

iLiana Fokianaki

Narcissistic Authoritarian Statism, Part 1: The Eso and Exo Axis of Contemporary Forms of Power

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In *Bestiario*, a book of short stories by the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar, “Casa Tomada” from 1951 stands out. It narrates the life of two middle-aged siblings in their inherited mansion, who fastidiously clean its eight bedrooms each day and silently enjoy lunches and dinners in peaceful surroundings. One night, the siblings hear noises from a different side of the house and, petrified, they seal off the doors, relinquishing half the house to “them.” By the end of the story, they are driven out by the thought of other inhabitants occupying all the remaining rooms – “others” who they never see but who they are convinced exist. Driven by fear, they finally abandon and lock up their house, disposing of the key.¹

This story offers a parable for contemporary conundrums regarding territory and legitimacy, although its meaning is open to interpretation. Who occupies what territory? Do the siblings possess their inherited home and property, which they fail to defend against the unknown “occupiers”? Or is it the other way around? The story also brings up questions about the imaginary fear that creates the dichotomy between “the native” versus “the Other.” Do the siblings represent the law-abiding citizens of today, who try to keep their houses clean and quiet, mind their own business, and refuse to engage at all with the Other? Do they represent the guardians of normality? Or do they represent progressive democratic citizens, who have been forced to give space to the elected tyrants of today? Or, rather, do the invaders represent an authoritarian regime?

As the world turns to the right, nationalist and racist politicians take power in local and national politics, a phenomenon spreading like a virus. As this manifests at an unmanageable rate, one sad realization sinks in: in nearly all cases they are being elected. That said, the means through which they are elected can be scrutinized. During the recent scandal surrounding Cambridge Analytica, a subsidiary company of the multinational SCL Group, evidence surfaced that Analytica “aided and abetted the selling of democracy down the river” by interfering with the Brexit referendum as well as elections in the US, Brazil, and Myanmar, among other places.² It is useful to reframe this recurring pattern of democratically elected authoritarian figures – brought to power with the help of institutions and multinationals – vis-à-vis the concepts of the state and state power in their current globalized, neoliberal versions. Are we facing a new behavioral pattern of the state, or a new form altogether?

Sociologist Bob Jessop argues that “there can be no general, let alone trans-historical, theory of the state.”³ In Max Weber’s 1918 lecture

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Meme created by the author.

“Politics as a Vocation,” he defines the state as a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” – what he called the monopoly of violence.⁴ Weber’s writings demarcate the “three-element approach” of state theory: territoriality, violence, and legitimacy. During the 1970s, political theorist Nicos Poulantzas added to this analysis, figuring the state as a social relation and a variable – not a passive tool or neutral actor, but a “relationship of forces.”⁵ These forces then, create frictions, which he insisted are derived from the class character of the state. Poulantzas pointed out that by the late 1970s, features of the political order previously considered exceptional and temporary (in times of dictatorship, for example) were becoming increasingly normalized. He termed this process the “authoritarian statism” of the capitalist state, demonstrated through “state control over every sphere of socioeconomic life, combined with a radical decline of institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so called ‘formal’ liberties,” as he wrote at the end of the 1970s, while witnessing the world market slowly integrating.⁶

Forty years later, the global market has integrated considerably more, and we are now faced with even more complex power structures: “extra-state formations,” elected or not, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU). The shift from liberalism to neoliberalism, and the process of state transformation, is tracked in Vijay Prashad’s magnificent 2012 book *The Poorer Nations*. Prashad explains how the liberal ideologies of the 1970s, which tried to break with the 1940s Bretton Woods management system of the IMF and the World Bank, facilitated new formations of extra-states like the G7. These ideologies also crushed the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the Non-Aligned Movement⁷ while weakening the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with under-the-table deals between Henry Kissinger and Helmut Schmidt. After 2000, multinational corporations like Facebook, Apple, and Amazon came to the forefront to influence but also bypass state power, manipulating or cajoling it through contemporary propaganda techniques. Their current practices make use of lobbyists who push for laws favorable to their operations and who negotiate deals with states and extra-states alike, acting as mercenaries.

