not a phenomenon that is only in the margins of democratic societies. In contrast, authoritarian populism is the effect of dynamics that take place in centre of democratic societies (Demirović 2018; Heitmeyer 2018). One of the central claims of this study is that there is general but *diffuse* (Bieber 2012, 83) and *partly unconscious* societal and affectual discomfort with neoliberal ideologies (Meisterhans 2019), which has been instrumentalized by right-wing movements and parties (Mouffe 2005) (on this point see also 3.5). Against this background, it questions whether the pandemic increases this diffuse and societal discomfort due to specific anxieties that are caused by growing unemployment, a general fear of death, but also political, economic, and social transformations inherent in the global health crisis.

Crises generally tend to strengthen the executive power and weaken the role of parliament and of parliamentary opposition (Moffitt 2015). In this regard, one of the hypothetical expectations of the study is that the present democratic crisis management could lead to the normalization of emergency-legislation, increasing the societal acceptance of authoritarian government in the long run. At the same time, it seems feasible that the restricted access to public spaces and social distancing inherent in contemporary lockdown measures could limit spaces of public and civic controversy.

Accordingly, the project points to one-dimensional politics (Marcuse 2008), which monopolize the health discourse towards bio-medical and technical solutions, but disregard the social and political determinants of health and global inequalities, that have led to various global crises in the first place (Kickbusch 2005; Gopinathan et al. 2014; Ottersen et al. 2014; Gostin, Habibi and Meier 2020; Khubchandani, Jordan and Yang 2020).[7] At present it is obvious that local, national, and transnational civil-society-engagement – which regarded from a radical-democracy-theoretical perspective builds a crucial corrective of state-centred democratic government (Rancière 2006; Hetzel and Unterthurner 2016; Mouffe 2018) – faces new barriers due to the restriction of social mobility and collective action, and it is questionable whether digital activities can compensate for this trend in the long run.

Furthermore, the dramatic socio-economic outcomes of the present crisis management seem to enforce the existing social inequalities and asymmetrical power-constellations that are likely to cause societal frustration (Schels 2020).[8] There is a certain risk that these frustrations could be instrumentalized by reactionary populist

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[7] See also: David McCoy on the Lancet-UiO-Commission on Global Governance for Health, http://www.medact.org/david-mccoy-the-lancet-commission-on-global-governance-should-scrap-its-recommendations-and-come-up-with-new-ones/, accessed October 16, 2020.

[8] See also: https://www.sora.at, accessed October 16, 2020.

movements and parties.[9] One of the problems the study focuses on is that right-wing movements and parties often arbitrarily relate to a set of contradictory normative positions, in order to empty or reverse their original meaning and to find acceptance in the democratic public (Sauer 2017).

2.2.4 Crises and critique in times of social confusion

It is already obvious that right-wingers in the US,[10] but also Austria[11] and Germany,[12] [13] [14] have scandalized the lockdown measures, by relating them in a conspiratorial and strategic manner to constitutional freedom rights.

Analysing these developments, the project questions if this ideological flexibility expresses a mode of arbitrariness that is already inherent in neoliberal ideologies and that is now pushed by right-wingers in order to establish a new cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1971) which legitimizes a non-democratic social order. This assumption seems plausible if one follows debates that point to an internal connection between neoliberalism and authoritarian populism (Demirović 2018; Heitmeyer 2018; Jessop 2019). As the project aims to clarify why right-wing-populist interpellations find support in democratic societies, it also questions the role of democratic responses to the emergence of right-wing movements and parties. The question is whether the authoritarian threat of the corona crisis management could also stem from the inability, or even unwillingness of democratic leaders, to clearly distinguish communication practices and political agenda-setting from right-wing populist discourses in the context of crisis-solutions. This is to take into account that right-wing populists in Germany and other European countries, but also in the United States and Latin America, have succeeded in shifting the public debate as a whole to the right (Birsl 2018; Salzborn 2018; Heitmeyer 2018; Wodak 2018, 323–25); 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, or even a lack of will, on the part of politicians in (neo)liberal democracies to clearly distance themselves from right-wing 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 (Sauer 2017; 2019).

In the context of the present global health crisis, it is already obvious that vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants and internally displaced people, informal workers, and poor people are not in the centre of democratic crisis management. In contrast, lockdown measures, for example in the context of the EU, have had especially dramatic effects on the situation of structurally marginalized people, who lack access to healthcare, accurate health information, and preventative services, such as proper sanitation facilities (Shah et al. 2020).

