Deviant and Diseased: Metaphors of Crisis and the Sexual Semantics of Excess and Perversion

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> Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.
> – Milton Friedman[1]

Crises as opportunities. Milton Friedman's catchphrase seems characteristic of capital's turmoil amid multiple crises, be they economic, political, ecological, or – at the time of my writing – the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The term "crisis" stems from the field of medical semantics, indexing the turning point of a disease, thus pointing either to life or death. This medical etymology manifests in the metaphors of crisis. For example, during the economic crisis that arose out of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, a typical headline read, "Some Jobs are Coming Back, but Economy Will Need Years to Heal."[2] Another read, "U.S. Labor Market Healing; Businesses Boost Spending as Profits Rebound."[3] Such titles are common in times of economic crisis, deploying

1 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002), xiv.

2 David Lynch, "Some Jobs are Coming Back, but Economy Will Need Years to Heal," *The Washington Post*, July 3, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/03/some-jobs-are-coming-back-economy-will-need-years-heal/.

3 Lucia Mutikani, "U.S. Labor Market Healing; Businesses Boost Spending as Profits Rebound," *Reuters*, June 25, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/business/us-weekly-jobless-claims-fall-first-quarter-gdp-unrevised-64-2021-06-24/.

a familiar metaphor, depicting the economy as a sick body requiring remedies and cures. Yet whose bodies are implicated by this metaphor?

Semantics of health, immunity, and resilience are deeply interwoven with sexual semantics. This semantic intermingling has been increased by the modern medicalisation of desire, which defines the modern formation of sexuality, according to Michel Foucault. In the first volume of his history of sexuality, Foucault lays out how the emerging sexual sciences in the 19th century analysed sexuality in a secularised approach that differed enormously from the religious vocabulary of moral guilt and sins:

> Imbedded in bodies, becoming deeply characteristic of individuals, the oddities of sex relied on a technology of health and pathology. And conversely, since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it – as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom – in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behavior. The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace.[4]

Deviance was not only associated with delinquency, but perversions were also turned into pathological phenomena due to the modern medical discourses, which revolved around the differentiation of normal/anormal. From now on, the heteronormative bourgeois family was the centre of political, economic, medical, and juridical operations; it became an ideal image for a healthy society and economy, while persistently being problematised as a source of trouble that required measures of control. At this point, Foucault recalls the sexual panics of hysterical women or masturbating children who pose permanent threats to the moral purity within the family.[5] Next to these inner threats of the bourgeois family, as an outer threat appeared in those subjects diagnosed as homosexual, members "of the numberless family of perverts who were on friendly terms with delinquents and akin to madmen."[6] As much as the history of sexuality changes over time, and differs from context to context, normalising and naturalising tendencies of equating disease and illness persist up to the present. Sexual bodies are also embraced by metaphorical means, and I am interested in how the semantics of crisis link excessive economies to deviance and disease.

While crises of capital come up continuously, crises of desire are also repeatedly conjured. The eclipse of desire, the claim of confusion in the libidinal household, is a topic that frequently occurs in media debates. It often accompanies a critique of the

4 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (NY: Pantheon Books, 1978), 44.

5 Foucault, 110–114.

6 Foucault, 40.

commodification of intimacy and sexuality. In recent years, such claims of a crisis of desire took a decisive reactionary turn: far-right, religious actors postulate such a crisis while attacking an alleged "gender ideology."[7] They argue that feminism, gender equality, diversity, and liberated sexualities put the desire for heterosexual family formations at risk. How is this rhetoric on desire in crisis connected to the endless cycles of capital's crises?

This chapter considers these questions while noting the following assumption. Crises of capital are often discussed with metaphors that display the pathologising semantics that link perversion to sickness. These metaphorical manoeuvres strengthen the appeal of security and safety associated with the heteronormative family. At the same time, claims of a crisis of desire seem to connect economic critique with matters of sexuality. As manifold, divergent, and even contradictory as these metaphors and semantics of crises may be, I suspect that they imply a distinction between a normal economy, on the one hand, and a perverted economy, on the other. As shown below, this distinction bears a long intellectual tradition, going back to Aristotle. Due to this distinction, economic crises may offer conservatives an opportunity to re-establish heteronormative family values. Yet, when it comes to metaphors that seek to depict economic crisis, my focus is not on the alleged individual intention of a speaker or author; my focus is on the semantic interplay that metaphors unfold. When it comes to reactionary movements and actors who claim a crisis of desire, I assume a concrete rhetorical strategy at work aiming to associate neoliberalism's hazards with queer bodies. Despite all their discursive difference, both narratives of crisis – of capital and desire – bear naturalising effects. They tend to naturalise capitalism and heterosexual family formations. This linkage may be traced in bodily metaphors deployed to describe a crisis. Through reference to an organic system, naturalising effects occur. These metamorphic bodies are not any body, but specific bodies depicted as sick and deviant. And I assume a strong correlation between these bodies that symbolise the crises and the bodies impacted the most by economic crises.

My analysis is informed by the theses of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the entanglements of desire and economy. In their two volumes on capitalism and schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari opt for rethinking capitalism, assuming that desire and economy are ontologically connected. Moreover, production "constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle."[8] They thus

7 Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte offer an overview on the political usages of the term "gender ideology." See Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte, "'Gender Ideology' in Movement: Introduction," in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Patternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

8 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 5.

define desire as a productive force that creates new assemblages; therefore, desire bears transformative potential, as these new assemblages undermine socioeconomic orders. In this view, desire "produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production."[9] Desire manifests materially – it moves bodies and makes them work. Hence, it is not a mere fantasy that lacks reality. It instead works as an ontological force that produces socioeconomic orders.[10] In its productivity, desire also appears as a driving force of capitalism. In this respect, economies must be broadly understood as economies of desire. Commonly, the economy is conceived as a system of rational choice; market rationality allegedly regulates economic processes. Against this naïve conception of capitalism as a pure sphere of reason, Deleuze and Guattari adhere to an intellectual lineage that revolves around the affective dynamics in capitalist processes, as in Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Bataille, and Pierre Klossowski, among others. Pursuing this path, Deleuze and Guattari grasp economies as economies of desire – hence, desire works as the driving force of capital.[11]

Due to these ontological entanglements of desire and economy, my perspective is twofold: economies are driven by desire, and vice versa, desire is economised.[12] After laying out how capitalism is driven by desire, my second assumption requires further clarification. The economisation of desire hints at the fact that desire is organised to suit the economic order. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari point out that Sigmund Freud's model of Oedipal desire universalised the bourgeois family. In doing so, it served the requirements of Fordist societies because it is built on the figures of the masculine worker as breadwinner and the housewife as the unpaid provider of care work.[13] This linkage of economy, gender roles, and sexual relations is already inherent in the etymology of *oikonomia*: *Oikos* defined the household, and thus an administration of land that works through gendered and sexual roles. Shifting from the ancient *Oikos* to modern capitalism, the heteronormative organisation of gender and sexuality provides the basic ground for surplus extraction. Silvia Federici lays out how the gendered division of labour secures social reproduction:

9 Deleuze and Guattari, 29.

10 Deleuze and Guattari, 25.

11 Deleuze and Guattari, 239. Of course, not only Deleuze and Guattari offer this insight; authors also such as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello – who remain sceptical to the formers' praise of productive desire – assume that as "a process of unlimited accumulation, capitalism must constantly stimulate tendencies to insatiability and activate different forms of desire for accumulation: amassing property; concentrating power." See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (NY: Verso, 2005), 487.