Many have highlighted the importance of technology in redefining state theory, specifically through the increased power of social networking platforms, which have proven to be substantial tools in the hands of activists

seeking the democratization of repressive regimes. During recent decades, however, we have seen authoritarian governments use these emerging technologies just as effectively. Journalist Rebecca McKinnon, who covers how technology has been used by authoritarian regimes, calls their tactics “networked authoritarianism,” citing the example of China.⁸ Today, seemingly democratic states are also using technology to their benefit by employing multinationals. The ethical question of whether states and extra-state formations should interfere with other states’ democratic processes has done little to stop multinationals like SCL Group from mining data and interfering with state politics. The nerve, audacity, and arrogance of corporate actors is underpinned by their agility, allowing them to outmaneuver the law or even create corporate rulings of their own (such as with the North American Free Trade Agreement) by way of abusing human rights.⁹ States remain lenient towards the activities of multinationals, mostly because state representatives benefit immensely from their operations. One recent example is how WhatsApp, a subsidiary of Facebook, was implicated in the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; another is the recently revealed connection between newly elected prime minister of the UK Boris Johnson and Facebook.

Behind the obvious structure of the state, we can find several agents of power that constitute it: some seen, some unseen, some official, some unofficial, but all components of a new state formation. What comes forth is a capitalist-corporate power structure, a new version of the old machine, but this one has more parts. Weber’s three-element theory of the state (territory, legitimacy, violence) is clearly not enough to describe our reality – and we are beyond what Naomi Klein called “disaster capitalism.” Perhaps we are entirely beyond capitalism as such, regardless of any descriptor or modifier, as McKenzie Wark argues. In his recent book *The State: Past, Present, Future*, Bob Jessop proposes to add a fourth element of state theory to Weber’s: the idea of the state as a semantic framework. Combining Jessop’s work with Poulantzas’s concept of “authoritarian statism,” I aim to draft the profile of a newly emerging state formation, executed by agents of power that come both from state and corporate structures, which I have previously named the Westphalian White Western patriarchy (the WWW).¹⁰ These agents utilize the territory and legitimacy of the state through violence, and construct a new form of the state via the use of technology: a contemporary version of authoritarian statism, which I term narcissistic authoritarian statism.¹¹ For the first part of this

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essay, I would like to look into this new state formation, including its “idea” and its behavioral patterns, and discuss the ways that certain cultural practices respond to it. Certain responses propose counter-hegemonic power structures through speculative scenarios to construct an imaginary for other forms of emancipatory power structures. Others actually infiltrate the power structures of the current state formation, hacking its systems and using its own tactics to expose its narcissistic authoritarian profile, thus “dismantling” its very idea.

Narcissistic Authoritarian Statism

In her recent book *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born* (2019), Nancy Fraser offers a very insightful reading of the US’s political-economic genealogy, focusing on the period after the introduction of neoliberalism. Fraser identifies two versions of neoliberalism after the 1980s: progressive and reactionary. Progressive neoliberalism, although Fraser admits that it sounds “like an oxymoron,” was a real and powerful alliance of two unlikely bedfellows: the mainstream liberal currents of new social movements and the most dynamic, high-end, “symbolic,” financial sectors of the US economy (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood.)¹² Reactionary neoliberalism was its antagonist, including mainly ethno-national, anti-immigrant, and pro-Christian figures, with similar distribution politics to the progressive neoliberals, “but a different reactionary politics of recognition.”¹³

Today, Fraser sees Donald Trump’s profile as one of reactionary neoliberalism and populism, in an augmented version that she calls “hyper-reactionary neoliberalism,” which “does not constitute a new hegemonic bloc.” Rather, “it is on the contrary chaotic and fragile, partly due to the peculiar personal psychology of its standard-bearer.”¹⁴ This psychological portrait of the Trumps, Putins, Dutertes, and Modis of the world is painted by writers such as Eve Ensler, as in a 2018 collection of fictional essays titled *Strongmen*.¹⁵ Ensler portrays Trump as the carrier of a virus, injected into the populace “through angry white-hate filled spittle, slimy superlatives, sham-filled promises, and toxic red caps which allowed the virus to seep in through the follicles and hair.” In her story, Trump is a “genocidal narcissist, a person willing and able to destroy everyone and everything on the planet as long as it makes him feel momentarily better. That extreme and total endgame narcissism made the oafish man the perfect host for the virus.”¹⁶

