

CHAPTER

5

**THE ROLE OF RACISM IN THE EUROPEAN
'MIGRATION CRISIS': A HISTORICAL
MATERIALIST PERSPECTIVE**

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In the 2010s, racism in Europe is becoming more open, militant and aggressive, resulting in stark political polarisation. It is most visibly expressed by the protests and electoral successes of right-wing forces, which combine fierce nationalism with welfare chauvinism and a thinly veiled racism, directed primarily against refugees and migrant workers of colour, especially Muslims. In Germany, the weekly protests of the PEGIDA-movement (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident) and the rise of the new right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD), which gained 12.6 per cent in the federal election of September 2017, thereby becoming the third-strongest party in the Bundestag, has incited violence against migrants and people of colour, contributing to more than 1 000 attacks on refugee homes in 2015 (Deutsche Welle 2016; Friedrich and Kuhn 2017a). In the Austrian presidential election of December 2016, the far-right candidate Norbert Hofer was defeated only narrowly, gaining 46.2 per cent of the vote. In Britain, right-wing campaigners used vitriolic language to mobilise against 'foreigners' in order to win the Brexit referendum in June 2016.¹ In Poland and Hungary, governments are using anti-Muslim racism to legitimise an increasingly authoritarian rule (Edwards 2016). Although, in 2017, the Dutch anti-Muslim populist Geert Wilders and the French Front

National were defeated in the general elections in the Netherlands and in the presidential elections in France, their vitriolic mix of anti-European Union (EU) chauvinism and racism remains a potent, dynamic factor in the European balance of forces.² 'A spectre is haunting Europe. Not for the first time, right-wing racist movements are on the march across that continent' (Vieten and Poynting 2016: 533). This chapter focuses on one key aspect of these dynamics. Its central question is how the current dynamics of racism in Europe are interwoven with the struggles within and over the European migration and border regime.³ It seems clear that the so-called European refugee or migration crisis of 2015/2016 – when, within one year, more than one million people claimed asylum in the EU – was exploited by right-wing populists to successfully push for a more repressive EU refugee policy. But how does the current conjuncture of racism shape the form and direction of the border regime? And conversely, how do the complex struggles of the European border regime influence the dynamics of racism? The chapter's main argument is that Europe's so-called migration crisis can be understood as a fierce and multi-sided transnational social conflict of which racism and racist forces are one part. In order to understand racism in Europe today, then, it is productive to analyse the social struggles and structural contradictions associated with migration and border regimes, which are shaped by racism and in turn shape racism's dynamic.

THE CRISIS OF THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION AND BORDER REGIME

Between summer 2015 and spring 2016, the European migration regime experienced an extraordinary dynamic. While between 2004 and 2011 the number of asylum claims in the EU had dropped to between 200 000 and 300 000 a year, more than 1.3 million people claimed asylum in 2015 and almost 1.2 million in 2016 (Eurostat 2017a, 2017b). Within the media and academia, this dynamic is commonly referred to as the European 'refugee crisis' or 'migration crisis', thereby declaring the refugees and migrants to be the problem. In rejection of this narrative, critical scholars in Germany speak more optimistically about the 'Long Summer of Migration' (see Hess et al. 2016),⁴ a time when the ability of national and EU institutions to control and prevent the movements of people seeking safety, work and better lives, at long last, partially broke down. The Long Summer began with the maritime

disaster of 19 April 2015 when about 800 people drowned near the Italian island of Lampedusa, creating shock and media attention throughout Europe. In the following months, the flight routes shifted east, from Italy to the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece. From about 18 000 in May and 31 000 in June, their number rose to 54 000 in July and nearly 108 000 in August (IOM 2017: 9). Partly, this shift resulted from the change of government in Greece in January 2015, where the left-wing Syriza government had reduced the illegal push-back of refugee boats, which the Greek coast guard had previously conducted (see Chick 2015). In late August, this dynamic came to a head. On 28 August, the bodies of 71 refugees were found in Austria. They had suffocated in a truck. In the following days, refugee protests in Budapest escalated. Thousands set off on the so-called March of Hope to reach Austria on foot, walking on Hungarian motorways (Santer and Wried 2017: 141). Then, on 3 September, images of the three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi were broadcast around the world. His dead body had washed up on a beach near the Turkish town of Bodrum.

