Toward Fortress Capitalism: The Restrictive Transformation of Migration and Border Regimes as a Reaction to the Capitalist Multicrisis

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Abstract

The article develops the concept of "fortress capitalism." The concept has two dimensions. First, it describes those elements within today's migration and border regimes that aim to control the mobility of the global working class in repressive ways. Second, it designates a dystopian future scenario, in which these repressive elements have massively expanded. Such a formation might develop as part of a twenty-first-century fascism. Based on historical materialism and critical theory, the article makes four points. First, it asserts that migration regimes are being transformed toward a new level of restrictiveness. Second, it argues that fortress capitalism complements theoretical motives that emphasize the uncontrollability of migration. Third, it contends that migration and border regimes in their emergence, dynamics, forms, and effects are closely linked to the intersectional dynamics of global capitalism as a whole. Fourth, it points out that global capitalism fundamentally depends on border regimes to regulate its contradictions.

Résumé

Cet article élabore le concept de « capitalisme forteresse ». Ce concept comporte deux volets. Premièrement, il décrit les éléments de la migration et des régimes frontaliers actuels visant à contrôler la mobilité de la classe ouvrière mondiale de façon répressive. Deuxièmement, il

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désigne un scénario dystopique futur, dans lequel ces éléments répressifs se seront sensiblement étendus. Une telle formation peut se développer comme faisant partie du fascisme du XXIe siècle. Se fondant sur le matérialisme historique et la théorie critique, cet article avance quatre arguments. Premièrement, il soutient que les régimes migratoires sont en voie d'être transformés vers un nouveau degré de mesures restrictives. Deuxièmement, il fait valoir que le capitalisme forteresse complète les motifs théoriques qui soulignent le caractère incontrôlable de la migration. Troisièmement, il avance que la migration et les régimes frontaliers de par leur émergence, leurs éléments dynamiques, leurs formes et leurs effets sont étroitement liés à la dynamique intersectorielle du capitalisme mondial dans son ensemble. Quatrièmement, il souligne que le capitalisme mondial dépend foncièrement des régimes frontaliers afin de pouvoir réglementer ses contradictions.

THE STARKEST EXAMPLE OF the restrictive transformation of migration and border regimes during the last few decades is perhaps the support that E.U. governments have given since 2015 to Libyan militias who are, in effect, paid to violently prevent refugees and migrant workers from reaching European shores. These armed groups, some of whom are recognized by the E.U. as state authorities, have set up a network of migrant detention centers in which ghastly human rights violations take place. NGOs and U.N. agencies criticize these practices and European collusion in blunt terms. For example, Amnesty International (2017:6) speaks of "horrific abuses" and details how "people are unlawfully detained in inhuman conditions and subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, including sexual violence" (p. 7). "EU and Italian officials," this same report notes, are "complicit in these abuses" (Amnesty International 2017:7). The U.N. Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the High Commissioners for Human Rights decry "unimaginable horrors" (UNSMIL/OHCHR 2018:4), ranging from "unlawful killings, arbitrary detention and torture, to gang rape, slavery, and human trafficking" (U.N. News 2018). After documenting the same conditions, a Human Rights Watch (2019) report concludes: "European Union (EU) migration cooperation with Libya is contributing to a cycle of extreme abuse on refugees and migrant workers" (p. 3).

This article starts from the claim that the shocking conditions in Libya and the E.U.'s co-responsibility for them are not simply isolated cases; rather, they are representative of a systemic process: a severely restrictive and violent transformation of key aspects of migration and border regimes worldwide. Within academic debates, several concepts have been suggested to analytically grasp this process, including "global apartheid" (Golash-Boza 2015), "bordered capitalism" (Chang 2017) and "parasitic and precarious apparatus of capture" (Scheel 2018a). My aim in this article is to systematically develop the concept of "fortress capitalism" (Brie and

Candeias 2016; Mann 2013:96; Minsky and Whalen 1996; Parenti 1999) as a key category for understanding and fighting this tendency.

Working from the perspective of historical materialism and critical theory, my understanding of fortress capitalism has two dimensions. First, it describes those elements and political projects within today's migration and border regimes that are severely restrictive and aim to control the mobility of the vast majority of the "global working class" (van der Linden and Roth 2014) in repressive, often violent, ways. These elements co-exist today with other, interrelated regime aspects that function according to different logics, among them the mobilization of migrant labor and humanitarian protection. Second, the concept of fortress capitalism designates a future scenario, in which today's repressive elements of migration and border regimes have massively expanded. Such a formation might develop as the migration-and-border dimension of what Robinson (2014, 2015, 2018) calls twenty-first-century fascism, a political metaproject pushed by an alliance of "reactionary political power with transnational capital" (Robinson 2015) that aims to control the turbulence of a structural multicrisis of capitalism in authoritarian, reactionary, militarized, and racist ways (Robinson 2014:163ff.). This multicrisis is a "catastrophic convergence" of crises of overaccumulation and wage labor, care and social reproduction, environment and climate, political stability, and the violent legacies of the Cold War-geopolitics and more recent imperialist interventions. Fortress capitalism, then, grasps both elements of current reality and a possible dystopian future (Demirović and Sablowski 2013:21ff.; Parenti 2012).

In proposing to further develop the concept of fortress capitalism, I aim to intervene in debates in critical migration and border studies and contribute to a broader reflection on capitalism and critiques thereof. I make four central points that are relevant for academic and political praxis. First, my interpretation of fortress capitalism argues that key elements of migration and border regimes are currently being transformed toward a new level of restrictiveness and violence. In focusing analytical light specifically on the restrictive elements of border regimes, the concept opens a field of inquiry. It is a call to monitor projects of "fortress-building," analyze their dynamics, and debate their effects and interrelation to other regime aspects.