This peculiar personal psychology that Fraser analyzes and that Ensler describes

through prose is the personification of narcissistic authoritarian statism. Today, more than ever before, it is an epidemic. We see political figures that fit this same description across the globe: Trump has his tangerine-headed counterpart in Boris Johnson, Viktor Orbán is channeling Erdoğan and Putin, and even Greece’s newly elected Kyriakos Mitsotakis has emulated Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro. In just a few months of governance, Mitsotakis has established himself as a churchgoing, anti-migration leader who has abolished mechanisms for monitoring tax evasion (to allow the circulation of black money), changed legislation in favor of the Greek elite, and wishes to restore “law and order” through the militarization of the police, the enhancement of religious propaganda in schools, and the expulsion of refugees from the health care system and from all civil-society institutions in Athens, where until now they have lived with dignity as part of the Athenian social fabric (instead of in tents in the countryside).

What Foucault named the “society of discipline,” later to be framed by Gilles Deleuze as the “society of control,” now demonstrates new characteristics. For psychoanalyst Lynne Layton,

Foucauldian theories describe neoliberalism’s ideal rational actor, but without a notion of unconscious process, so they offer only a partial sense of how neoliberalism is felt and lived. It thus makes sense to use their work to rethink earlier ideas about culture and character, to see what psychoanalysis might contribute to understanding neoliberal versions of subjectivity.¹⁷

Here, Layton offers a reading of the psychological tropes of neoliberalism that not only bring narcissistic leaders to power but that also *produce* narcissistic subjectivities – identities driven by individualism.

The difference between narcissistic authoritarian statism and previous examples of autocratic governance is the creation of a new reality, a new idea of normality, that in turn normalizes violence with the help of technology. It succeeds because neoliberal subjectivities have been brought to the point of apathy and detachment, and therefore facilitate, perpetuate, and mimic this type of statism. The psychological drive for success embedded in neoliberal subjectivities further alienates them from those who are less affluent and fortunate; a dependent or vulnerable human is seen as a failed human.¹⁸ Dependent humans represent the fear of failure and therefore are cast as a burden to society, making it very easy to ignore them, thus

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Left: Mercy Vera at *Convention of Women Farmers and Ecological Feminists* (2019), a project by Marwa Arsanios at the Biennale Warsaw, 2019. Right: detail of *Convention of Women Farmers and Ecological Feminists*.

encouraging the corrosion of those support systems that neoliberalism has long been unraveling.

This lack of interest in the disenfranchised, vulnerable, dependent, and precarious among us fortifies the us-versus-them divide. This recalls Cortázar's story: the fear of losing space, property, and privilege, the fear of sharing or being faced head-on with the Other, goes hand in hand with the refusal to engage with what is presupposed as a threat. We are now suspicious of collective action and care for others, and this creates a "radical split between autonomy and dependence."¹⁹ The capacity to separate individual fate from the fate of others is one hallmark of what Layton describes as "social narcissism." This also leads to the complete denial of any culpability or responsibility for the living conditions of others, or any consideration of how such conditions were produced. Robert Samuels has called this the "obsessional narcissism of the privileged."²⁰ This divide exists between and also within groups demarcated by race, gender, and sexuality, as well as by the qualifiers citizens, migrants, refugees, and those in exile. Narcissistic authoritarian statism thrives on this split between autonomy and dependence and is sustained by a social fabric governed by individualism. A new form of apathy cultivated through technology and its continual incorporation into our lives optimizes the condition for narcissistic authoritarian statism's survival. This psychological condition of apathy towards the less fortunate is embodied by states and their leaders, but also by institutions, and consequently subjectivities.

The Eso and Exo Axis of Narcissistic Authoritarian Statism

I recently proposed an axis to map and display the behavior and structures of narcissistic authoritarian statism.²¹ It was helpful to use a form of visual mapping to better understand the characteristics of this type of statism and its four-element makeup: constituted through territory, legitimacy, violence, and idea. Cartography allows one to represent how structures of power and counterpower are positioned, for example by counterpoising statism in relation to "counter-state" formations: activism, collectivism, radical left politics, feminism, and so on, as well as their subsequent roles in culture and contemporary art. The map is drawn according to two different terrains, which I name the eso-state and the exo-state.