Furthermore, observing how governmental leaders, for example in Austria, frame the health discourse, it seems that not only a disciplinary rhetoric is established, in order to ensure societal compliance.[15] In the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic a central figure of Austrian government speeches has been the regular reference of

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[9] Müller, Jan-Werner.2020. "How Populists Will Leverage the Coronavirus Pandemic." *World Politics Review*, available at: https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28663/how-populists-will-leverage-the-coronavirus-pandemic. Accessed May, 10th, 2020.

[10] The Guardian: The rightwing groups behind wave of protests against Covid-19 restrictions, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/17/far-right-coronavirus-protests-restrictions. Accessed: April 19, 2020.

[11] Der Standard: Corona-Demos: Identitäre Impf-Taliban machen Stimmung, available at: https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000117342095/corona-demos-identitaere-impf-taliban-macht-stimmung. Accessed May 18, 2020.

[12] Tagesschau:"Hygienedemos" Jahrmarkt der kruden Ideen, https://www.tagesschau.de/faktenfinder/corona-demos-101.html, accessed May 20, 2020.

[13] Die Taz: Corona Proteste in Berlin: Dicht gedränkt gegen „Virokraten". https://taz.de/Coronaproteste-in-Berlin/!5705179/, accessed August 3, 2020.

[14] Protest gegen Corona-Politik Entsetzen über Eskalation am Reichstagsgebäude: https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/corona-demo-berlin-131.html, accessed September 1, 2020.

[15] See https://www.facebook.com/ZeitimBild/videos/811642652661258, accessed August 20, 2020.

the chancellor to death and dying, to someone passed away whom each and every one would have to reckon with in their own social environment. The coronavirus has also given politicians in many countries a strong argument for turning away migrants and refugees at their borders and thus preventing them from coming to Europe at all. And since the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have temporarily had to suspend their resettlement programmes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, even the weakest and most vulnerable have had to wait at Europe's gates and are put into camps inside the EU, without having access to health services (Nossem 2020). In line with the de facto suspension of the right to asylum, but also the human right to health, it seems that in various democracies a general contempt, or at least ignorance, regarding certain forms of suffering are becoming increasingly rationalized and normalized. And even though viewed from a global perspective, populists differ in their reactions to the pandemic and there is no coherent pattern of how to respond to the global health crisis (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020), it is significant that populist politics obviously render certain societal groups disposable and that certain lives are considered worthy of protection, while others are at the mercy of death (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2019; Bauman 2004; Foucault 2004).

2.2.5   Necropolitical populism?

As mentioned above, in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a central figure of Austrian and French government speeches were the regular references to the (potential) dead and the use of a war rhetoric. At the same time, populist leaders such as Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro denied the threat of COVID-19, cynically edging that the economy is more important than disease control. Bolsonaro even went so far as to openly admit that he was factoring in the dead, in order to guarantee the continued functioning of the economy.[16] Although populists differ in their strategies to cope with the crisis, regarded from a psychoanalytical perspective there seems to be an obscene populist enjoyment (Žižek 1993; Lacan 1986; Hook 2017) of disease, death, and punishment, and it is already becoming apparent that the crisis is being cynically used as a populist strategy to increase national narcissism and to present scapegoats. Accordingly, this project questions if we are confronted with a new form of populism, that could be categorized as *necropolitical* populism (Mbembe 2019; Braidotti 2007; Gržinić and Tatlić 2014). Mbembe defines necropolitics as a scenario in which governments decide who will live and who will die, but also how they will live and die (Mbembe 2019). In conjunction with this, the necropolitical character of populist crisis management can be also traced back to the "fact that the virus does not affect everyone equally" and that the will to sacrifice certain lives and to save others is a typical feature in the context of neoliberal crises-management[17] (on this point see also Gržinić and Tatlić 2014).

The question at this point is if we are being confronted with a populism that works with interpellations which intend to prevent empathy and solidarity in society with the structurally marginalised.[18] The study therefore relates to psychoanalytical debates with the intention of renewing the concept of death drive, in conjunction with the concept of necropolitics (McGowan 2013; Gržinić and Tatlić 2014; Ritchie 2017).

With reference to these debates, the study aims to systematically analyse the relation between ideology and political sadism[19] (Adorno 1974; 1995), and questions if this obscene populist enjoyment can be deconstructed

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[16] https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/bolsonaro-wirtschaft-wichtiger-als-covid-19-bekaempfung-16762055.html, accessed September 12, 2020.