Second, the concept, thus, complements motives present in border studies and the autonomy of migration literature that emphasize the uncontrollability of migration and the constant "imperfection, precarity, and 'productive failure'" (Scheel 2018a:269) of border regimes. While acknowledging the reality and relevance of such failures, the concept holds that analyses of the *heteronomy* of bordering practices, which are often highly effective in deterring migration, is equally important. In fact, there is no necessity to play these motives off against each other.

Third, fortress capitalism contends that migration and border regimes in their emergence, dynamics, forms, and effects are closely linked to the

intersectional dynamics of global capitalism as a whole—and can be adequately understood *only* if they are analytically located within this larger framework. The concept is therefore opposed to research strategies that try to explain migration and border regimes in *immanent* ways—that is with a too narrow focus on policy debates, actor struggles, or discursive and performative micropractices (Pott, Rass, and Wolff 2018).

Fourth, the concept intervenes in debates about capitalism. It suggests that global capitalism today *fundamentally* depends on fortress-like border regimes to regulate key contradictions and reproduce its existence. The most important contradiction regulated by fortress-like elements of border regimes is the one between the severely negative effects of capital accumulation and their crises on billions of members of the global working class, on the one hand, and the relational autonomy of mobile sections of the global working class to realize escape practices, that is, flight and migration, which threatens the modes of living of privileged class factions, on the other. For emancipatory actors, this means that it is *not* possible to criticize capitalism without also fighting against its fortress aspect. The failure to do so leads necessarily to a bigoted politics—an exclusionary, nationalist defense of already privileged class factions.

The article is organized into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section describes how migration and border regimes have been restrictively transformed in the last decades. The third section summarizes and evaluates criticisms that have been leveled within border studies against the fortress metaphor. The fourth section sets out my understanding of fortress capitalism by situating the transformation of migration and border regimes within the dynamics of capitalism since the 1970s. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the concept and the analytical and political contributions it can make to challenge the tendencies toward a twenty-first-century fascism.

A NEW LEVEL OF RESTRICTIVE BORDERING PRACTICES

A first sign that an expansion of restrictive bordering practices in the last few decades might have led to a new, fortress-like quality of border regimes could be seen in the widespread use of such motives in recent literature and pop culture. Dystopian movies such as *Elysium* (U.S.A. 2013), TV shows like 3 percent (Netflix 2017ff.) and novels like *On Such a Full Sea* (Chang-Rae Lee 2014) and *The Wall* (Lanchester 2019) depict the violent separation of people living in devastated landscapes on the outside and the citizens of repressively sheltered enclaves on the inside: "their consistent portrayals of a narrow, endlessly privileged few, who live in highly policed and segregated seclusion from the poor, excluded, disdained and fear-provoking masses on the outside—always trying to break in—can indeed be presented as a mirror of how we live now." (Segal 2017:198)

There is compelling empirical evidence that these (pop) cultural motives epitomize real-world tendencies.

To begin with, there has been a stronger political mobilization of chauvinist attitudes. In a study on the global rise of nationalism, Bieber (2018) finds that while there is no general increase in nationalism, specific countries have experienced strong nationalist surges and there is an increased visibility of nationalism worldwide. This "is less attributable to a shift of global attitudes, but rather of the political and social articulation of these attitudes" (Bieber 2018:520). Regarding Europe, such an articulation is described by Fekete (2018) as the "Rise of the Right," a process in which extreme-right electoral parties, ultraright activists, violent vigilante groups, and local racist initiatives of seemingly ordinary citizens feed each other's mobilizations. Similarly, global opinion polls find an increasing polarization between consistently high, and in some countries increasing, support for antimigrant and antirefugee sentiments on the one hand, and more liberal and progressive attitudes on the other (Ipsos 2017; Migrationdataportal.org 2019a). For the E.U., the Eurobarometer (2019) shows that while "negative" feelings toward immigration from non-E.U. countries are consistently larger than positive feelings and have increased in specific countries, the survey results for these issues between 2014 and 2018 are surprisingly stable: for the E.U. as a whole, negative attitudes are in the mid-50s percent range, positive ones are in the high 30s (Eurobarometer 2019). This stability suggests that the electoral successes of right-wing parties in the 2010s (among them in the United Sttaes, Brazil, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, Germany, Austria, France, and the United Kingdom) was a result of successful right-wing mobilization of more or less stable chauvinist attitudes (Inglehart and Norris 2017).

If one looks more closely at migration and border policies, a similar picture emerges. On the one hand, repressive bordering practices are uneven and constantly challenged. One example is the (in hindsight) rather short "Summer of Migration" in Germany in 2015. For a brief historical moment, the relationships of forces shifted decisively into a progressive direction. The E.U.'s border control regime was interrupted and within one year more than 1 million people reached safety in Europe (Buckel 2016; Georgi 2016:189ff., 2019a:97ff.). The dominant trend, however, which has intensified after 2015, has been an expansion and radicalization of restriction. This can be shown with regard to several fields. Regarding visa policy, between 1973 and 2013 the global share of "levels of entry visa restrictiveness have remained strikingly stable at high levels of around 73 percent" (Czaika, Haas, and Villares-Varela 2018:617). Thus, although the overall numbers of entry visa requirements imposed by states on citizens of other countries has barely changed, the introduction of IT and biometrics databases has made visa counterfeiting and overstaying more difficult. Examples include the E.U. Visa Information System (VIS) (Scheel 2018b) and the development of biometric entry–exit systems in the E.U. and other

regions (for the E.U., see Sontowski 2018:2736). Thus, compared to the 1970s, visa regimes have been turned into more effective tools of digital (remote) control (Finotelli and Sciortino 2013; Marciano 2018).