The "eso" prefix comes from the Greek word *ἔσω*- (inside, internal, or within), while "exo" comes from *ἔξω*- (outside, external, or without). The eso-state delineates all the structures the state encloses, accepts, embodies, contains,

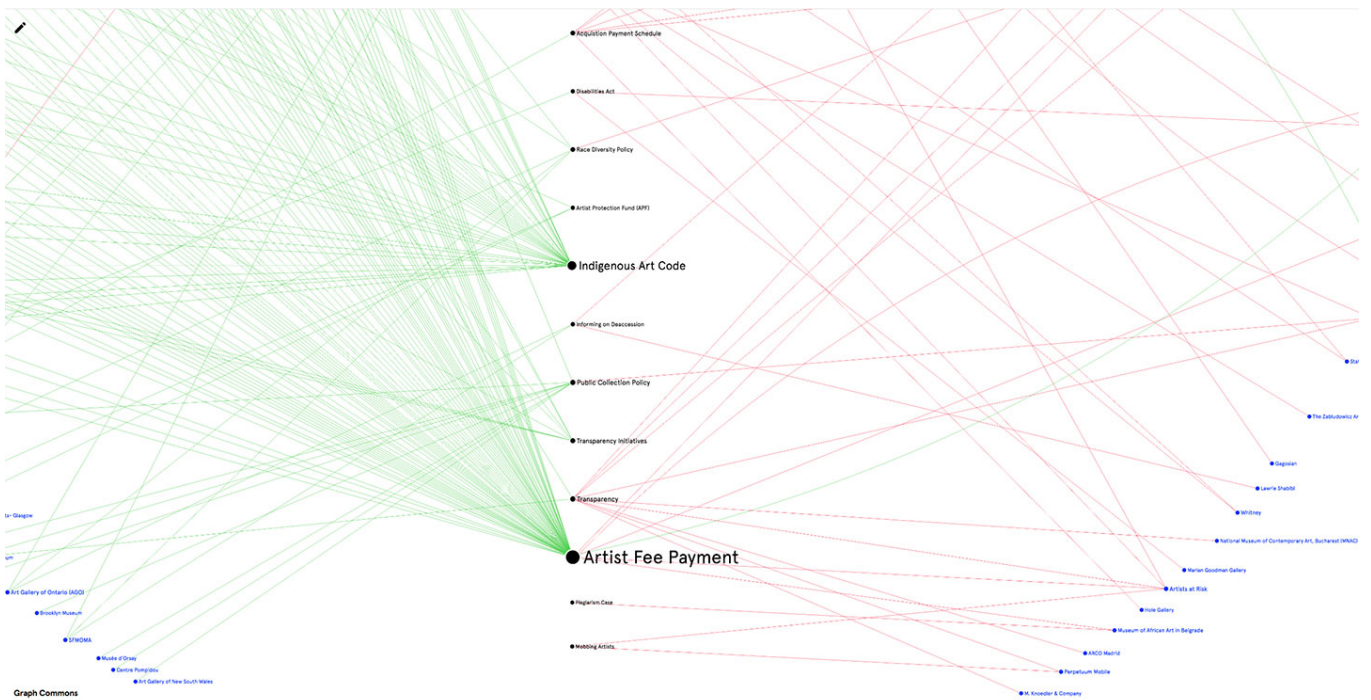
implements, supports, and validates. We can think of the eso-state as the power imposed on subjectivities that are legitimized as part of it, the so-called "natives" or citizens within its borders – a topography where the state demonstrates Deleuze's societies of control.²² The exo-state, on the other hand, is defined by all that the state rejects, attacks, represses, sidetracks, archives, or hinders. It is directed towards the external, the Other, and the "outside" of its borders. Thus, it refers to subjectivities that do not belong, both actually and metaphorically, or what can be thought of as the "extra-statal" body. Whether in the eso-state or in the exo-state, the eso- and exo-axes are defined through territoriality and legitimacy.