[17] Achille Mbembe and Diogo Bercito:"The Pandemic Democratizes the Power to Kill". An interview. Accessed July 20, 2020.

[18] https://www.akbild.ac.at/Portal/universitaet/uber-uns/corona_essays/refugees-europe-death-and-covid-19, accessed July 12, 2020

[19] The concept of *political sadism* refers to the idea that ideological interpellations can be based on sadistic impulses and forms of othering, which are aimed at devaluing and degrading certain societal groups. What is addressed here is that

as a sadist desire that once again has a specific effect on societies, insofar as it might increase social disinhibition. Thus, the project interrogates if health-based interpellations working with the figure of death, in order to ensure compliance with the corona-related emergency-legislation can be described as necropolitics of the death drive (McGowan 2013; Butler 2014; Žižek 2015; Zupančič 2018) that could create an atmosphere in which authoritarian leadership, but also a bourgeois coldness (Adorno 1966; Adorno and Horkheimer 2008; Stückler 2014) towards the suffering of the most vulnerable, is increasingly legitimized.

2.2.6 The global health crisis – an opportunity for societal learning processes?

Referring to Adorno's concept of negative dialectics (Adorno 1966), the project questions if and in what conditions social movements could subvert the politics of the death drive (McGowan 2013; Butler 2014; Žižek 2015; Zupančič 2018). One of the central hypotheses to be discussed is that the subversion of destructive ideological interpellations, which have specific effects on processes of subjectification, can take place if human abyss and the inescapable destructiveness of human activity is not denied, but is taken as a starting point for concrete-utopian thinking, which is based on radical negation (Adorno 1985). According to these initial considerations the thesis under discussion will be that civil society-based scandalizations can be emancipatory, if performative negation-practices follow a strategy of self-empowerment. This is to address societal practices which enable collectively reworking the trauma of ideological and structural violence that have led to subaltern subject positions (Spivak 1994). In this light the question is whether the politics of the death drive (McGowan 2013; Butler 2014; Žižek 2015; Zupančič 2018) can be subverted by dystopian storytelling (Heller 2016). This will be theoretically investigated with reference to corona-related (queer)feminist protests which take an art-based form and are based on dystopian story-telling, such as Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (Meisterhans 2019). The interesting point is that feminist protests currently form a transnational movement,[20] that not only offers a visible counterpart to authoritarianism and right-wing radicalism, but that also scandalizes the global health crisis as a symptom of complex structural power asymmetries, that have been increased by neoliberal austerity policies[21] (Germain 2018). A good example are the protest performances of the Chilean feminist theatre troupe and feminist collective *Las Tesis*. The collective had a starting point with the scandalization of sexual violence and not only inspired feminist protests in Argentina and Mexico, but also in Austria, France, the USA, Spain, and Germany and was also transformed into a call for comprehensive health, education, and pension reform and a critique of neoliberal politics.[22]

Accordingly, this study questions if and in what sense dystopian narratives and performances, which are based on different science fiction genres, such as pandemic films,[23] or novels like Sam J. Miller's *Blackfish City* (2018),[24] can stimulate public discourses, i.e. if they enable perspectives of immanent transgression in a context of death and life. The project thus addresses practices of resistance that point to the intersectional and complex interdependencies of the global health crisis, highlighting the political determinants of health, but also of living

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political leaders, by constructing scapegoats, drive people in turn to project sadistic aggressions in pathic ways onto stigmatized populations.

[20] https://transversal.at/blog/8m-der-groe-feministische-streik, accessed May 30, 2020.

[21] Couto, Marcia Thereza; Elda de, Oliveira; Separavich; Alves, Marco Antônio ; Olinda do Carmo, Luiz. "The feminist perspective of intersectionality in the field of public health: a narrative review of the theoretical-methodological literature." SALUD COLECTIVA, 2019;15:e1994. doi: 10.18294/sc.2019.1994, pp.1-14, accessed: November 3,2020.

[22] https://www.web24.news/u/2020/03/las-tesis-chiles-resistance-is-female.html, accessed: November 4, 2020.