The most brutal aspects of bordering practices today result, possibly, from the "externalization" of migration controls from regional centers toward spaces in their periphery (Zaiotti 2016). Examples include the instrumentalization of Indonesian authorities in preventing refugee boats leaving for Australia, and the offshore detention of asylum seekers for Australia in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Nethery and Gordyn 2014), the complicity of Mexico and other central American countries in U.S. migration control (Sarabia 2019), and the payoff of dictatorships such as Sudan or Eritrea (Oette and Babiker 2017) or of Mali and Niger (Dünnwald 2016) by the E.U. in order to prevent refugees and migrant workers reaching Europe. As the number of refugees arriving on European shores has decreased since 2016, E.U. institutions and think tanks have described such policies as a success: "They appear to be working" (ICMPD 2019:5).

Additionally, those refugees and migrant workers who cross land borders are increasingly confronted by walls and fences. In 2001, less than 15 borders worldwide had physical barriers; in 2016 the number stood at 63. Examples include new or expanded barriers at the U.S. border with Mexico, the Hungarian borders with Croatia, Serbia, and Romania, India's borders with Nepal and Myanmar, and South Africa's borders with Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Granados et al. 2016; Vallet 2014). Moreover, the massive expansion of border surveillance by satellites, radar, drones, cameras, and various sensors has turned many regions in highly controlled borderlands in which police forces, nonstate militias, and private vigilante groups act with brutal impunity (Borderviolence.eu 2019; Grandin 2019). In some instances, these systems have been highly effective in reducing irregular entries, one example being Spanish surveillance of the strait of Gibraltar (Ferrer-Gallardo 2008).

Increasingly, refugees and illegalized migrant workers who succeed in crossing borders are held in immigration detention centers that "are in operation under countless forms and guises" (Flynn and Flynn 2017:3f). This system of detention "has reached global proportions and appears to be expanding still" (Flynn and Flynn 2017:4), especially in transit countries and the periphery of regional capitalist centers (Flynn 2017:9). The mandatory detention of all or most asylum seekers has been practiced in Australia since the 1990s (Phillips and Spinks 2013) and has been expanded in the United States after the election of Donald Trump (Buzzfeednews.com 2019). Since 2015, detention of asylum seekers is increasingly used in Europe, mostly in Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary (Matevžič 2019). Correspondingly, in recent decades governments worldwide have performed a "deportation turn" (Gibney 2008:148). They have invested heavily in their ability to illegalize and deport unwanted populations. Despite many practical difficulties, fierce resistance by activists and migrants, and financial

limits due to economic crises and austerity, many countries have increased deportations (Hiemstra 2016; Weber 2015), among them the United Kingdom (Gibney 2008), the United States (Gholash-Boza 2015), Saudi Arabia (The Guardian 2013), and South Africa (Sutton and Vigneswaran 2011).

As a result of such restrictive bordering practices, refugees and migrant workers are forced to choose highly dangerous routes to reach safety or realize life aspirations. Consequently, over the last few decades, the number of people dying while trying to cross borders is consistently high. Since 2014, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has documented each year more than 4,000 deaths, with the highest number being more than 8,000, in 2016 (IOM 2019). Since the year 1996 at least 75,000 people have died (Migrationdataportal.org 2019b). Crucially, these numbers "represent only a minimum estimate because the majority of migrant deaths around the world go unrecorded." (Migrationdataportal.org 2019a,b) Some scholars describe this acceptance of death as an instance of what Michel Foucault has called "necropolitics": "the biopolitics of migrant control has given way to necropolitical brutality" (Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017:1264; see Squire 2017).

FROM FORTRESS EUROPE TO FORTRESS CAPITALISM

Criticism of the Fortress Metaphor

There have been many attempts to conceptualize the tendencies that I have described thus far. One example is Scheel's (2018a) interpretation of the European border regime as a "parasitic and precarious apparatus of capture" that, while mostly ineffective and constantly failing, tries to absorb migration practices "in order to turn them into a driving force for the refinement of the means and methods of regulation and control" (p. 269). Other concepts that focus, among other aspects, on the repressive elements of mobility controls and the mobilization of migrant labor, include "enclave society" (Turner 2007), "fortress world" (Raskin, Electris, and Rosen 2010), "gated capitalism" (Rilling 2014), "global apartheid" (Golash-Boza 2015), and "bordered capitalism" (Chang 2017). Another, related term, which has been used up until now in a rather sporadic and mostly metaphorical way, is "fortress capitalism." Scholars have employed it to describe bordering practices *within* neoliberal societies of the global North (Minsky and Whalen 1996:161; Parenti 1999), a dystopian future under the conditions of severe climate change (Mann 2013:96), and a political project of right-wing forces (Brie and Candeias 2016). My central aim in this article is to build on these earlier uses and to develop the concept systemically. In my view, the term can highlight important aspects of both border regimes and capitalism. "Fortress" evokes associations of severe control, violence, brutality, restriction, and repression, which are all expanding aspects of contemporary border regimes and need to be captured conceptually. In

contrast, the notion of "gated capitalism" (Rilling 2014) might appear to be too benign, while "bordered capitalism" (Chang 2017) could be seen as not specific enough—there are always bordering practices in capitalist societies. Other concepts such as "enclave society" (Turner 2007), "fortress world" (Raskin et al. 2010), and "global apartheid" (Golash-Boza 2015) do not stress capitalist dynamics in the same way. However, I consider all of these concepts to be highly relevant. Despite focusing on different aspects, their content is not far from my own analysis.