In relation to territoriality, this type of statism drawn along eso- and exo- lines denies the inhumane conditions of millions of refugees whose situation is continuously highlighted by humanitarian organizations the world over. Documented mostly via social media, the "compassion" is fleeting and lasts only until the next click. The body/territory of the refugee/border represents the absolute topos of narcissistic authoritarian statism. Many countries have closed their borders and simultaneously persuaded thousands of citizens that such violent actions are legitimate methods of safeguarding their territory and the existence of the state itself. Other countries find alternative ways to control borders: in 2019 the former Italian deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini passed new legislation that fines boats attempting to unload refugees, with amounts reaching up to one million euros. These tactics operate in concert with military interventions waged outside the borders of Europe, that create millions of refugees; the EU, however, can legislate and define what counts as war and what doesn't. For instance, refugees who come from Afghanistan are no longer recognized by the EU as refugees from a war zone, even though military operations by the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are still being conducted in the region.²³

Another important issue through which narcissistic authoritarian statism manifests is climate catastrophe: the inability or unwillingness to act upon the ecological crisis that is occurring before our eyes. The denial is dumbfounding. Trump's June 2017 Paris Agreement withdrawal was based on a manufactured narrative based on reinforcing the us-versus-them divide as well as dismissing science. Trump's narrative relied on the harm supposedly caused to the US economy by conservation, the minimal impact the agreement would allegedly have on bettering the climate catastrophe, and the accusation that other

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Map from the platform initiated by artists Ahmet Ögüt and Burak Arıkan titled *Code of Acquisitions* (2019–20). The project’s mission statement, posted on its website, reads: “Code of Acquisitions is a platform that exposes good and bad practices of art institutions and galleries based on published policies as well as cases of misconduct and abuse, where artists are not paid, not told the truth after sales, or did not get back their works.” Courtesy of Code of Acquisitions.

countries simply want to handicap the US – pointing the finger towards China.²⁴ Bolsonaro employed the same tactic by using the argument of “colonialism” when the G7 expressed concerns about the massive fires burning the Amazon, and attacked Brazilian scientists who reported on the extent of the fires, further accusing them of serving foreign interests and “spreading lies.” This is an astonishing tactic of appropriating the discourse of the Other (here the indigenous or the native who has sovereign right over their land and economy) against the “evil” propaganda of science and other “colonizing” countries. It is the same tactic that defines a narcissistic personality: twisting truth (here we can pose scientific facts as some sort of objective truth), while creating a new narrative and blaming the victim for what is happening to them.

In culture, and particularly the contemporary visual arts, we should not underestimate the extent to which cultural workers themselves mimic the tropes of narcissistic authoritarian statism. We need look no further than Ai Weiwei’s 2016 recreation of a photograph depicting the death of Aylan Kurdi, a child refugee whose body washed up on the shores of Turkey. Weiwei cast himself in the role of the drowned child, as if the only way to raise awareness was to reenact the drowned refugee child, publicizing his image as equally strong as the actual event. Or consider Swiss artist Christoph Büchel’s work *Barca Nostra* (2019), presented at the 2019 Venice Biennale: he docked a vessel in which more than seven hundred people died on the night of April 18, 2015 on a pier in Venice’s Arsenale, next to a snack bar. In both cases, the narcissism of the artist employs neoliberal logics: their cultural capital is important enough to justify breaking codes of respect toward the dead. And what more accurate display of narcissistic authoritarian statism is there than art-lovers taking selfies in front of this boat? Narcissistic authoritarian statism is performed continuously by state, semi-state, and privately funded museums, institutions, cultural bodies, and their staff, which kill any idea that does not fit their own by positing the museum as “a safe space for unsafe ideas.” In this way both artists and institutions abuse power and deny culpability. Being safe has become truly scary, to paraphrase artist Banu Cennetoğlu.²⁵

Cultural Workers and Narcissistic Authoritarian Statism

Thankfully, many cultural workers have instead begun organizing and working with the forces of counter-state formations: activism, collectivism, radical left politics, and feminisms.

Notwithstanding the fact that neoliberalism has decimated the potentials in unionizing, collectivity, and the concept of mutual care, we see collective actions consistently surfacing through published letters, in-situ demonstrations and interventions, and petitions and articles in mainstream media. Decolonize this Place (DTP), a collective of cultural workers based in New York, is one example. The collective resists unethical, neocolonial, and abusive practices within the art institution and elsewhere, targeting broad institutions profiting from continuing (neo)colonial violence. Recently, DTP and many other cultural organizations, community groups, and cultural activists organized for many months against Warren Kanders, CEO of Safariland and (now-former) vice chair of the Whitney Museum board.²⁶ After months of sustained pressure, they succeeded in forcing him to resign. Traces of narcissistic authoritarian statism can be found in Kanders’s response to the initial letter that came from the staff of the museum calling for his resignation:

Safariland’s role as a manufacturer is to ensure the products work, as expected, when needed. Safariland’s role is not to determine when and how they are employed. The staff letter implies that I am responsible for the decision to use these products. I am not. That is not an abdication of responsibility, it is an acknowledgement of reality.²⁷

This is the epitome of abdicating responsibility.