[23] See Drehli Robnik. 2020. Ansteckkino. *Eine politische Philosophie und Geschichte des Pandemie-Spielfilms von 1919 bis Covid-19.* Neofelis: Berlin: https://www.paranoia-tv.com/en/program/content/453-drehli-robnik-pandemic-cinema also https://www.paranoia-tv.com/en/program/content/453-drehli-robnik-pandemic-cinema, accessed: November 4, 2020.

[24] https://www.popmatters.com/sam-j-miller-blackfish-city-2645956817.html, accessed September 24, 2020

and dying taking the form of art-based performances. Referring to contemporary utopian-theoretical debates in the (queer-)feminist context (Ashcroft 2009; Casale 2013; Dierkes 2013; Jones 2013; Voigts and Boller 2015; Chrostowska and Ingram 2016; Daniels and Klapeer 2019), the study further seeks to elaborate if and in what sense these civic interventions can be distinguished from populist interpellations that work with the figure of death or create apocalyptic scenarios based on conspiracy-theories. The project thus focuses on different scandalizing practices and corona-related forms of protest.

2.2.7   The theoretical challenge: Conceptualizing utopian thinking in the context of latent desires

In terms of utopian-theoretical reflections, a most central consideration of this project is inspired by Ernst Bloch's philosophical writings (1969; 1972; 1985; 2018). The question to be discussed; if civil society based critiques that distinctly negate the political status quo are motivated by latent, i.e. not yet conscious, utopian desires. This means to inquire into whether practices of radical negation that take the form of civic scandalizations can serve to develop concrete utopias and to elucidate in what sense they operate, to rework the trauma of ideological and structural violence.

Considering that public discourses per se are not only related to current and past events, but also to future ones (Kosellek 2006, 50), the study's original turn is to reveal in what sense dystopian-storytelling can be transformed into concrete-utopian viewpoints (Bloch 1969; 1972; 1985; 2018). From a perspective of utopian-theoretical considerations that will be grounded in psychoanalytical approaches (Bohleber 2007; Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 2007; Brunner 2012), this brings us to the thesis that reworking the trauma of ideological (dis-)recognition depends on specific solidarity-based practices and affects (Sauer 2016). The precise twist here is to address solidarity-based practices that mourn the subaltern living and dying in the form of art-grounded protests and of performative actions (Butler 1990; Gržinić 2008; Meisterhans 2019). In this sense, the study asks whether dystopian storytelling can be part of the solidarity-based work of grieving (Butler 2004; 2010), as it might not only allow remembering, repeating ideological interpellations that have led to structural marginalization. In a first tentative expectation, it also seems reasonable that this solidarity-based grieving enables the transformation of stored experiences into a source for anticipating a concrete-utopian future grounded in the principle of hope (Bloch 1985). However, attention must also be paid to debates in psychoanalytical trauma research, to reflect on the reasons that lead to the failure of (self-)healing grief (Anderson, Jenson and Keller 2011; Brunner 2012; Becker 2014). Depending on the outcome of reflecting the concept of collective trauma (ibid.), a result of the study could be that dystopian storytelling entails a latent utopian moment, insofar as radical negation might serve as a wake up-call to the public and as a collective project of memorizing, capable of subverting ideological hegemonies which have led to the production of subalternity.

The project thus raises the question if a) these kinds of civic scandalization processes can stimulate the imagination as to what it means to be in the subaltern position, and b) while doing so, if they transform the critique into concrete utopias which can inspire public discourses in the context of the pandemic. And finally, c) it raises the question if these processes of collective memorizing and dystopian scandalizing can serve to overcome subaltern subject positions by fostering emancipatory processes of subjectification.

3 Theoretical steps and methods: critical theory and psychoanalysis as a method of ideology critique

3.1 The first theoretical enterprise: Reflecting the relationship between the non-identical and the creation of a phantasmagorical surplus as part of utopian-theoretical reflections