12 Jule Govrin, *Begehren und Ökonomie. Eine sozialphilosophische Studie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020).

13 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 51–57.

> The expulsion of reproductive work from the spheres of economic relations and its deceptive relegation to the sphere of the "private," the "personal," "outside" of capital accumulation, and, above all, "feminine" has made it invisible as work and has naturalized its exploitation. It has also been the basis for the institution of a new sexual division of labor and a new family organization, subordinating women to men.[14]

All in all, this exploitation of gender inequality, like the formation of the heteronormative family as an economic unit, appears as an economisation of desire. These subjectivations operate through disciplining desire.

To grasp these entanglements of desire and economy, it is essential to inquire into their molecular, micropolitical and molar, macropolitical movements.[15] For this purpose, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the useful analytical tools of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Deterritorialisation unbinds desire from socioeconomic hierarchies, whereas reterritorialisation binds desire back into these orders.[16] De- and reterritorialisation always go together because capital "axiomatizes the decoded flows," which means organising them according to the principle of accumulation, and simultaneously "reterritorializes the deterritorialized flows."[17] For example, the deterritorialising dynamics of financial speculation guided the economic crisis in 2008, and the subsequent state interventions and investments to save banks can be seen as reterritorialisation.[18] Capital's crises unfold deterritorialising dynamics, and these deterritorialisations manifest as dispossessions that intensify socio-political crises. The impacts of such socio-political crises stemming from accumulation through dispossession[19] are often addressed in terms of a crisis of de-

14 Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019), 17.

15 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 181–184.

16 Deleuze and Guattari, 35.

17 Deleuze and Guattari, 266.

18 Adam Tooze offers a profound analysis on the financial crisis of 2008: Adam Tooze, *Crashed. How a Decade of Financial Crisis Changed the World* (London: Alan Lane, 2018). Deleuze and Guattari deploy their twin terms of de- and reterritorialisation in an analytical approach and a normative approach. They understand deterritorialisation as a potentially transformative movement assuming capitalism could collapse by continuously exceeding its own limits. For them, the goal lies in "liberating the schizoid movement of deterritorialisation in all the flows, in such a way that this … affects just as well the flows of labor and desire, of production, knowledge, and creation in their most profound tendency": Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 321. About 50 years after the publication, and after five decades of neoliberalism, Deleuze and Guattari's assessment appears all too hopeful. Nowadays, the term "deterritorialisation" perfectly describes the transnational capital flows in a globalised world.

19 On accumulation through dispossession as main mechanism of capital, see David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

sire. For instance, right-wing forces frame the effects of globalisation as a crisis of the heterosexual family. This reactionary rhetoric summons sexual politics for affective mobilisation – a rhetorical twist that may be conceived as reterritorialising resentment.

I situate my approach in the field of feminist economics, following two impulses. First, Lucí Cavallero and Verónica Gago argue that a "feminist reading of debt proposes concrete bodies and narratives of its operation in opposition to financial abstraction."[20] Taking up their proposal, I pursue a bottom up approach for analysing the economy regarding its material impacts on and inscriptions in bodies. Second, Evangeline Hellinger offers a reading of precarious, popular economic practices such as trash picking in terms of metaphors of economic bodies. In doing so, she seeks to pluralise perspectives on economy. Following the ecofeminist author duo J. K. Gibson-Graham, Heilinger's approach aims at multiplying "the metaphor of body, using 'economic bodies' (rather than economic body) to counter powerful existing metaphors that promote the idea of a singular, unified, economic totality such as 'the body of Capitalism' and 'the Market.'"[21] She further aims to unveil the differential of power inscribed in bodies. All in all, her approach of using "metaphor of 'bodies' … – rather than 'actor', 'economy', or 'economic actor'" seeks

> (1) to pluralize and multiply economic systems; (2) to emphasize the vulnerability of the human bodies living and working under conditions of structural inequality; and (3) to utilize the power of metaphor to insert images of vulnerable economies in the minds of readers.[22]

Heilinger highlights that the

> relationships of and between economic bodies can be understood only through engaging a radical analysis that incorporates intersectional analytics of power, including but not limited to gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, embodiment, and other structural forms of power.[23]

Although her approach differs from mine, her insights about the socio-somatic[24] dimension of the economy and the economic dimension of bodies support analysing bodily metaphors of crisis. Nicky Marsh offers a similar approach in exploring the

20 Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago, *A Feminist Reading of Debt* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 5.

21 Evangeline Heilinger, "Queer Economies: Possibilities of Queer Desires and Economic Bodies (Because 'the Economy' is Not Enough)," in *Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy*, ed. Nikita Dhawan et al. (NY: Routledge, 2015), 199.

22 Heilinger, 198.

23 Heilinger, 197.

24 Govrin, *Begehren und Ökonomie*, 142–144.

linguistics of crisis and its manifestation in metaphors of deviant and diseased bodies. She "focuses on the recurring deployment of bodily metaphors in moments of recent crisis, highlighting the ways in which they lay bare some of the contradictions inherent in neo-liberal conceptions of the economic corpus."[25] My consequent analysis relies on their studies to carve out the semantic interplay of narratives of economic crisis and narratives of a crisis of desire.

To pursue this endeavour, the first part of this chapter provides insights into the genealogical assemblage, which links bodies, economies, deviance, and disease in various metaphors. The second part focuses on bodily metaphors of financial crises. The third part discusses reactionary claims of a crisis of desire and, to conclude, I offer an outlook on the intermingling of virological and social immunisation amid the recent COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Sane and straight economies versus diseased and deviant economies

The somatic metaphorisation of economy bears a long intellectual history, resulting from (nonmetaphorical) material linkages between economy and corporeality. In its most basic procedures, the economy organises bodily needs and thus provides the means for social reproduction and may thus be conceived as *body economic*.[26] Given this bodily basis of the economy, it becomes obvious why the body serves as such a prominent economic metaphor. Early attempts to describe economic organisation leans on the body and conceives of its organic processes as models to describe economic processes, thereby revealing that the body is literally the most proximate metaphor. Fundamental economic concepts, such as "homoestasis," are, in fact, former corporeal concepts that grasp the body's household. As persistent as such material and metaphorical linkages between economy and corporeality are, they are far from static, constantly shifting to other forms, expressions, and semantic fields. Like our understanding and perception of corporeality changes in the course of histories, approaches to economy change over time. As mentioned above, etymologically, economy (*Oikonomia*) defined the household. In contrast, the idea of the economy as a separate sphere is a modern phenomenon that emerged in the early Enlightenment philosophies of the 18th century, as J. K. Gibson-Graham observe. Even Adam Smith's conception of the market coins economy as a corporeal, organic system:

25 Nicky Marsh, "Desire and Disease in the Speculative Economy. A Critique of the Language of Crisis," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 4, no. 3 (2011): 301.