Another initiative worth noting is a new project by artists and researchers Nayantara Ranganathan and Manuel Beltrán: *ad.watch*, a seriously researched tool that breaks open Facebook’s machine of political persuasion. It is an extremely comprehensive visualization of the political advertisements that appear on the social media platform across thirty-four countries, presenting an insight into targeted propaganda. So far, only those thirty-four countries have been researched because Facebook refuses to provide access to data from others, but the duo hopes to collect more in the second phase of the project. *Ad.watch* successfully unmasks the influence of narcissistic authoritarian statism on the eso-axis – when, for example, state and para-state officials collaborate with corporate actors to manipulate public opinion using Facebook’s tools. It also directs the viewer to the dozens of countries that have employed such tactics, but also to companies linked with governments, campaigns, and politicians – companies that abuse the opaque operation of Facebook ads, as recently demonstrated in the Boris Johnson

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case.²⁸

Artists can imagine counter-hegemonic structures that propose ways to replace the narcissistic authoritarian institutions of this type of statism. *Silent University* (2012–ongoing) by Kurdish artist Ahmet Ögüt is a solidarity-based knowledge exchange platform by displaced people and forced migrants. It is led by a group of lecturers, consultants, and research fellows who in many cases remain anonymous. Ögüt's recent project, *Code of Acquisitions*, initiated with Burak Arikan, is a platform that exposes the good and bad practices of institutions as well as cases of misconduct and abuse, aiming to create a database of conflicts and codes of conduct to increase awareness about the accountability of art institutions and organizations.

Cuban artist Tania Bruguera's projects have also made a consistent inquiry into inhumane migration policies. At times, her works rupture the fabric of the eso-axis of narcissistic authoritarian statism. Her work *Citizens Manifesto for a European Democracy, Solidarity and Equality* (2011–13) was a three-year process of popular consultations across Europe, in which thousands of Europeans (by birth, choice, or circumstance) were asked to elaborate policy proposals which, in their view, should constitute the primary focus of the work of the next European Parliament and Commission. In Bruguera's words, the work "springs out of a detailed analysis of current European legislation and an understanding of the power the EU currently has, the power it does not have, or the power it could have if there was enough political will to act radically."²⁹ This is one work that unmasks the narcissistic authoritarian statism of the EU – today's supra-state – and its delusion of being a progressive superpower that provides care to the less fortunate while remaining diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and nationality.

The reality that migrants face is beautifully presented in artist Meriç Algün's depiction of migrant life in Northern Europe. In her large body of work *Becoming European*, the artist acts as the unofficial registrar of the bureaucratic process of moving across borders, where application forms, customs, civil servants, and other players of the state apparatus perpetuate a consistent violence on the extra-state body. The racism felt by migrant communities throughout the EU and the thousands of deaths at sea in recent years – what many sociologists have called "white innocence in the Black Mediterranean" – bear witness to this break between autonomy and dependency that I mentioned earlier.³⁰

Marwa Arsanios, born in the USA, responds to climate catastrophe by highlighting the

inability of governments and corporations to take responsibility. She documents women's farming collectives that utilize their means and knowledge to carry out what she calls "the work of repair."³¹ Arsanios researches the modus operandi of such communities and is specifically interested in their view of territory as one that treats land as a subjectivity to be "cured from a history of marginalisation, mistreatment and drought." In this way Arsanios echoes the politics of care and repair prominent in feminist histories. For the 2019 Biennale Warsaw, she organized an assembly of ecofeminists, climate activists, and scientists along with women farmers from Syria, Lebanon, Mexico, India, Greece, and Poland to exchange knowledge about how they communally live and cooperate and how they create infrastructures. Small groups such as these, focused on developing alternative structures, offer counterproposals to the continuous negligence of narcissistic authoritarian statism and its climate-change denial. Similarly, Petra Bauer has long been unfolding the powerful legacies and realities of the women's movement and has worked with organizations in her native Sweden as well as Greece, the UK, and other countries. Bauer is interested in the medium of film as a political tool that can be used to challenge contemporary social and political events and processes. Her works are often made in collaboration with existing social and political organizations, such as the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) – the radical, pioneering London-based feminist organization has politically engaged with the contemporary social and political conditions of black and minority women since 1979.