I will first come to the merits of Adorno and Horkheimer's "Critical Theory", that social practice and theory-induced critique should not be regarded as two separate spheres. Instead, it is underlined that practices of civic resistance and of negation are elementary components of societal self-enlightenment and of political transformation (Adorno 1966; 1974; Adorno and Horkheimer 2008). Critical theory focuses on the non-identical and against this background the study interrogates if this dialectical approach opens new horizons of thought and perspectives for action, which form essential prerequisites for utopian thinking and theorizing (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008). This is to stress that Adorno and Horkheimer are strictly opposed to a dominance of the factual and that they outline, following Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis (2000a –d), the necessity of aesthetical sublimation as a sphere of transgression and of counter-hegemonical imagination (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008). Therefore, what is from theoretical relevance, is that they focus on the emancipatory potential of non-commodified art. Relating to the concepts of negative dialectics (Adorno 1966) and of dialectical phantasy (Jay 1981), the study asks if this theoretical perspective can serve to clarify under what conditions societal critiques form the basis for utopian imaginations. It questions whether negation-practices that are based on dystopian storytelling can create a metaphorical and phantasmagorical surplus (on the idea of a phantasmagorical plus see Finkelde 2016). By accentuating that speech acts are not linear per se and purely logical, but also phantasy-driven interpretations of our social experiences (ibid.), the project asks in what sense dystopian storytelling and art-based civic critiques can constitute creative spaces for anticipating future scenarios. Against this backdrop, it is discussed whether negation practices (as outlined in section 2.2.7) can serve to make unconscious and latent utopian desires conscious and can therefore help to rework the trauma of ideological (dis-)recognition that have led to subaltern positions.

3.2 The second theoretical enterprise: Developing criteria in order to distinguish dystopian thinking from apocalyptic conspiracy theories

Concurrently, following Adorno (1985), the study emphasises the need for critical self-reflection in order to prevent utopia (in the sense of the dialectic of enlightenment) from falling back into myth (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008) and thus affirming existing power relations.[25] The hypothesis here is that this is a decisive criterion in distinguishing emancipatory-oriented utopias, grounded in dystopian storytelling, from authoritarian ideas of salvation and scapegoat constructions, based on apocalyptic scenarios and conspiracy theories. In this sense, the project claims recourse to psychoanalytical considerations, which can contribute to evaluating the utopian content of practices of social scandalization. If they serve as defensive formations, taking the form of apocalyptic conspiracy theories, only to establish collective desire for narcissistic gratification (Lohl 2017; Meisterhans 2019), they behave fundamentally antithetically to ideological self-criticism and societal self-enlightenment.

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[25] Abensour, Miguel. 2010. "Der Mensch, das utopische Tier". Interview mit Miguel Abensour. I *Polar 9:* Fortschritt. *Ein besseres Morgen.* http://www.polarzeitschrift.de/polar_09.php?id=416#416; accessed July 10,2020.

3.3 The third theoretical enterprise: Reflecting the necropolitics in relation to desires for recognition

The study further seeks to explicate in a necro-political perspective, how to understand the death drive in relation to desires for recognition. It relates to contemporary debates that reflect the death-drive as a category of analysis in political philosophy, but also cultural studies (McGowan 2013; Butler 2014; Žižek 2015; Zupančič 2018). This includes recognizing that Freud and Lacan differ in their conceptualizations (Lacan 1964; 2005; Freud 2000a–d). The project enters these debates questioning how reflections on the death drive can contribute to the development of a critical theory and theory of ideology critique.

The essential intuition of the project is that psychoanalysis, like no other theory, allows insights into the human abyss. Therefore, it should be an indispensable component of critical theorizing, especially in those areas in which power relations are reflected in the perspective of societal emancipation. In this sense, one of the central claims is that psychoanalysis can be unfolded as a critical theory, that does not have its point of departure in the *positive* formulation of a social ideal or a positive utopian model. Rather it is based on a perspective of radical negation, reminding us that emancipation can only take place if the fundamental destructiveness of human existence and of socialization is not denied, but taken as a fundamental starting point of philosophical and socio-theoretical reflection (McGowan 2013). The fundamental idea of the project is that critical thinking has a starting point of considering that destructive (i.e. sadistic) desires matter in politics and that there is a fundamental relationship between the political and the psyche (Butler 2018). Against this backdrop the project aims to deconstruct populist interpellations by reflecting the relationship between government-based interpellations and ideology deeply inscribed in the psyche (McGowan 2013) and relates to debates that point to the affective dimension of political subjectification (Mouffe 2005; Bargetz 2015; Sauer 2016).