26 David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, *Body Economic. Why Austerity Kills. Recessions. Budget Battles, and the Politics of Life and Death* (NY: Basic Books, 2013), 139.

> the body economic is an organism, a modern paradigm of totality that is quite ubiquitous and familiar. The organismic totality emerged, by some accounts, with the birth of "the economy" as a discrete social location. When Adam Smith theorized the social division of labor as the most productive route to social reproduction, he laid the groundwork for a conception of "the economy" as a coherent and self-regulating whole. By analogy with the individual who labored to produce his own means of subsistence, thereby constituting a unity of production and consumption, Smith saw society as structured by a division of labor among quintessentially "economic" human beings laboring for their own good and achieving the common good in a process of harmonious reproduction.[27]

Still, for Gibson-Graham, this *body economic* is not a neutral but a gendered body that relies on the masculine conception of a self-regulating, strengthened organic system:

> Man's body, constituted as an organism structured by a life force that produces order from within, became at this time the modern episteme, setting unspoken rules of discursive practice that invisibly unified and constrained the multifarious and divergent discourses of the physical, life, and social sciences. Modern economics is grounded in Man's body, finding the essence of economic development in man's essential nature – his labor (the struggle against nature and death), for example, or his needs and desires.[28]

One might argue against Gibson-Graham that the economic is depicted in various manners, and that different metaphorical figures symbolise divergent aspects of the economy, as Heilinger shows. Yet, Gibson-Graham hint at the overall conception of capitalism, and its most prominent discursive figure, the *homo economicus*. Even if its boundaries have become more permeable during capitalist history, in its discursive foundations, the homo economicus constitutes a masculinised figure defined by its self-sufficiency, passion for capitalist ventures, and entrepreneurial spirit. It is modelled in distinction to gendered and racialised alterity.[29] In this overarching, genealogical view, Gibson-Graham's analogy of the capitalist economy and the masculine body seems accurate.

This modern paradigm of the economic body that Gibson-Graham portray marks the theorising of capitalist economies as bodies. These economic bodies are regularly at risk due to disease but get revalorised to grow and prosper. Thus, there

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27 J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It). A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 98.

28 Gibson-Graham, 101.

29 A detailed study on the construction of the *homo economicus* in distinction to racialised and gendered alterity is provided by economist Friederike Habermann. See Friederike Habermann, *Der homo oeconomicus und das Andere* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008).

is a double movement at play in corporeal metamorphoses of economic processes: first, steady tendencies for growth, and second, continuous cycles of crisis. Economy and society appear "as an organic structure that operates as a unity among harmoniously functioning parts," and considering this, "[c]apitalist history is portrayed as a succession of such structures, each one experiencing maturation and healthy functioning followed by sickness and death."[30] In the meantime, "growth and reproduction are the narrative constants of capitalism's story, revealing the hidden role of accumulation as its life force."[31]

Relying on Gibson-Graham's analysis, Heilinger stresses the importance of pluralising economic bodies. For in statements such as "the economy is sick," it becomes visible that it is mostly thought of as a singular body, shaped in terms of embodiments that "rely on a Western framework that values certain 'masculine-affiliated' qualities over 'feminine-affiliated' others."[32] In a similar vein to Gibson-Graham, Heilinger hints at "the gendered nature of economic discourse," yet the

> tendency to anthropomorphize "the economy" also serves to break down an image of the economy as singular: "the" economy is variously described as masculine, feminine, hard, soft, sick, dying, racialized, reproducing, and lazy. … Each of these scenarios holds promise for imagining multiple, diverse economic bodies.[33]

As much as I sympathise with Hellinger's approach, I disagree with her assumption that an expression such as "the economy is sick" refers to singularity. I would argue instead that discourses pursuing a disease diagnosis of the economy tend to distinguish between a safe, sane, stable, and straight economy, on the one hand, and a deviant, diseased economy, on the other, associated with a plurality of precarised, perverted bodies. This leads us to corporeal metaphors of crises.

Crises, commonly coined in terms of disease and deviance, are depicted in bodily metaphors of ill and infectious bodies.[34] Kristoffer Klammer offers an historic-semantic analysis of economic crises.[35] His findings make clear that images of illness and sickened bodies do not only appear in the contexts of economic crises in the

30 Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 100.

31 Gibson-Graham, 100.

32 Heilinger, "Queer Economies," 203.

33 Heilinger, 203.

34 Another metaphorical strand is the semantic field of machines and mechanics, yet this appears minor in contrast to the strand of metaphors of disease and sick bodies, which may be explained by the fact that the metaphorisation of the economy as an organic system or as body politic has a much longer history. See Kristoffer Klammer, "Körper und Krankheit, Maschine und Mechanik. Formen und Funktionen von Metaphern in ökonomischen Krisendiskursen," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (2016): 416.

35 Klammer, "Körper und Krankheit," 410.

twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This metaphorisation goes back to the idea of the *body politic*, prominently depicted by Ernst Kantorowicz,[36] which presents social systems as organic systems. Gibson-Graham implicitly rely on the term "body politics," naming body metaphors of the economy as "*body economic*."[37]

Metaphors in general – and body metaphors in particular – bear political impact. They intervene in social imaginations, enabling new visions for more just societies. They can also limit imagination in established economic systems. As Heilinger comments:

> [M]etaphors influence our thinking whether or not we are explicitly aware of the metaphor's role in our decision-making process. [T]hose who consider all economic activities part of a singular, unified entity such as "the economy" will seek out economic solutions for a singular, unified economy, convinced these are the best solutions regardless of data. If the same people are willing to think of economies as bodies – as lots of different kinds of "people" moving through the world interacting with other "people" – they will look for economic solutions that meet the needs of diverse people who will function best by interacting with others to meet their needs.[38]

Her assessment can also be understood in a negative sense. When bodies marked as "other" are associated with economic practices from which one wishes to distance oneself, body metaphors may exclude economic alternatives and, at the same time, reinforce the stigmatisation of those bodies.

Even as metaphors differ with every crisis, there are common, characteristic features. Klammer roughly defines two fields of crisis metaphors: first, metaphors of disease and sickened bodies, and second, metaphors of medicine, cures, and treatments.[39] Metaphors of ill bodies usually point to a particular problem and offer a specific interpretation of this problem. In contrast, medical metaphors suggest ideas for a possible cure.[40]

There are numerous examples revolving around the financial crises or the economic crisis that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, seen across the titles of books, newspapers, and other scholarly works – for example, *Financial Crisis and the Free*

36 Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2016).