Lastly, in her project *Operation Sunken Sea* (2018–ongoing), Cairo-born artist Heba Y. Amin appropriates the language and gestures of authoritarian male figures of the past in order to comment on current policies surrounding the migration and movement of peoples, therefore hinting at the narcissistic nature of today's statism. *Operation Sunken Sea* is a proposition for draining the Mediterranean Sea that takes the form of a speech by an imagined leader, performed by the artist and presented on film. Looking into specific historical figures of fascist and authoritarian regimes and appropriating their speeches, the artist uses past claims to address the contemporary concept of territoriality, as well as current socio-economic and political conditions regarding the Mediterranean. These include: a continuous refugee crisis, war, and the collapse of nation-states in the Middle East – vis-à-vis the further deterioration of the concept of the nation-state within the EU itself – and the effects of crypto-colonialism and turbo-capitalism beyond EU

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borders. The project therefore offers a warped mirror image of narcissistic authoritarian statism, by mocking it and deconstructing its semantics from a feminist perspective. Laying bare the modus operandi of current neo-nationalist and racist leaders who mimic authoritarian tactics and propaganda from the twentieth century, Amin manages to break the mirror as such and reveal the true ugly face of new narcissistic authoritarian tropes.

Contemporary artistic practice operates within a difficult reality of acute polarization, but the artistic practices discussed here counteract the structures of narcissistic authoritarian statism and what it embodies. They manage to attack the “idea” that has been slowly building by exposing its behavioral patterns – dismantling its modus operandi and depicting the sinister workings of its model – or proposing other ways of creating power structures that embrace dependency. In other words, many of them present models of autonomy based on interdependent care.

These practices need space to flourish, and our task as cultural workers is to facilitate this space. As pointed out to me recently by one of the founders of the Melissa Network of migrant women in Greece, Nadina Christopoulou, “art is the unexpected ally”: it can bring forward questions and propositions to wider audiences. And for the sake of this argument, I think it can do so against the “idea” of this current state formation. Thinking back to Cortázar’s story, it feels as if we have already relinquished a lot of space, just as the siblings did. While riding the turbo-capitalist wave, we have accepted our current condition as either normal or as a temporary glitch. We have adapted to a reality that promotes a competitive autonomy over dependencies of care. We play out a short-term vision of monetary success in a field defined by narcissism, precarity, public relations, and diplomatic nonideological positions. Is the battle lost? Faced with the ever-growing presence of narcissistic authoritarian statism and all its tropes, one thing becomes apparent: it is the magnitude and multiform nature of its very idea, played out through the concepts that define it, that should be our focus. Its deconstruction and the creation of counter-hegemonic power structures through the field of contemporary art, in alignment and in solidarity with a larger coalition of already existing (and currently threatened) counter-hegemonies of civil society, can create the groundwork for a new power bloc against narcissistic authoritarian statism and its current violent ideology and practice.

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1
Published in Greek, the stories are included in a book of collected works titled *Axolotl and Other Stories*, which combines several story collections from 1950 to the 1980s, including *Bestiario*. Julio Cortazar, *Axolotl and Other Stories* (Papyros Letra, 2009).

2
David Fear, "The Great Hack Review: From Data-Rights Fights to Democracy R.I.P.," *Rolling Stone*, July 22, 2019 <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/the-great-hack-movie-review-netfli-x-861785/>.

3
Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future* (Polity Press, 2016), 5.

4
Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, eds. David Owen and Tracy Strong (Hackett Publishing, 2004), 37.

5
Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (Verso, 1978), 147.

6
Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, 203–4.

7
This was in fact never implemented and instead led to neoliberalism, granting more freedom for multinationals to transcend borders and state control.