3.4 Systematic foundations: Desires for recognition and the concept of symbolic castration in the light of the ideological unconsciousness

Referring to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis (2005) indicates the framing of social orders as *symbolic* orders, constituted by speech acts and a general desire of individuals to be recognized as (political, social, legal) subjects. Symbolic orders can be framed as norm-based *recognition orders*, to which a latent, unconscious dimension is always inherent (Lacan 2005, 95 –6, Adorno and Horkheimer 2008, 177, 201–205; Marcuse 2008, 87, 91–2). And although it is difficult to grasp the concrete impact of the unconsciousness, the study claims that it is relevant to reflect the possibility of processes inaccessible to conscious rationalization, in order to understand the causes and symptoms of authoritarian populism in the context of the COVID-19 debate. This supposes to consider that symbolic orders contain formal, but also informal and above all, unconsciously internalized rules (Lacan 2005, 46). Lacan refers here to an idea which he labels *symbolic castration*, i.e. the fact that we, as subjects, cannot evade identifying with (social, political, legal) norms inherent in specific ideological settings, because the subject position is produced by (partly unconscious) identifications with ideological interpellations (Althusser 1977; Lacan 2005, 46). Simultaneously, Lacan highlights that symbolic orders are never sufficient when it comes to representing, but also to addressing the subject (Butler 1990; 2001; Lacan 2005, 95–7). In any speech act there is a surplus, something which is implicit (unconscious), something that cannot be symbolized and therefore, although the subject is interpellated, there remains a fundamental deficit. To put it bluntly, symbolic orders and subjects are shaped by unconscious rifts. But what is central to Lacan is that the symbolic order is capable of deceiving subjects about their incompleteness and inner turmoil when identifying with this order. In addition to this, Lacan notes that subjects are willing to identify with symbolic orders (ideologies) because 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*") (Lacan 2006).[26] In other words, subjectification revolves around a fundamental loss and it structures the desire of a subject, which aims to compensate for this loss by identifying with the norms of recognition inherent in the symbolic order.

Another paradox which Lacan emphasises is that the subject who identifies with the symbolic order does not know precisely which interpellations demand to be recognized by others (as legal, political, social subjects) in the horizon of ideology. *Both* political subjectivity *and* societal norms inherent in political interpellations are thus characterized by a fundamental non-identity and concurrently, like the self-image in Lacan's mirror stage (Lacan 2006), individual, but also social identities are based on constitutive misjudgements ("*Verkennung*") and infinity. But as symbolic orders and their inherent ideological frames tend to veil their own unavoidable incompleteness and infinity, they manage to integrate the split in the form of a phantasmatic object, which is accused of disturbing the completeness of the order. According to this unavoidable process of subjectification, the thesis to be discussed is if desires for the devaluation of otherness can be repatriated to the subject's denial of a fundamental loss, motivated by an impulse to re-install a symbiotic entity and complete jouissance.

In line with this thought, it seems feasible that working through the trauma of symbolic identification (of symbolic castration) is an essential societal precondition in avoiding identification with scapegoat constructions and salvation phantasies, projected to certain forms of authoritarian leadership (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008, 196). Therefore, the study seeks to clarify under what conditions ideological interpellations and its inherent pathetic projections can be appropriated in subversive ways.

The concept of castration, like that of the death drive, is still the subject of heated debate today. Feminists in particular, have been extremely critical of the concept of castration, regardless of whether it is the version of Sigmund Freud (Millett 1977) or Jacques Lacan (Butler 1990; Campbell 2004; Zupančič 2017). Thus, the study aims to demonstrate in which sense the concept of symbolic castration can be made fruitful for research on populist authoritarianism (on this point see 3.6), but also utopian-theoretical debates. The central idea to be discussed is if emancipatory forms of subjectification begin with the willingness to recognize that we as subjects cannot avoid identifying ourselves with ideological interpellations (Lacan 2005, 51). Accordingly, the project claims hypothetically, that working through the trauma of symbolic identification presupposes the acceptance of symbolic castration.

3.5   The fourth enterprise: Synthesizing Lacan and the Frankfurt School: Neoliberal ideology as a breeding ground for authoritarian populism which could culminate in the context of the global health crisis

As the study follows debates that point to an internal connection between neoliberalism and authoritarian populism (Demirović 2018; Heitmeyer 2018; Jessop 2019) and stress that authoritarian populism is part of a neoliberal crisis management (Demirović 2018; Hall 2014), it is intended to expound in which sense the concept of symbolic castration can be applied as a central category of ideological-critical reflections. It would also certainly be abbreviated to speak of neoliberalism as a unique political phenomenon, yet in this study neoliberalism is supposed to be an ideological project, in which certain core libertarian elements, such as ideas about the relationship between the individual and society, but also on the relationship between state and market, have a significant influence on processes of subjectification, albeit to varying degrees, depending on the phase and country (for an overview see Ötsch and Thomasberger 2009).