37 Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 98.

38 Heilinger, "Queer Economies," 199.

39 Klammer, "Körper und Krankheit," 410. In the context of corporal metaphors of illness, one must, of course, allude to the prominent essay by Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Books, 2002).

40 Klammer, "Körper und Krankheit," 410.

Market Cure, "There Will be No Easy Cure for a Recession Triggered by the Coronavirus," and "How the Sick Man Avoided Pneumonia: The Philippines in the Asian Financial Crisis."[41] Such metaphors warn against the hazards of specific economic practices – for instance, in 2008, against excessive, high-risk financial speculation. However, they also define the push to revitalise the economic body. A tendency becomes visible to naturalise certain conceptions of the economy as it is depicted as an organism that became sick, and thus needs recovery. This tendency connects with a long tradition that reaches back before the birth of capitalism.

Especially in metaphors which depict financial crises, we can spot a subtle distinction between a "normal" economy that seems stable and secure and an economy that turned bad by being too excessive. For instance, in the case of the financial crisis of 2008, it was the speculation with housing mortgages that upset a functional economy. Such subtle distinctions between natural and unnatural economies appear in Aristotle's writings.[42] He distinguishes between "wealth acquisition" and "household management."[43] Aristotle states that "there is a natural kind of property acquisition for household managers and statesmen."[44] He defines this natural sphere of acquisition and administration of good, as *Oikos*, as economy. He connects the household to natural reproductive cycles and portrays the *Oikos* in its stabilising effects that uphold social orders, ergo, the patriarchal order of the "master of the household." The master governs "his" wife and children as "his" slaves.[45] In contrast, "there is another

41 John Allison, *The Financial Crisis and the Free Market Cure: Why Pure Capitalism is the World Economy's Only Hope* (NY: McGraw Hill, 2018). Simon Jenkins, "There Will be No Easy Cure for a Recession Triggered by the Coronavirus," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/09/cure-recession-coronavirus-economic-collapse-globalisation; Marcus Noland, "The Philippines in the Asian Financial Crisis: How the Sick Man Avoided Pneumonia," *Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (2000): 401–12

42 Aristotle also links economy to medicine, even as he differentiates the tasks of a household manger and those of a doctor: "For one might be puzzled as to why wealth acquisition is a part of household management but medicine is not, even though the members of a household need health, just as they need life and every other necessity. And in fact there is a way in which it is the task of a household manager or ruler to see to health, but in another way it is not his task but a doctor's. So too with wealth: there is a way in which a household manager has to see to it, and another in which he does not, and an assistant craft does": Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 1258a.

43 Aristotle, 1256a.

44 Aristotle, 1256b.

45 Aristotle, 1255b. Aristotle embeds the household in natural cycles of reproduction: "It is evident that nature itself gives such property to all living things, both right from the beginning, when they are first conceived, and similarly when they have reached complete maturity. Animals that produce larvae or eggs produce their offspring together with enough food to last them until they can provide for themselves. Animals that give birth to live offspring carry food for their offspring in their own bodies for a certain period, namely, the natural substance we call milk": Aristotle, 1256b.

type of property acquisition which is especially called wealth acquisition";[46] it does not aim at the use-value of goods, but rather at their exchange value. "Take the wearing of a shoe, for example, and its use in exchange":[47] the practice of simply wearing shoes defines the household where all goods are used for subsistence; the exchange defines chrematistics, and thus deals to acquire more and more and transgress the proper use of a good. In short, shoes should be worn and not exchanged, according to Aristotle.

One may sympathise with Aristotle's decisive stance against any kind of economy in which exchange value transcends use-value, and thus does not aim at the good life but at accumulating goods. However, his distinction between economy and chrematistics involves difficult distinctions as he projects sociosexual norms onto economic practices. In contrast to the natural household, chrematistics is seen as unnatural, excessive, and a destabilising set of economic practices because "the part of wealth acquisition which is commerce does not exist by nature."[48] It is acceptable to exchange wine for wheat if needed, "for its purpose was to fill a lack in a natural self-sufficiency."[49] Yet, exchange that merely aims at acquiring and accumulating goods is morally wrong. In early medieval Europe, Thomas Aquinas, a neo-Aristotelian, reworked the concepts of chrematistics and strengthened its sexual associations. Aquinas characterises chrematistics as excessive, cannibalistic, unnatural, perverted, and sodomitical. He thus links it to sinful, sexual practices out of wedlock, while, in contrast, the household represents the "natural" economy incorporated by the patriarchal family.[50] Moreover, Aquinas' rhetoric undergoes an antisemitic twist. Christian ideology forbade credit. Meanwhile Jewish people were banned from working as farmers, artisans, shop owners, or millers. They were thus forced to conduct credit transactions and, in a blatant victim-perpetrator reversal, were treated with hostility and resentment for doing so. Hence, the modern antisemitic associations with finance stem from this early anti-Judaism and its stigmatising practices.

Even without examining these older ideas on natural and unnatural economy in detail, it already becomes apparent that economic metaphors of disease and illness rely on distinctions between a morally good and bad economy. These distinctions are actualised in discourses of crises.

46 Aristotle, 1256b.

47 Aristotle, 1257a.

48 Aristotle, 1257a.

49 Aristotle, 1257a.

50 Sabine Schülting, "Wa(h)re Liebe. Geldgeschfte und Liebesgaben in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Imaginationen des Anderen im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ina Schabert and Michaela Boenke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002).

Cycles of capitalist crises: Othering economies

Neoliberal economic policies are deeply intertwined with neoconservative family values. Early neoliberal pioneers and neoconservative politicians such as Margret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Gary Becker were proponents of heteronormative family models. This approach is captured in Thatcher's catchphrase, "There's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families."[51]

Melinda Cooper outlines how early neoliberal policies came alongside claims of a family crisis – more precisely, the white, heterosexual, Fordist family.[52] Especially in the United States, economists blamed welfare state programs for supporting single mothers and thus increasing the disruption and divorce rates of heterosexual marriages – a deeply racialised debate, as Black single mothers were targeted as representatives for these allegedly misguided programs.[53] These appeals to re-establish white, bourgeois, christian, heterosexual family values and stable family structures thus served to sabotage social-state structures. As Wendy Brown stresses, neoliberal politics aims at a double privatisation: first, an economic privatisation of state structures, and second, a socio-political privatisation that deliberately sabotages the principles of public institutions.[54] In this approach to economic policies, the nuclear family becomes, economically and affectively, a privatised unit of care for the individual. The neoconservatives of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's era in the 1980s framed these affective appeals to the family in terms of heteronormativity. Yet, as Melinda Cooper lays out, not every neoliberal economist shared these conservative family values; they "may well be in favor of the decriminalization of drugs, sodomy, bathhouses, and prostitution," still, "their apparent moral indifference comes with the proviso that the costs of such behavior must be fully borne in private."[55] For instance, in 1993, two Chicago economists, Richard Posner and Tomas Philipson, published their proposition on the HIV epidemic. Their text lacks any vocabulary of moral panics. According to the neoliberal approach, which conceives social spaces in the logics of markets, Posner and Philipson analyse sexual behaviour as economic transactions and assume that HIV infections are a result of

51 Douglas Keay, "Interview for *Woman's Own* ('No Such Thing as Society')," September 23, 1987, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689. David Harvey offers a concise overview of the history of neoliberalism. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007).