As indicated, the term fortress *capitalism* has only been used sporadically until now and has not been systematically developed. In contrast, since the early 1990s, social movements and critical academics have employed widely the metaphor of fortress *Europe* to describe increasingly restrictive E.U. migration policies (Ireland 1991). Scheel (2018a:269), whose own proposal to interpret the European border regime as a "parasitic and precarious apparatus of capture" I mentioned above, has helpfully summarized the criticism of the fortress metaphor within migration and border studies. He distinguishes four points of critique and I will add a fifth point. First, the metaphor allegedly ignores the autonomy of migration, that is, the fact that mobile populations constantly circumvent border regimes, evade control practices, and appropriate social and political rights. According to this critique, the metaphor therefore overestimates the effectiveness of constantly failing attempts to control migration (Scheel 2018a:271; see Karakayali and Tsianos 2007:12). Mezzadra and Neilson (2013:165) argue that it focuses too much on controls and too little on migrant practices:

> "[It] drives the political imagination in a too unilateral way onto mechanisms of control and domination. There is a risk of obscuring how the external borders of the European Union are challenged by migrants along the multiple geographical scales of their stretching."

According to the second criticism, the metaphor ignores the creativeness and productivity of border regimes, their function for the hierarchized exploitation, especially of migrant workers. Borders today, many authors argue, do not operate like medieval fortresses, but rather like filters or firewalls that selectively allow movements to pass: "[the] metaphor of a hermetically sealed 'Fortress Europe' is erroneous as the European Union is in fact open to strategically selected immigrants" (van Houtum and Pijpers 2007:292; see Scheel 2018a:271f.). Walters (2006) points out that border regimes aim to produce both mobility and immobility: "Perhaps it is not so much a question of walls vs markets and porosity but of systems that aspire, albeit frequently with mixed results, to produce and distribute both mobility and immobility" (p. 152; see also Mezzadra and Neilson 2013:viii) To speak of a fortress Europe is, these scholars argue, analytically wrong, or at least one-sided. The selective openness toward economically useful migration cannot be grasped in this way, they claim.

The third criticism, according to Scheel (2018a), is that the fortress concept implies a systemic logic and coherence of migration and border regimes that does not in fact exist: "Migration policy constitutes, however, a contested policy arena in which a multiplicity of actors compete over influence, budgets and agendas" (p. 272). Migration policy and borders, in this view, should not be conceptualized from the top down, as systems of rule, but rather as dynamic regimes, that is, as "negotiation spaces in which the contradictions and paradoxes of this institution [border] are carried out" (Karakayali and Tsianos 2007:13, translation by author; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013:177ff.) The image of a fortress—a sturdy castle on a hill—is seen as being too static to capture such dynamics.

The fourth criticism, according to some scholars, is that the fortress metaphor is not only analytically inaccurate but is also politically counterproductive—or even reactionary. Scheel (2018a), referring to Mezzadra, argues that it creates a highly problematic political imagery:

> the migrant as a weak subject in need of support, the "evil" border guard as a stand-in for the fortress-like European border regime and, finally, the 'good' humanitarian aid worker providing assistance to migrants or heroic antiracist activist fighting against an allegedly all-powerful border regime. (p. 272)

Worse still, according to Scheel (2018a), is that "the imagination of the European border regime as a well-guarded fortress facilitates paternalistic proxy policies as pursued by many humanitarian organizations as well as some antiracist groups." The fortress metaphor, Scheel (2018a;273) claims, leads to "campaigns and demands that tend to be defensive, reformist and reactive insofar as they appeal to governments on moral grounds to attenuate the restrictive effects of allegedly omnipotent border regimes."

Strengths and Ambivalence of the Fortress Concept

The first two points of criticism have, in my view, a lot of merit, the third and fourth points less so. It is certainly true that an isolated use of the fortress metaphor would be too one-sided. It *cannot* be the sole master category of critical migration and border studies. It does not fully grasp either the escape practices of migration (point of criticism 1) or the functionality of border regimes for the hierarchized exploitation of mobile labor (point of criticism 2).[1] Still, the consequence of these shortcomings should not—and need not—lead us to abandon the concept. A single term will never be able to conceptualize all aspects of complex social realities. Instead, the metaphor of fortress capitalism should be understood in a specific way and used in conjunction with other terms. Such an approach is supported

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1. However, also medieval fortresses were not build to stop all movements. Instead, they were enmeshed in the transactions, struggles, and mobilities of the societies surrounding them (Coulson 2005).

by Walters (2006) who argues: "If borders are multiplicities then we need a plurality of concepts to think their different dimensions and changing functions" (p. 145; see also Scheel 2018a:283). More concretely, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) argue that borders are "spaces of control *and* spaces of excess at the same time, places of restriction of mobility *and* places of struggle" (p. 183; emphasis added by author). Within this field of tension, the fortress concept emphasizes control and restriction. Thus, if border regimes include both aspects—that is, the obstinacy of escape practices *and* their repressive management; the autonomy of migration *and* the heteronomy of borders—then the solution cannot be to focus the view solely on the turbulence of migrant practices by removing control-focused concepts, such as the fortress metaphor, from the analytical vocabulary.

Similarly, concepts such as "border games" (Andreas 2009) and "border spectacle" (de Genova 2013), insofar as they highlight the ineffectiveness of controls and the prevalence of performative and symbolic politics within border regimes, need not preclude the use of the fortress metaphor. First, I do not understand these concepts to suggest that the massive financial, political, social, institutional, and physical infrastructures of border regimes would not substantially influence, and more specifically deter, limit, prevent, and abort attempts by millions of members of the global working class to reach safety, work and life prospects through mobility. The facts that visa regimes make legal migration for many people impossible, and that border regimes make irregular mobility expensive, challenging, and dangerous, exclude many people from starting migration projects in the first place. Second, to describe the suffering and death produced by border regimes as mere "spectacles" or as "games" seems to me to be, to put it very mildly, rather unfortunate. Third, concepts such as border spectacle and border games do highlight real and relevant processes, that is, the prevalence of symbolic politics and the ineffectiveness of control practices. But to draw from this conclusion that we should remove control-focused concepts, such as the fortress metaphor, from our conceptual tool box seems to me not only wrong, but also unnecessary. Fortress capitalism, border spectacle and autonomy of migration stress different aspects of border regimes. While there is tension between such concepts, all are able to contribute to critical analyses.