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[26] 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.

Referring to the writings of the early Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008), the project questions if authoritarian desires are the result of governmental interpellations, that manage to veil the power-structural and ideological causes of discomfort in neoliberal culture, in a context of multiple crises. This includes questioning if the authoritarian shift in democratic societies could result from the ideological fabrication of a societal unconsciousness (Erdheim 1984). What is questioned here is if neoliberal interpellations seduce subjects to deny the fact that they are deeply shaped by neoliberal norms and consequently are blocked from reflecting on the impact of ideological subjectification. That is to problematize that the neo-liberal appeal is based on a post-ideological phantasma, suggesting manifold chances for self-realization, which at the same time are regularly and necessarily disappointed – for example with regard to phenomena of precarization in the world of work (Ehrenberg 2008; Bröckling 2016). Viewed from this perspective, it seems that the hidden but powerful "dirty" message of the neoliberal interpellation is that a subject has manifold chances, but if it fails, it is its own fault. Therefore, it will be issued that the societal and political conditions which might have caused that "failure" are made invisible and therefore *unconscious.* This includes discussion on if and in what sense the denial of symbolic castration could make the solidarity-based realization and articulation of individual and collective suffering more difficult (Adorno 1970, 96) and if this tendency is increased in the present global health crisis. As charted in the context of the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 2008; Marcuse 2008), it seems feasible that the ideological impossibility to locate the origins of the ongoing discomfort in neoliberalism and the emergence of new anxieties and frustrations caused by the global health crisis could form the foundation of what Theodor W. Adorno once described as pitiless anger toward structurally marginalized groups (Adorno 1970, 94). Consequently, this study aims to clarify if this anger, caused by real *and* conceited precarization (Heitmeyer 2018), has become increasingly directed against vulnerable groups, such as refugees and migrants in the present health emergency. What is questioned is whether the diffuse societal discomfort with neoliberalism culminates in the willingness to identify with necropolitical interpellations, as the societal reflection on the power-structural origins of the current health crisis is hampered. Regarding the current coronavirus demonstrations in Germany, Austria, and also the USA, which are increasingly accompanied by conspiracy-theory invocations, the study seeks to clarify to what extent the already existing societal (especially affectual) unease in neoliberalism builds a fertile soul, not only for identifying with governmental populist interpellations, but also for invocations that are central to political movements which aim to oppose COVID-19 pandemic legislation. Accordingly, it will be exhibited if and in what sense populist interpellations, in the context of pandemic management have the tendency to prevent societies from working through repressive effects caused through identification with neoliberal ideologies. Up to this point, the project relates to approaches which outline that deep structural changes in democratic societies, caused by globalization processes, give grounds for collective regressions (Geiselberger 2017; Heitmeyer 2018). With this in mind, a result of the study could be that 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 put counter-hegemonic interventions from civil society into a subaltern position and are thus reluctant to conceptual self-criticism (Žižek 2009; 2010). Seen from this perspective, neoliberal ideology could be interpreted not only as an anti-social, but also an *anti-utopian* cultural and political project. Moreover, it shall be discussed if these figures of thought, resting on the so-called TINA-principle ("there is no alternative"), have led to a general crisis of the political (Žižek 2010; Demirović et al. 2011) *and* of utopian thinking in the mainstream of democratic societies (Arnswald and Schütt 2010), as they tend to undermine the political imagination of social, political, and legal alternatives (Castoriadis 1996).

3.6 Elaborating the relation between symbolic castration and concrete-utopian thinking

As the project intends applying the concept of symbolic castration as a central category of ideological-critical reflections and as it looks out for emancipatory counter-dynamics, the thesis to be developed with regard to utopian-theoretical considerations is that while accepting (and not suppressing) ideological effects on subjectification (symbolic castration), creative spaces of resignification can be opened. This presupposes questioning in what sense performative interventions can have an enlightening societal effect that is especially, to ask if they a) enable a de-identification with populist interpellations and b) if these practices are capable of unmasking ideological power-techniques that manipulate desires for recognition. Against this background, the project formulates the hypothesis that scandalizations based on dystopian story-telling, in the context of crisis, can take the form of a non-closing ideology critique by non-repressively sublimating critique (Marcuse 2008) into a modus of the utopian not yet achieved, of something to come (Bloch 1972; 1985; 2018).