52 Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (NY: Zone Books, 2017), 8.

53 Cooper, 32–40.

54 Wendy Brown, "Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century 'Democracies,'" in *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*, ed. Wendy Brown, Peter Gordon, and Max Pensky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 18.

55 Cooper, *Family Values*, 174–175.

rational cost–benefit calculation of the respective actors.[56] This serves as an argument to privatise responsibility, and thus privatise the medical costs, which, in the end, means reducing public health programs. Moreover, their cynical conclusion is that the death of AIDS patients is more profitable for the state:

> Taking into account the limited life expectancy of AIDS patients in the early 1990s and the correspondingly foreshortened burden on public welfare programs such as Medicaid, they calculated that the AIDS crisis might in fact have saved the state money in terms of long-term Social Security payments. Those who were dying of AIDS in the greatest numbers tended on average to be young but poor and relatively unproductive (aside from being ill, many of them were drug users); the state therefore would have lost relatively little in terms of productive working years from their premature deaths.[57]

As much as this approach contrasts the moralistic arguments deployed by neoconservative politicians such as Thatcher or Reagan, both neoliberal strands share the tendency to privatise responsibility. Thus, they seek to deterritorialise the market, while reterritorialising social relation in the idea of the family as an intimate unit of care. After briefly outlining these tenets of neoliberal family policies, I turn now to economic crisis metaphors that conjure up sexual panic.

Nicky Marsh notes that metaphors of sex and disease intersect in discourses on financial crises. In crisis cycles that accompany the rhetoric of boom and bust, the "possibility of the bust is always contained within the figurative languages of the boom and images of degeneration and disease are never very far removed from these sexualised languages of masculine desire."[58] In the first decades of neoliberalism, the bodies of energetic managers – usually white, bourgeois, cisgender, and heterosexual – symbolised the successful entrepreneur, the venture capitalist whose joy for risk pushes the capitalist desire for creative destruction[59] or the dynamic manager, the creative CEO.[60] Commonly, these bodies traditionally symbolise the figure of the *homo economicus*, building the unmarked norm in contrast to bodies marked

56 Cooper, 168–170.

57 Cooper, 170.

58 Marsh, "Desire and Disease," 303.

59 The idea that capitalism is defined by a logic of progression that manifests as cycles of creation and destruction, thus in processes of creative destruction, originates from economist of Joseph Schumpeter. See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 1994), 82–84. Teresa de Lauretis rightfully criticises that Schumpeter's view was much too optimistic, concealing the material destruction of work structures and social structures. See Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive. Psychonalysis, Literature and Film* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 93–95.

60 Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit*, 78–80.

by racialised and gendered differences. Yet, in times of crisis, certain manager, investor, and trader bodies, which usually represent growth and progression, must be put at a distance from economic policies. They must be defamed as unnormal, unnatural. Similarly, those economic practices that appear all too excessive and as a cause for crisis must be presented as an exception to the established economic system, which is presented in the image of a stable and natural economy. Marsh shows how, in contexts of currency crises, politicians who were very much in favour of neoliberal politics became eager to distance themselves from financial speculation. Hence, "heads of state, from Robert Nixon to Margaret Thatcher to Mahathir Mohamad, have repeatedly damned the willful opportunism and self-interest of currency traders."[61] In the 1990s, after the peak of the HIV crisis in Western Europe, the metaphorical field of infection was actualised: "The description of such traders as the 'AIDS of the world economy', attributed to Jacques Chirac, potently suggests how the healthy blood of speculation becomes infected in such instances, as it is turned against its host organism."[62]

There is no coherent metaphorisation of economy as a body, yet a strong heteronormative framing defines them, as the economy is imagined in the idea of heterosexual dynamics, as Gibson-Graham stress.[63] Still, these economic metaphors stuck in the heterosexual matrix differ enormously from one another. For instance, in discourses of financial specialisation, speculation is feminised, while the traders are characterised by masculinised striving to venture and to conquer. The dynamics that unfold between speculation and speculator are thus grasped as heterosexual seduction.[64] In times of crisis, economic metaphors often imply a separation between a "good economy" and an economy "gone bad." Of course, it is neither feasible nor desirable to draw a straight genealogical line from Aristotle and Aquinas to current metaphors. Still, they share the differentiation of two types of economies expressed in terms of deviance. To give another example, Gibson-Graham explain how the body of the industrial economy is depicted as a masculine body while labour runs like blood through the economy's veins – it is a robust body of constant, stable growth. "Social labor is pumped from the industrial heart of the economy and circulates through the veinous circuitry in its commodity, money, and productive forms. As it flows, it nourishes the body and ensures its growth."[65] Yet, in the Global North, this body is shaken by waves of deindustrialisation in the last decades of the

61 Marsh, "Desire and Disease," 305.

62 Marsh, 305. On metaphoric uses of AIDS and HIV, see Sontag, *Illness as Metaphors*, 93–184.

63 Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 101.

64 Urs Stäheli, *Spektakuläre Spekulation. Das Populäre der Ökonomie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 272–275.

65 Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 100.

20th century.[66] In the accelerated dynamics of economic globalisation, the new vital essence, the lifeblood, is not labour but finance capital. Its transitional, free-flowing, deterritorialised movements appear as a crisis in the double meaning suggested by Friedman: as a risk and an opportunity. According to Gibson-Graham, these ambivalences inherent to finance capital become visible in vital metaphors – eventually, excessive flows are associated with semen. This association manifests most blatantly in the term *money shot* used in the porn industry. Gibson-Graham comment on the dangers posed by excessive capital flows as follows:

> Consider the seminal fluid of capitalism – finance capital (or money) – which has more traditionally been represented as the lifeblood of the economic system whose free circulation ensures health and growth of the capitalist body. As seminal fluid, however, it periodically breaks its bounds, unleashing uncontrollable gushes of capital that flow every which way, including into self-destruction. One such spectacle of bodily excess, a wet dream that stained markets around the globe, occurred in October 1987, when stock markets across the world crashed, vaporizing millions of dollars in immaterial wealth.[67]

Thus, financial speculation is imagined as an excess of flows that transgress bodily borders, rendering it porous, penetrable, erratic, and excessive.[68] The fear and disgust evoked by the metaphorical body manifests the homophobia inherent in the conceptualisation of the body economic.[69] This homophobic tendency is analysed by Gibson-Graham in quite abstract terms; they appear much more concretely in Chirac's quote calling traders "the HIV of the world." However, it also manifests in the infection metaphors that have circulated in discourses of economic crisis since the late 20th century. Marsh hints to the conjuncture of HIV and AIDS as a metaphor for economic danger and decline, feeding on the moral panics that orchestrated the stigmatising social discourses on HIV:

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66 Gibson-Graham writes, "It is not hard to see lurking in the vicinity of economic and industrial policy a body engaged in a battle for survival. Couched in the language of the living body or machine, the economy is portrayed as an organism machine) whose endemic growth dynamic (or mechanical functioning) is in jeopardy. Diagnoses usually focus upon two key areas of economic physiology, obstructions in the circulation system and/or malfunctioning of the heart. The faltering national economy is often compared to healthier bodies elsewhere, all poised to invade and deprive the ailing, or less fit, organism of its life force. Economic and industry policy is formulated to remove the internal, and create immunity to the external, threats to reproduction": Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism*, 105.