Still, as indicated above, in my view the first two criticisms of the fortress metaphor summarized by Scheel (2018a) have some validity, the third and fourth less so. The third criticism is that the fortress concept implies a coherence or systemic logic of migration policies and border controls that does not exist. To begin with, fortress capitalism should not be understood as a rigid system of rule. Instead, it designates specifically the repressive elements of today's migration and border regimes and a possible future formation in which these elements have massively expanded. Moreover, even critical authors, such as Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), who reject the fortress metaphor, point out that border regimes can be characterized

by specific logics and a corresponding coherence. While such coherence cannot be assumed, it can be the result of struggles: "the unity of the border regime is not a given a priori. Rather, such unity emerges through the ability to react effectively to questions and problems raised by dynamic processes" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013:179). In crucial ways, such "dynamic processes" arise from capitalist contradictions. More concretely, an understanding of migration and border regimes influenced by regulation theory (Lipietz 1987), argues that a number of capitalist contradictions, together with other, intersecting dynamics, constantly produce "migration-related" problems, conflicts, and crises that undermine and potentially prevent the reproduction and dominance of capitalist social relations. The only way that these problems and crises do *not* then lead to a breakdown of capitalist reproduction is that they are successfully regulated within and through migration and border regimes. Key contradictions whose historical articulations are regulated within migration and border regimes include the creative destruction of accumulation processes, labor problems, welfare state chauvinism, and geopolitics. Thus, while I agree that migration and border regimes do not function coherently according to just one systemic logic, I argue that these regimes regulate shifting constellations of a more or less stable set of systemic contradictions which are historically articulated in constantly changing ways (Georgi 2016, 2019b).

Unconvincing, as well, is the fourth criticism of the fortress metaphor summarized by Scheel, that is, the claim that the fortress concept is politically counterproductive and necessarily leads to paternalistic politics. In my view, the term's effects depend on how it is interpreted and with which terms it is used in concert. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013), who reject the term fortress Europe, still acknowledge that it "has played an important role in drawing attention to the warlike operations against migrants along the external borders of the European Union" (p. 165). Scheel's (2018a:273) claim that the term fortress Europe leads to reformist strategies is particularly surprising. In fact, the term was and is often used by activists who are anything but reformist. In Germany, for example, the radical leftist "Nationalism is no Alternative" campaign is directed "against Fortress Europe and its fans" (NIKA 2018, translation by author).

A fifth possible problem of the fortress metaphor is its use by right-wing actors. Fortress Europe has emerged as a key propaganda term for certain sections of the European right who justify their demands with references to apocalyptic crises that allegedly threaten Europe and "Western civilization" (Garrelts n.d.). Such scenarios have a long tradition. Examples range from the moral panic over the "yellow peril," that is, Chinese immigration to the United States in the 1890s, and the hysteria about the "overpopulation of the Third World" in the 1970s, to the influential essay "The Coming Anarchy" by neoconservative intellectual Kaplan (1994), which articulates the existential *angst* that privileged, mostly white class factions experience when confronted with the struggles and survival

strategies of subaltern groups. Such reactionary notions indicate that a critical concept of fortress capitalism must not depict the geographical and social spaces of the excluded, in a racist manner, as ahistorical chaos or as amorphous mass misery. The people living and acting in these spaces must enter the concept with their subjectivity and their dignity, their historicity and their struggles (Restrepo and Escobar 2005). The next section attempts to develop such an understanding.

FORTRESS CAPITALISM AS A CRITICAL CONCEPT

In all relations of domination, the control over mobility and immobility is a crucial technique of power. In order to exercise and reproduce their rule, dominant groups aim to regulate the spatial movement and spatial confinement of the oppressed, as well as rights and status associated with it. Examples include feudal lords tying serfs to their land, white supremacists in apartheid South Africa restricting the travel and settlement of Black citizens, and patriarchal control over women's movement in public. Similarly, and intersecting with sexism, racism, and other relations of domination, the control of (im)mobility has been a factor in all phases of capitalism, from slavery and forced labor in European colonialism, to the various "guest worker" schemes of the twentieth century, and finally to the complex hierarchizations produced by today's 'migration management' (Gambino and Sacchetto 2014; Potts 1990). The term fortress capitalism, then, specifically conceptualizes the severely restrictive and violent elements of today's migration and border regimes and their possible massive expansion in a scenario of twenty-first-century fascism (Robinson 2014, 2015, 2018). Building on earlier uses as well as related terms, I will develop the fortress capitalism-concept through an analytical narrative of the interconnection between the restrictive transformation of border regimes and capitalist dynamics since the 1970s.[2]

Since the 1970s crisis of Fordism, dominant class factions, chiefly among them transnational industrial and finance capital and their political allies (Robinson 2014:19ff.), have been confronted with a series of social, economic, and political crises that they were forced to regulate in order to reproduce their rule. In the center of these crises has been a chronic overaccumulation, that is, the relative scarcity of profitable investment opportunities. The reasons for this overaccumulation are manifold and hotly debated (McNally 2011:28ff., 74ff.). The one put forward in Keynesian arguments—that of insufficient demand due to low wages and austerity—is not the only relevant factor. Others include global overcapacities in industry that lead to ruinous price wars (Brenner 2006:99ff.), as well as