3.7 Methods and Workplan

In view of critical epistemologies, inherent in psychoanalytical reflections, but also critical theory of the Frankfurt School, this entails highlighting in a meta-analytical perspective a general antagonistic, but also productive tension between the given and the non-given, between fiction and reality, between the conscious and unconscious, and to put this non-identical thinking into the centre of holistic and dialectical reflection (Adorno 1974). Following Adorno, this indicates rejecting positivist interpretations of our world, emphasising that only the factual can be part of scientific analysis. Accordingly, the study focuses on a perspective of analysis that highlights manifest and latent processes on subjectification in the form of unconscious, partly conscious, and conscious structures.

Methodologically, the project aims to utilize psychoanalysis as a critical theory, which can be amplified as a heuristic device that theorizes partly unconscious effects on processes of subjectification. By investigating the ideological production of social unconsciousness (Erdheim 1984), it relates to debates that stress the affectual turn in social sciences (Clough 2007; Wetherell 2012) and outline the affectual dimension of political subjectification, in a horizon of great societal and political transformations (Mouffe 2005; Bargetz 2015; Sauer 2016). Against the backdrop of debates that focus on the affectional dimension, the study methodologically places the concept of the unconscious as a category of theoretical analysis. The surplus of this theoretical manoeuvre is that it can provide criteria for operationalizing empirical research that aims to deconstruct political interpellations in a horizon of ideology-critique. In addition, the project does not collect its own data, it is in close exchange with an internationally oriented project located at the University of Vienna, which analyses the social effects of coronavirus legislation. In terms of empirical illustrations, the project points to different interpellations in the public sphere dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The perspective is threefold:

a) It refers to governmental interpellations that are based on a disciplinary mode and war-rhetoric, as in the case of France and Austria, or are grounded in a denial of the health crisis and give priority to the economy, instead of saving the population, as in the case of Brazil; b) it points to social movements which scandalize the lockdown-measures, based on the framing of the new right ("Querdenker Demonstrationen"),[27] and c) opposes these with civic critiques that are based on the human right to health and critique of neoliberal governance, grounded in dystopian storytelling and performances such as the feminist collective *Las Tesis*.

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[27] https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000122101184/corona-leugner-vergleichen-lockdown-mit-ausgehverbot-fuer-juden-1938, accessed: December 5, 2020

The perspective of the study is fourfold and is based on the following theoretical operationalization:

1. The project commences with the reconstruction of contemporary research on the authoritarian crises in (neo)liberal post-democracies (Demirović 2013; 2018; Hall 2014; Nachtwey 2015; 2016; Brubaker 2017a–b; Morelock 2018; Crewe and Sanders 2019; Brunner, Lohl and Wirth 2019) and relates these debates to studies which investigate the populist challenges of the corona-crisis management, in an empirical and conceptional perspective (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020).[28]

2. In order to clarify the origins of authoritarian desires in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it links this debate to the psychoanalytically inspired research of the early Frankfurt School, dealing with authoritarianism in perspective of ideology-critique (Adorno 1966; 1970; 1995; Adorno and Horkheimer 2008; Marcuse 2008). This includes synthesizing the classical approach of the Frankfurt School, not only with new research on perspectives of critical theory focusing on the origins and dynamics of authoritarianism (Nachtwey 2015; 2016; Morelock 2018), but also with investigations that focus on the affectual dimension of subjectification processes in contexts of societal transformation and of crisis (Mouffe 2005; Clough 2007; Wetherell 2012; Bargetz 2015; Sauer 2016). In this phase, the applicant intends to visit a one-month residency New School's Exchange Visitor program in the United States.

3. In the next step these considerations (on the origins of authoritarian desires in the COVID-19 pandemic) will be supplemented by psychoanalytical reflections on desires for recognition and the concept of the death drive (Lacan 1992; 2005; Freud 2000a–d; McGowan 2013; Butler 2014; Žižek 2015; Zupančič 2018) and linked with Lacan's concept of symbolic castration (Lacan 2005).

4. Finally, as the study aims to demonstrate that these psychoanalytical figures of thought can also be made fruitful for utopian-theoretical perspectives, which could offer a way out of the authoritarian crisis, it relates to (queer-)feminist debates that focus on performative and artistic scandalization practices as counter-hegemonic interventions (Butler 1990; Daniels and Klapeer 2019; Meisterhans 2019).

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[28] See also https://digigov.univie.ac.at/solidarity-in-times-of-a-pandemic-solpan/solpan/, accessed November 20, 2020.

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