67 Gibson-Graham, 135–137.

68 Gibson-Graham, 135.

69 Gibson-Graham, 137.

> As a metaphor for financial bust … the discourses of HIV/AIDS speak very pointedly to the tensions within the neo-liberal agenda. In replacing the ostensibly rational individual abstractions of financial risk with an emphasis on risk as a political and social phenomena the shift draws sceptical attention to the promise of tolerance that neoliberalism appears to hold out, requiring us to re-evaluate what kind of society this individualism produces.[70]

For instance, in "Britain in the mid-eighties HIV/AIDS emerged as a metaphor for the excesses of the financial market in ways that pointed precisely to the limitations of these ideals." Among others, a

> parody published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in March 1987 …, conflated the sexually celebratory languages of money with the fearful languages of AIDS in articulating a dream about "a deadly new ailment that was transmitted by money. The first people to go down with it were usurers and croupiers and everyone said 'serves them right', PAY PLAGUE: GOD'S PUNISHMENT FOR AVARICE: said the headlines; SERVE THE DIRTY BANKER'S RIGHT said the graffiti."[71]

In this manner, the image of the healthy economic body that got sick due to the excesses of financial speculation merges images of illness with denotations of deviance. As convincing as Marsh's reading can be of the metamorphotic linkages of HIV and speculation, disease, and deviance, her assumption that neoliberalism held out a promise of tolerance towards queer communities falls short. Even though Thatcher herself did not equate financial speculation and HIV as did British newspapers, she nevertheless nourished a deeply homophobic climate. In reaction to the growing LGBT movements claiming equal rights, Thatcher remarked in a speech at the 1987 Conservative Party conference, "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life. Yes, cheated."[72] Consequently, in 1988, the Thatcher Government introduced Section 28, a law that censored queer publishing and prohibited public support in schools or local authorities.

These associations of capitalist crisis with disease and deviance reveal that neoconservative politicians were well served by using metaphors depicting speculation gone bad, and linking this with the risk of infection caused by HIV. Such language

70 Marsh, "Desire and Disease," 306.

71 Marsh, 306.

72 Patrick Kelleher, "The Terrible History of Margaret Thatcher's Homophobic Section 28, 16 Years Since It was Repealed in England and Wales," *Pink News*, November 18, 2019, https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/11/18/section-28-homophobic-repealed-england-wales-history-margaret-thatcher/.

offered a possibility to praise their sound economic policies while distancing them from defamed economic practices such as speculation. It also allowed neoconservative politicians to reaffirm their heteronormative family values and create an aura of security and belonging promised by their politics. They thus rhetorically reterritorialise deterritorialised capital flows. As soon as they single out the economy's diseased and devious aberrations, the economy is renaturalised – and, in the meantime, queerness is denaturalised. A similar tendency seems to be at play in current reactionary movements.

Crisis of desire: Rhetoric of resentment and reactionary reterritorialisations

Claims of crises of desire come up regularly. They are primarily uttered in scandalising tones, embedded in media footage. For instance, in the mid-1990s, in the aftermath of the HIV crisis, sexologists diagnosed a decrease in libido. Such diagnoses of desire's decline persist in the 21st century. Yet, as Dagmar Herzog remarks, they are uttered so scandalously that it is impossible to decide if these claims bear any empirical basis.[73] Such a diagnosis often goes along with a fierce critique of May '68, highlighting how the liberalisation of sexuality led to its commodification. Even though it is hard to ascribe a clear-cut political position to such criticism, it often leads to reaffirming heteronormative family values. French author Michel Houellebecq, the self-entitled prophet of an "eclipse of desire,"[74] provides a compelling example. In his novels, the protagonists – white, bourgeois, heterosexual men in their midlife crises – attack the atomisation in late-capitalist society. Yet, the cause for all the suffering and assumed state of decadence lies for them in sexual liberalisation and gender equality. Houellebecq's protagonists prefigure the antifeminist rhetoric of current right-wing movements that attack feminism and movements for sexual emancipation for Western society's decline. What appears to be a critique of neoliberalism is an attack on gender equality and sexual rights.[75]

Houellebecq's novels and public statements provide only one of many examples. For instance, since 2013, the *Manif Pour Tous* – a far-right-wing, ultra-catholic movement – has protested legal gay marriage with similar rhetoric. This French movement has equivalents in other European countries, such as Germany and Italy. All de-

73 Dagmar Herzog, "Die 'Sexuelle Revolution' in Westeuropa und ihre Ambivalenzen," in *Sexuelle Revolution? Zur Geschichte der Sexualität im deutschsprachigen Raum seit den 1960er Jahren*, ed. Peter-Paul Bänziger et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 636.

74 Jack Abecassis, "The Eclipse of Desire: L'Affaire Houellebecq," *MLN* 115, no. 4 (2000): 801–827.

75 For a detailed analysis of Houellebecq's reactionary rhetoric, see Jule Govrin, *Sex, Gott und Kapital. Houellebecqs Unterwerfung zwischen neoreaktionärer Rhetorik und postsäkularen Politiken* (Münster: Edition Assemblage, 2016).

ploy the same vocabulary and "corporate design." For example, they all use pink and blue as predominant colours to symbolise a strict gender dualism. Regarding the German equivalent, called *Demo für Alle*, Imke Schmincke outlines its main rhetorical manoeuvres:

> Instead of arguments, one only finds key concepts (i.e. discursive weapons) on their website, which are repeated and framed within a rhetoric of fear, loss and destruction. Marriage and the family are in danger; "gender ideology" is abolishing "natural" gender identities (male/female); parents' rights are in danger and must be defended; sexualization takes place in schools (via sex education), threatens children by violating their sense of shame; and indoctrination is underway (through sex education, "gender ideology," gender mainstreaming, "lobby groups" or LGBTIQ people).[76]

Queer bodies are targeted as hazards to society, hazards to children, hazards to families, and, finally, hazards to the economy. These bodies are associated with deterritorialising neoliberal policies. The French movement used anti-neoliberal rhetoric while protesting legalising gay marriage. They managed to associate the unpopular neoliberal policies of former French President François Hollande and his social-democratic government with homosexuality and rainbow families. They blame an alleged "gay lobby" or "LGBT lobby" for the precarisation and insecurity stemming from neoliberal state policies.[77] In the meantime, they advertise the heteronormative breadwinner family as a safe harbour against the dangers of economic globalisation. Hence, the bodies of gay and trans people depict the economic danger that threatens the wellbeing of so-called "common people." In the case of *Manif Pour Tous*, the movement managed to mobilise a platform for the far-right party *Rassemblement National* (formerly *Front National*). In the 2022 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen, party leader of *Rassemblement National*, prominently reached the ballot with centre-right neoliberal Emmanuel Macron for the second time in succession.