8
Rebecca MacKinnon, "China's Networked Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, April 2016, 32–46.

9
There has been a campaign from several organizations to incorporate the protection of data into human rights. The United Nations has issued a guidance note for treating data as a human right <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>.

10
See my previous article: iLiana Fokianaki, "Redistribution via Appropriation: White(washing) Marbles," *e-flux journal*, no. 91 (May 2018) <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/91/197800/redistribution-via-appropriation-white-washing-marbles/>.

11
Here I am utilizing the methodology of Deleuze and Guattari's employment of psychiatry in their book *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which they define the state's self-presupposition as "schizoid Urstaat."

12
Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying*

and the New Cannot Be Born (Verso, 2019), 12.

13
Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, 17.

14
Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, 26.

15
Strongmen, ed. Vijay Prashad (OR Books, 2018).

16
Eve Ensler, "Trump: A Fable," in *Strongmen*, 24.

17
Lynne Layton, *Some Psychic Effects of Neoliberalism: Narcissism, Disavowal, Perversion, Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* (Macmillian, 2014), 161–78.

18
We only need look at the contempt with which contemporary societies view people that receive benefits and the decade-long crusade of neoliberalism to dismantle the welfare state.

19
Layton, *Some Psychic Effects of Neoliberalism*, 164.

20
Richard Samuels, *New Media: Cultural Studies and Critical Theory after Postmodernity* (Macmillian, 2009), 32.

21
For further context see "Extra States: Nations in Liquidation," curated by iLiana Fokianaki, September 2018, Kunsthal Extra City, Antwerp.

22
Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October*, vol. 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.

23
The detachment with which we consider with the news of hundreds of bodies drowning in the Mediterranean or thousands starving in Yemen operates similarly to our indifference with regards to extreme levels of poverty found throughout the world and the rise of inequality. As I am writing these lines nine refugee children below the age of twelve have died either at sea or by burning alive in the camps in Greece. This did not make mainstream European news headlines, or not as much as it should, let's say. One must ask, why is it that we find it easier to mobilize in large numbers for climate catastrophe but not for the constant death of people of color in the Mediterranean, especially children? We must, of course, understand all this injustice to be interrelated. The left – at least in the EU – is not loud enough, because it is also to blame for this condition. In Greece, one of the biggest refugee camps, built for three thousand people but currently

hosting twelve thousand, was created by the left Syriza government. On the one hand, the EU left and center left abandoned the working class across the continent, accepting the collapse of the welfare state while failing to constructively oppose the further augmentation of class disparities. They did not only abandon their citizens and legal constituents, but furthermore, all the “exo-state” bodies, mainly refugees and migrants, who not only suffer across the continent from failed and disgraceful “assimilation” policies, but also face progressively more hostile infrastructures in their attempts to reach Europe. Therefore, instead of demolishing the us-versus-them divide, the center and left political forces of the EU unwillingly aided it, giving ground to far-right rhetorics.

24

See <https://climateanalytics.org/briefings/fact-check-trumps-paris-agreement-withdrawal-announcement/>.

25

The work *Being safe is scary* (2017) was installed in the entrance of the Fridericianum as part of Banu Cennetoğlu's contribution to Documenta 14 in Kassel.

26

Safariland is a company responsible for manufacturing and marketing weapons (such as tear gas) used against migrant families at the US–Mexico border, water protectors at Standing Rock, and protestors in Ferguson, Oakland, Palestine, Puerto Rico, Egypt, and other countries.

27

Alex Greenberger, “‘I Am Not the Problem’: Whitney Vice Chair Responds to Open Letter Calling for Action Against Him,” *Art News*, December 3, 2018 <http://www.artnews.com/2018/12/03/not-problem-whitney-vice-chair-responds-open-letter-calling-action/>.

28

See further https://techcrunch.com/2019/08/05/uk-watchdog-eyeing-pm-boris-johnsons-facebook-ads-data-grab/?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cDovL2FwcGxLLmNvbS9zcG90bGlnaHQtc3VnZ2VzdGlvbg&guce_referrer_cs=A830Abj7SowVZmG9GNuJYQ.

29

Noted in a private conversation with the artist.

30

See <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2017/06/07/white-innocence-in-the-black-mediterranean/>.

31

See <https://biennalewarszawa.pl/en/konwencja-rolniczek/>.