2. This narrative builds on and expands analyses I have developed elsewhere (see Georgi 2010, 2016, 2019a, 2019b).

technological advances, including in IT and robotization, which drive living labor (the source of value) out of the production process and make, therefore, billions of people "unnecessary" in a capitalist sense (Robinson 2014:179f.). In response to overaccumulation, capital factions find themselves forced—with bankruptcy and ruin as alternatives—to search ever more aggressively for new possibilities to invest profitably. Central strategies are "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003:137ff.), that is, the expropriation and privatization of land, resources, public goods, etc., which are often accompanied by violent expulsion, and "militarized accumulation" (Robinson 2014:147ff.), that is, the expansion of military operations, surveillance, prisons, and border controls to absorb overaccumulated capital. As a result, over the last few decades, billions of members of the global working class have faced a fourfold attack (Demirović and Sablowski 2013:21ff.; Parenti 2012). First, their livelihoods, security, and hopes have been under attack by a multitude of crisis dynamics, among them crises of climate change and other planetary boundaries (including loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, and the nitrogen cycle), of agriculture and food, and of care and social reproduction. Second, there are insufficient opportunities for them to sell their labor power in the core sectors of the capitalist economy, or to state apparatuses dependent on its taxation. Third, they are under massive pressure from the side effects of the aggressive investment and growth strategies of capital, the associated expulsions and dispossessions, and their creatively destructive consequences. Finally, the political and economic conflicts over the distribution of resources that arise from these dynamics escalate into often ethnically and religiously charged (civil) wars and situations of state breakdown and endemic violence, which have often been created or exacerbated by climate change, environmental destruction, and imperialist interventions in the context of the Cold War and the "war on terror."

For billions of people worldwide, these processes constitute indeed a "catastrophic convergence" (Parenti 2012). Since the 1970s, the consequences of the capitalist multicrisis have included war and violence, crushing poverty, and the shattering of hopes and life aspirations. Human beings, as a rule, do not passively accept such conditions. Their capacity to make their own history, although not under conditions of their choosing (Marx), is driven by a fundamentally progressive "obstinacy" or *Eigensinnigkeit* that manifests itself, however subtle, when people find themselves in situations that do not meet their expectations, hopes, and wants. As a response, different sections of the global working class employ strategies of voice, of subversion, and of exit (Hirschman 1970).

Voice strategies are deliberate attempts to change a social relationship or a situation for the better. Crucial instances of such strategies in the last decades include the "food riots" of the 1980s and 1990s (Walton and Seddon 1994), the altermondialist struggles of the 1990s and 2000s, and the Arab Spring, Occupy, Indignados, and Black Lives Matter

movements of the 2010s. While voice strategies try to actively alter broader social situations, strategies of subversion aim to achieve improved reproduction primarily on the individual or familial level by breaking rules or appropriating rights, be it through squatting, theft, or the more egoistic or anomic survival strategies of "violent crime" (Gilmore 2007:74). Finally, humans have always used practices of exit and escape to other locales to find safety, hope, and better lives. More specifically, the massive processes of displacement, flight, and emigration since the 1970s within the so-called Global South and from the Global South to the North, can be interpreted, at least to a large degree, as militant strategies with which sections of the global working class have resisted the dispossession, displacement, and destruction of the capitalist multicrisis.

Since the early 1980s, there have been bitter conflicts, especially within destination and transit countries, over how to react to these strategies. A wide range of social forces, from the local to the global level, are involved in these struggles: movements of migration, together with their political allies in leftist groups, antiracist networks and immigrant communities; capital factions that aim for a flexible exploitation and control over migrant labor supply; trade unions and their social bases which, often awkwardly, combine working class solidarity with antimigrant chauvinism; ultranationalist and racist actors who push to restrict or reverse immigration and realize their "racial projects" (Winant 2001) of ethnically pure or racially hierarchized societies; and finally, local to transnational state apparatuses, NGOs, and security industries, whose institutional existence depends on the regulation of flight and migration, and that engage in struggles to expand it.

In recent decades, the shifting power relationships between these social forces have materially crystallized in a wide range of migration and border regimes, oscillating between openness and closure via-à-vis different groups (Georgi 2019b). As empirically illustrated above, there has been a haphazard but continuous buildup of surveillance, repression, and control directed against the transnational mobility of the large majority of the global working class, combined with a "regulated openness" (Ghosh 2000:25) for the economically useful few. This was the compromise behind the neoliberal project of "migration management," which has dominated, in one form or another, migration policy in most advanced capitalist countries for the last two decades (Georgi 2010, 2019b). Its rationale was to implement effective restrictions against refugees and superfluous migrant labor, in order to convince chauvinist electorates to accept the select few who are seen as economically beneficial (Georgi 2010:65). Thus, the restrictive elements of border regimes, which I contend should be seen as aspects of fortress capitalism in the present day, have resulted, to a large degree, as the repressive side of the migration management project. From an even broader perspective, the restrictive elements of attempts to manage migration can be seen as part of what Robinson (2018:2) calls the global

police state, the "ever more omnipresent systems of mass social control, repression and warfare promoted by ruling groups to contain the real and potential rebellions of the global working class and surplus humanity" (see also Robinson 2014:180). With regard to migration this means the defense of the privileges of the "imperial mode of living"[3] (Brand and Wissen 2017) enjoyed by citizens of the national-social welfare states of the Global North and the middle and upper classes of the South, by regulating the mobility of less privileged members of the global working class. Robinson (2014) notes that "from the vantage point of dominant group interests, the dilemma is [. . .] finding a formula for supplying stable, cheap labor to employers while at the same time providing greater state control over immigrants" (p. 201).