Associating queerness and neoliberalism is quite effective as a reactionary rhetoric strategy. It is particularly successful, as many neoliberal politicians have deployed a tone of tolerance towards sexual minorities since the 1990s, celebrating

76 Imke Schmincke, "Sexual Politics from the Right. Attacks on Gender, Sexual Diversity, and Sex Education," in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, ed. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 64.

77 La Manif Pour Tous, "Une fois de plus, François Hollande méprise les familles," Press Release, July 1, 2016, https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/actualites/une-fois-de-plus-francois-hollande-meprise-les-familles-communique-de-presse.

difference and diversity while increasing social inequality.[78] The anti-neoliberal and anti-globalisation rhetoric that right-wing actors use connects the crises of desire, conceived as a crisis of heterosexuality, with the threat of economic crisis. Broadly speaking, an alleged crisis of masculinity merges with the claim of national sovereignty. Thus, fixed gender roles are presented as a medical cure against the economic hazards of the present. For instance, Björn Höcke, a fascist politician in the *Alternative für Deutschland* (*AfD*), claimed, "We have to rediscover our masculinity. Only if we rediscover our masculinity will we be manful. And only if we are manful will we be able to become fortified; and we have to be able to become fortified, dear friends!"[79] Höcke also argues for a strict restriction of international experts and presents a higher reproduction rate as an opportunity to revitalise the economy in the German state of Thuringia, his electoral district.[80] In his perspective, a healthy economy is merely embodied by a white, German, patriarchal family. This volkisch-nationalist approach amalgamates the people's organic body (*Völkskörper*) with the economy's organic body (*Volkswirtschaft*), recalling the National Socialist regime's rhetoric in the 1930s and 1940s considering the economic crisis of 1929.[81]

The rise of such right-wing rhetoric resulted from the restructuring of work in the neoliberal decades, which strongly impacted gender roles. Analysing right-wing identarian politics, Brigit Sauer notes that "male labor became more precarious and the 'family income' declined as a consequence of neoliberal restructuring."[82] Still, instead of fighting the sources of social inequality, right-wing parties, such as Höcke's *AfD*, pursue a scapegoat logic. They blame migrants for the rising precarisation, and in so doing, conceal the economic causes of socio-political conflicts. While migrants, particularly Muslim migrants, function as an outer enemy, the inner enemies to attack include queers and feminists. They are associated with elites linked to finance – hence, antisemitic patterns are actualised.

Renaud Camus' conspiracy theory about "The Great Replacement" provides a paradigmatic example. Camus sets forth basic concepts for international right-wing politics today. He is not only closely connected to the French *Rassemblement*

78 In his autobiographical essay, Didier Eribon offers an intriguing analysis how these neoliberal politics reinforced right-wing parties, such as the *Rassemblemt National*. See Didier Eribon, *Returning to Reims* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

79 Höcke translation by Birgit Sauer. See Birgit Sauer, "Authoritarian Right-Wing Populism as Masculinist Identity Politics. The Role of Affects," in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender. European Perspectives and Beyond*, ed. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 29–31.

80 Dietmar Neuerer, "Landtagswahl Thüringens Wirtschaft warnt vor AfD-Wahl – DIW-Ökonom attestiert Partei wirtschaftsfeindliche Politik," *Handelsblatt*, October 21, 2019, https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/landtagswahl-thueringens-wirtschaft-warnt-vor-afd-wahl-diw-oekonom-attestiert-partei-wirtschaftsfeindliche-politik/25135846.html.

81 Klammer, "Körper und Krankheit," 410.

82 Sauer, "Authoritarian Right-Wing," 29.

National, but the German translation of his text was also published by *Antaois*, whose editor, Götz Kubitschek, is associated with Höcke and *AfD*. Camus' conspiracy theory claims that Muslim families and migrants had secretly replaced France's white population due to the French government's migration policies and the higher reproduction rate of Muslim families. Presenting a eugenic, biopolitical horror scenario that portrays migration in terms of stream and flood metaphors, he demands that national and cultural identity be bordered. He combines this claim of a clash of cultures with eugenic ideas of reproduction rates, thereby fusing aspects of cultural and biological racism. Moreover, Camus blames international elites in finance for secretly fostering the plan of exchanging populations – another clear-cut antisemitic narrative.

The sexual, gendered, racialised, religious other embodies the hazards of economic crises. Hence, while right-wing rhetoric often addresses economic inequalities, their aim does not lie in more just societies. To stick with the example of the *AfD*, their political programs do not aim at restructuring and redistributing property. Their anti-neoliberal and anti-globalisation rhetoric addresses the alleged crisis of masculinity and the decline of the patriarchal family. Sauer comments:

> The populist right frames the marginalization of working- and middle-class men as a "crisis of masculinity" and blames this crisis on female labor market integration, gender equality and, of course, migration policies. Instead of arguing for a new distribution of labor and time between men and women, the populist right channels the feelings caused by the deprived class status of "subordinated men" into hatred against well-educated women and against migrants.[83]

Sauer concludes that "the right-wing anti-gender discourse and the evocation of a 'crisis of masculinity' is another facet of the re-signification process of neoliberal social inequality, strategically confounding causes and consequences by interpellating 'wounded white men.'"[84] Such right-wing rhetoric often goes along with protectionist programs, like those promoted by former United States President Donald Trump, whose blatant sexism is embedded in the fairy tale of a hardworking, self-made man, thereby disavowing his wealthy family. Another example is Jair Bolsonaro, former president of Brazil, who presents a protectionist agenda while performing militarised masculinity and aggressively attacking and endangering queer communities. A more ambivalent example is Marine Le Pen, leader of *Rassemblement National*, who uses solid protectionist rhetoric and attempts to de-demonise her party by presenting herself as a strong, female leader while providing pro-gay and pro-feminist arguments – but only if she can use them to defame Muslims and

83 Sauer, "Authoritarian Right-Wing," 30.

84 Sauer, 30.

migrants. This protectionist rhetoric requires a separate analysis and hints at the differences within the field of current right-wing politics. At the same time, some shared characteristics of their rhetoric are already apparent.