As a result, migration and border regimes on all levels, from the local to the global, have massively expanded over the last 40 years, with more actors, institutions, and resources involved, including visa regimes and biometric databases, border walls, detention centers, and deportation systems, and the externalization of migration controls. Fortress capitalist strategies, as a tendency, have given up on earlier attempts by dominant class faction to improve the living conditions of the masses in order to prevent rebellion, crime, or flight. Instead, fortress capitalism is the historical result of failed regulation. It uses a global police state to isolate privileged (class) factions from subaltern groups because it is unable or unwilling to achieve hegemony and stability by way of material concessions (Robinson 2014:164). This becomes expressed not only in repressive border regimes, but also in "gated communities" and other highly policed spaces *within* countries. Privileged groups today shut themselves off in a "thousand petty fortresses" (Walzer 1983:39).

In fact, it was in this sense of internal exclusion that the concept of fortress capitalism was first used. In the mid-1990s, Minsky and Whalen (1996) predicted that if economic policy in the United States were to be dominated again by a neoliberal "laissez-faire" approach, similar to the interwar period, then widespread poverty and severe inequality would be inevitable and lead to "a hostile and uncivilized 'fortress' capitalism [. . .]— a system with declining fortunes for all but a minority who seek protection behind walled and gated communities" (p. 161). Similarly, Parenti (1999) argued that, from the perspective of ruling class factions in the United States, the neoliberal transformation of U.S. capitalism had produced

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3. The concept of imperial mode of living points out that the way people in the Global North and elites in the South (re-)produce, live, and consume, is fundamentally based on unequal and imperialist social relations and structures, generating a mode of living that for ecological and economic reasons cannot be universalized. The concept "implies that people's everyday practices, including individual and societal orientations, as well as identities, rely heavily on: (i) the unlimited appropriation of resources; (ii) a disproportionate claim to global and local ecosystems and sinks; and (iii) cheap labor from elsewhere. This availability of commodities is organized through the world market, backed by military force and/or the asymmetric relations of forces as they have been inscribed in international institutions." (Brand and Wissen 2017:152)

economically "superfluous" groups that needed to be disciplined through mass incarceration. As a result, prisons became job engines for rural regions in which predominantly white workers would collaborate with dominant class factions to control People of Color and Black people from the big cities and the global South: "The business of disciplining the surplus populations of the post-industrial landscape becomes a way of reincorporating the enraged remnants of middle America. Small cities [. . .] must become the Vichy regimes of fortress capitalism" (Parenti 1999).

The dynamics that were visible to Minsky and Whalen and Parenti in the 1990s have since intensified. The 2010s saw another sharpening of the contradictions underlying the transformation of migration and border regimes since the 1970s. Turning points include the so-called refugee crisis of 2015/2016 in Europe, the Brexit referendum in Britain in June 2016, and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in November 2016. In many countries, the root causes of flight and emigration intensified and escalated, from the civil wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to the state breakdown and endemic gang violence in Central America and Venezuela, to the effects of climate change in Africa, and crises of social reproduction, poverty, and food sovereignty all over the world (Parenti 2012). This accumulation of pressures led more people than ever before in modern history to decide to flee or to migrate. In 2017, there were 3.1 million people in the process of seeking asylum and 25.4 million refugees worldwide; 40 million people were internally displaced. Since 2000, the number of people under the care of UNHCR has more than tripled (UNHCR 2018:2, 58). The number of international migrants in 2017 was estimated at 244 million, 57 percent more than in the year 2000 (IOM 2017:13).[4] At the same time, millions of people around the globe, embittered by the effects of the capitalist multicrisis and feeling threatened by cultural changes that seemed to undermine their material and symbolic privileges (Inglehart and Norris 2017), displaced their frustrations and shifted their support to racist movements and right-wing parties, who, in turn, won elections and influenced or even controlled governments in one country after another, among them Hungary, Poland, India, Norway, Austria, the United States, Italy, and Brazil. Despite many differences, a universal trait of these forces has been an aggressive chauvinism directed against those sections of the global working class who were fleeing or migrating in increasing numbers from peripheral regions (Brie and Candeias 2016).

If these tendencies continue, fortress capitalism might reach a qualitatively new level. It is in this sense of a dystopian image of the future, that the concept has been used by the historical sociologist Michael Mann. Mann (2013) argues that if governments were to fail to agree on far-reaching measures against climate change, then "various disaster scenarios" were likely:

[4] Although counterfactual arguments are speculative, it seems obvious to me that without the restrictive elements of today's border regimes, these numbers would be significantly higher.

"relatively favored states, richer ones in the North of the world, erecting great barriers of 'fortress capitalism', 'fortress socialism', or 'ecofascism' against the rest of the world; of mass refugee starvation; of resource wars" (p. 96). Mann's reference to "ecofascism" connects with what Robinson (2014) calls twenty-first-century fascism. Robinson argues that a contemporary fascism, while different from twentieth-century versions, would again be a specific reaction to a structural crisis of capitalism, based on an alliance between transnational capital and ultrachauvinist and racist forces. This alliance would have its "mass base among historically privileged sectors of the global working class, such as white workers in the North and middle layers in the South experiencing heightened insecurity and the specter of downward mobility" (Robinson 2014:163). The key aim of such an alliance would be

> . . . to contain any challenge to the system that may come from subordinate groups [. . .] involving hundreds of millions if not billions of people who have been expropriated from the means of survival yet also expelled from capitalist production as global supernumeraries or surplus labor, relegated to scraping by in a 'planet of slums'. (Robinson 2014:163)

Highly restrictive, fortress-like border regimes would be a key element of the global police state: the "all-pervasive and ever-more-sophisticated and repressive social control systems" (Robinson 2014: 164).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the concept of fortress capitalism can be defined as follows: Fortress capitalism describes the severely restrictive and violent elements of today's migration and border regimes as well as a future scenario in which these elements are massively expanded, possibly as part of a twenty-first-century fascism. Crucially, these restrictive border regimes aim to regulate the structural contradiction between the negative consequences of a capitalist overaccumulation and multicrisis, on the one hand, and the fundamental obstinacy and relational autonomy of the global working class, and especially its escape strategies, on the other. Thus, restrictive border regimes are part of a global police state within which capital factions in uneasy alliances with chauvinist forces try to react to today's structural crises of capitalism. These groups try to implement a repressive hierarchization of rights to mobility and social inclusion through border and migration controls, and everyday racism. Instead of trying to generate hegemony by way of material concessions, they aim to (re)establish a global mode of accumulation that defends the privileges of ethno-nationalist selective class factions primarily in repressive ways. Fortress capitalism, then, is crucial for the reproduction of capital: First, it shields the accumulation process, and the imperial mode of living enjoyed by privileged

groups, from disturbances caused by uncontrolled working class mobility. Second, the severe control of unwanted transnational working class mobility is employed as a tactic to make populations in destination countries accept a regulated openness for specific groups of migrant workers that are deemed especially useful for the (re-)production of capital. Third, as argued by Robinson (2018:7), the expansion of migration and border controls can be seen as part of "militarized accumulation" that absorbs overaccumulated capital and therefore allows accumulation to continue. In this sense, fortress capitalism is not the end of neoliberalism, but its mutation, a shift from "progressive" to "authoritarian neoliberalism."

By way of conclusion, I will elaborate on the contributions this concept can make to analytical and political praxis. First, unlike some earlier uses of the concept, my interpretation contends that fortress capitalist elements are a reality today. The severely repressive aspects of contemporary migration and border regimes can and should be described in these terms. At the same time, I concur with those scholars who use the term to describe a dystopian scenario in which these elements have massively expanded, and which might be seen as the migration-and-border dimension of twenty-first-century fascism. In this way, the concept opens a field of inquiry. It shines analytical light on the dynamics of these restrictive elements and calls for their constant monitoring. It also makes the case that such monitoring must connect investigations of migration and border regimes with analyses of their shifting capitalist context.

Second, the concept implies that it is counterproductive for critical scholarship to strategically overemphasize the uncontrollability of migration and the ineffectiveness of border regimes. While such an emphasis can indeed highlight subaltern resistance and points of fracture in the global police state, it must be combined with analyses of the broader context and the relative autonomy of a *multitude* of social forces that struggle within these regimes, including movements of migration, left-wing actors, capital factions, state apparatuses and racist forces. While I agree with the autonomy of migration argument that a single-minded focus on fortress-like controls would be too one-sided, I hold that there is a danger to swing too much in the other direction and overlook or downplay the *heteronomy* of bordering practices. Fortress capitalism highlights these elements of severe control and provides categories for their study—without denying the relevance of autonomy of migration or the existence of other regime aspects, including labor regimes focused on mobilizing and controlling mobile workers.

Third, to speak of fortress capitalism is to imply that the emergence, dynamics, forms, and effects of migration and border regimes are closely connected with the shifting structural contradictions and social struggles of intersectional capitalism. They can *only then* be adequately understood if critical migration and border research expands its view beyond micro- and mesolevel analyses and situates the regimes in the broader

dynamics of the historical formation. More specifically, the concept distinguishes three key ways in which capital depends on restrictive border regimes to secure its (re-)production: It utilizes them to regulate the contradiction between the relative autonomy of subaltern working class mobility and the imperial mode of living enjoyed by privileged class factions. This introduction of regulation theory (Lipietz 1987) into the debate about migration, borders, and capitalism seems especially productive (see Georgi 2016, 2019a). Moreover, restrictive bordering practices function as the repressive component of regional and global labor regimes. Unwanted transnational working class mobility is repressed in order to make the immigration of select migrant workers politically feasible. Finally, the technological and institutional expansion of migration and border regimes is part of militarized accumulation. It absorbs overaccumulated capital and thereby helps capital to alleviate the relative scarcity of profitable investment opportunities. The concept of fortress capitalism calls for more research in each of these areas. Critical migration and border studies should, therefore, evolve away from immanent analyses of certain regime aspects toward studies that connect those aspects with the fortress capitalist formation as a whole. Researchers who ignore this wider context miss an elephant in the room and might not contribute as much as they could to efforts to overcome the suffering and domination associated with these regimes. By encouraging political strategies that do not address the structural underpinnings of migration and border regimes, they might even distract and divert critical efforts.

Finally, the concept intervenes in debates about capitalism. By asserting that capitalism in its current form cannot reproduce itself without relying on border regimes that include fortress-like elements, the concept makes the case that it is not possible today to fight for social justice while ignoring this connection. If progressive actors and movements try to improve the living conditions of working class factions, who in global perspective are relatively privileged, while disregarding how their imperial mode of living is built upon and defended by fortress capitalism, then their politics will necessarily be bigoted. The highly contentious politics pursued by a faction of the German party *Die Linke* (The Left), led by Sarah Wagenknecht, are a case in point (Fischer 2017; Georgi 2019b). The same dilemma is faced by movements supporting Bernie Sanders in the United States, Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom, and all emancipatory actors anchored in relatively privileged sections of the global working class (Dale 2017). In contrast, acknowledging the reality of fortress capitalism implies a politics of transnational (class) solidarity. It implies global freedom of movement, that is, the right to migrate and the right to remain, the real, material possibility of not being forced to leave. For the realization of these rights, however, nothing short of the fundamental transformation of the global mode of production will do.

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