Reactionary claims of crises of heterosexual desire and masculinity profit from neoliberal policies as they can address feelings of alienation and anger that stem from the increased inequality produced by neoliberalism's privatising and precarising policies. Instead of calling for market regulations, they call for a de-liberalisation of society and a return to a patriarchal order. In this regard, they draw on the two economies at work in metaphors of economic crisis: the natural and healthy body of the economy and, in contrast, the diseased and deviant body of the economy. Whereas white, Christian, heteronormative families depict the sane and safe national economy, queer bodies are associated with finance, trading, and venture capital – narratives that feed from patterns of antisemitic resentment. In this rhetorical realm, racialised bodies appear as a phantasmagorical threat of a cheap labour force that threatens employment and unregulated reproduction that threatens emasculated white men. These politics of fear and resentment do not challenge the causes of economic injustices but seek to deepen social inequalities by naturalising differences. As much as current reactionary positions and politics differ enormously from the neoconservative stance that Margaret Thatcher prominently represented, right-wing policies profit not only from the precarisation resulting from neoliberal policies but can also build on the neoconservative appeal to heteronormativity – praising the family as an affective nucleus amid the market sphere and social competition.

Even though current reactionary and neoconservative metaphors of crises differ tremendously, they share tendencies to naturalise the family by associating it with a healthy and stable economy. Meanwhile, the "bad" economy – the finance economy, embodied by trader figures in Thatcher's time and today – is depicted as diseased and deviant. In close connection with queer bodies and eventually racialised bodies, this excessive economy is othered and defamed as alien and abject. Hence, it is projected on the bodies of those who appear as a phantasmagorical threat to the white, christian family. They appear not only as embodiments of a perverted, unnatural, excessive economy but are also targeted as causes for capitalist crises, pursuing a rigorous scapegoat logic that covers the actual causes for capital's turmoil.

Conclusion: Metaphors of infection and immunisation in times of pandemic crisis

Economic crises conjure up disease metaphors often associated with deviance. These metaphorical manoeuvres traverse various discursive strands, although they cannot be conceived according to a linear coherence. Its manifestations are divergent and must not be reduced to individual intentions and expressions. There

is no precise sequence of the semantics of crisis in the different sociohistorical contexts of Aristotle and Aquinas, Thatcher, and Trump. Still, they share tendencies of naturalising and denaturalising certain economies. Moreover, they unveil how crisis metaphors of disease strengthen social norms.

Instead of summarising the train of thought within this text at this point, a closer look at metaphors of infection and immunisation might be helpful. The metaphoric field of infection and immunisation is much too broad to outline in full.[85] Yet, a specific characteristic lies in the idea of social immunisation – immunising the social body means making it resilient against inner and outer enemies. This is a recurrent image that perhaps had its peak in times of National Socialism and its antisemitic appeal to an alleged organic unity of people (*Volkskörper*). Still, as we have seen in recent pandemic times, these metaphors alter when actual issues of infection and immunisation are at play. The COVID-19 pandemic, which shapes the present of my writing, radically shifts the perspectives on bodily metaphors of crisis and metaphors of immunisation.[86] It renders the material brutality of metaphors of social immunisation painfully perceptible. The bodies most exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infections are racialised, feminised bodies, which have few protections in associated workplaces – typically the highly precarious fields of care. In political discourse around the pandemic, social immunisation and virological immunisation often merge. For instance, Donald Trump rigorously employed the racist ascription of COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" while constantly denying its dangers. Moreover, bodies marked as "other" are depicted as virological hazards. For example, many media images of herds of infections accompanied scandalising reports on migrant and Roma families in Berlin.[87] These families were called "clans" and stigmatised as irrational, irresponsible subjects spreading the virus.

In contrast, rural, white, more affluent, bourgeois villages – such as Berchtesgaden in Bavaria – that also turned out to be virus hotspots have not been similarly attacked. Such depictions not only reproduce racist logics of social immunisation but also conceal the real causes for infections – often economic inequality, manifesting in unprotected work environments and confined living conditions. At the same time, many lockdown restrictions revealed a narrow conception of familial

85 For a detailed analysis of social immunisation, see Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

86 On the political dimensions of embodiment, and pandemic bodies, see Jule Govrin, *Politische Körper. Von Sorge und Solidarität* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2002).

87 Pascal Bartosz, "Polizei beobachtet Berliner Großfamilie: Clan-Hochzeit in Neukölln – trotz Corona-Maßnahmen," *Tagesspiegel*, March 31, 2021, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/polizei-beobachtet-berliner-grossfamilie-clan-hochzeit-in-neukoelln-trotz-corona-massnahmen/27056050.html; Berliner Zeitung, "Trauriger Spitzenreiter! Neukölln ist Deutschlands Corona-Hotspot," *Berliner Zeitung*, October 15, 2020, https://www.bz-berlin.de/berlin/neukoelln/trauriger-spitzenreiter-neukoelln-ist-deutschlands-corona-hotspot.

contacts, carrying old images of the bourgeois, heteronormative family living in one house, for example, in Bavaria.[88] This political focus on the family unfolds privatising effects: it denied the socioeconomic dimension of viral infection by defaming precarised subjects as irresponsible. In the broader picture, this appeal to self-responsibility hinders solidarity on a global scale – for instance, in the German federal government's refusal to release vaccine patents. Thus, to a certain degree, political discourses on the pandemic pursued a similar logic as crisis metaphors of disease and deviance: they projected ideas of social immunisation on virological immunisation and infection, often concealing the concrete virological routes of dissemination while undermining global measures against COVID-19.

In these pandemic times of crisis, a strong controversy about bodily self-determination is at stake. "Coronavirus deniers," as well as antivaxxers organising in right-wing contexts, tend to refer to bodily self-determination to protest basal solidaristic protections such as vaccinations and masks, even adapting and appropriating the feminist slogan "my body, my choice." They equate bodily self-determination with negative freedom and fully fail to recognise that our bodies are interdependent, reliant on mutual protection in a spirit of solidarity, just as the air we breathe is shared and cannot be divided into yours or mine. At the same time, these same right-wing contexts mobilise massively against the bodily self-determination of women and trans people, for example, through the illegalisation of abortion in the United States, or through the campaign against the human rights of trans people, who are currently the main target of right-wing attacks.

In terms of the body economic, the pandemic crisis has revealed clear winners and losers. The virus "has exposed, fed off and increased existing inequalities of wealth, gender and race." Consequently, over "two million people have died, and hundreds of millions of people are being forced into poverty while many of the richest – individuals and corporations – are thriving."[89] Indeed, crises offer opportunities. In this respect, Friedman is quite right. The cynicism of his statement is cruelly revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic just as in the multiple ongoing crises of our time.

88 Magdalena Müssig and Louka Goetzke, "Familismus in der Coronakrise," *Soziologie Magazin* (2020). https://soziologieblog.hypotheses.org/13599.

89 Esmé Berkhout et al., "The Inequality Virus. Bringing Together a World Torn Apart by Coronavirus Through a Fair, Just and Sustainable Economy," Oxfam International Policy Papers, January 25, 2021, https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-virus.

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