In Germany, these events made a significant impact. On 31 August, pressured by left-wing forces, liberal media and the agency of migrant mobility, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared Germany ready to help hundreds of thousands of refugees: 'We can do it, and where something is in our way, it has to be overcome' (Merkel 2016; my translation). On 5 September, the Merkel government decided to partially open Germany's borders for refugees on the Balkan route.⁵ Citizens in Germany and Austria welcomed refugees at train stations with applause, gifts and an outpouring of practical help (Blume et al. 2016; Karakayali and Kleist 2016). On 15 September, Merkel defended her policy in humanitarian terms: 'If we now have to start apologizing for showing a friendly face in response to emergency situations, then that's not my country' (cited in *Spiegel Online* 2015a). In the following weeks, even more people made their way to Greece: 147 000 did so in September and 211 000 in October (IOM 2017: 9). Leftist observers, who for years had criticised the inhumanity of EU asylum policy, were rubbing their eyes in disbelief. With Germany taking refugees in, other countries (with the notable exception of Hungary), from Greece over the West Balkans to Austria, decided to let refugees pass their territory. For a few weeks in the late summer and autumn of 2015, Europe's borders were open like never before since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989/1990. This period of almost euphoric solidarity with refugees

was short-lived. After being blind-sided for a few weeks, conservative forces of the political centre and chauvinist actors from the right started an aggressive counter-offensive and demanded restrictive border controls and mass deportations (Friedrich and Kuhn 2017a; *Spiegel Online* 2015b).⁶ Based on street protest, (social) media discourses and opinion polls, their strength in the relationship of forces increased and had institutional effects. As a result, the Long Summer of Migration can be seen to have ended in mid-November 2015 when terrorist attacks in Paris enabled right-wing forces to associate refugees with 'Islamic terrorism'. Shortly thereafter, Macedonia decided to let only people from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan cross the border from Greece and continue to western Europe. In a probably too broad understanding, the Long Summer could be said to have ended only in March 2016 when the Aegean and Balkan route was effectively blocked by a deal between the EU and Turkey (Santer and Wriedt 2017: 145). Even though the number of arrivals dropped significantly, racist rhetoric among many Europeans did not disappear. Moreover, the number of border deaths in the Mediterranean in 2016 was even higher than in the previous years: 5 143, compared to 3 784 in 2015 and 3 283 in 2014. In 2017, 3 116 perished and from January to early June 2018 a further 785 people died (IOM 2018). The crisis of death and inhumanity in the European border regime is set to retain its normal mode of operation.

Despite this continuity, the Long Summer shifted the relationship of forces, resulting in an even more restrictive EU migration policy than was previously the case. In May 2015, shortly after the deadly shipwreck near Lampedusa, the European Commission (2015) published yet another policy initiative – the so-called European Agenda on Migration, under which it continued to push hard for repressive reforms of EU refugee policy. From May to July 2016, it released a whole set of (legislative) proposals, aiming to further tighten the EU border regime and externalise it to North Africa and beyond (European Commission 2017). By 2017, as noted by an Amnesty International report, these policies had turned the central Mediterranean route, through Libya towards Italy, into a ghastly death trap: 'This reckless European strategy is not just failing to deliver the desired outcome of stopping departures and preventing further loss of life, but is in fact exposing refugees and migrants to even greater risks at sea and, when intercepted, to disembarkation back in Libya, where they face horrific conditions in detention, torture and rape' (Amnesty International 2017: 5).

A RELATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF BORDER REGIMES AND RACISM

What was the role of racism in shaping these dynamics? And how have the recent turbulences in the border regime influenced racism in Europe? My attempt to answer these questions starts from an approach I have developed elsewhere and termed historical materialist border regime analysis (Buckel et al. 2014; Georgi 2016). Its main contention is that the policies, institutions and state apparatuses of border regimes result from social and political struggles that are fundamentally shaped by a set of migration-related structural contradictions within a capitalist and racist world system. Migration policies and border regimes are, to speak through Nicos Poulantzas ([1978] 2000: 128), ‘material condensations of relationships of forces’ between manifold actors and social forces. The strength of this approach is that the categories, policies and institutions of these regimes (for example, illegality or residence categories) are de-naturalised and historicised.

This approach corresponds to a relational understanding of racism as presented by David Camfield, who interprets racism as distinct and historically shifting social relations of oppression, ‘*oppression of a multi-gender social collectivity on the basis of differences (not limited to those surrounding sexuality or impairment) that are treated as inherited and unchangeable*’ (Camfield 2016: 47; emphasis in original). On this basis, several points can be made. First, the term ‘oppression’ stresses that the harm done as well as the benefits and privileges accrued by racism do not operate only on an individual level or in micro-situations. They affect social groups and are material and systemic, that is, they are connected to the way society as a whole reproduces itself. Second, by stressing that the social groups oppressed by racism are ‘multi-gender’ and are targeted *not* on the basis of sexuality or impairment, Camfield distinguishes racism from other relations of oppression, namely sexism, heteronormativity and ableism.

Third, to assert that ‘racism is a social relation, not the mere ravings of racist subjects’ (Balibar 1991b: 41) highlights that the racist essentialisation and hierarchisation of socially constructed differences is not always or primarily the result of explicit discourses, thought-out ideologies or conscious intentions. Instead, the essentialisation is (also) produced by *effectively treating* certain differences as inherited, unchangeable and inferior in order to reap the associated advantages of doing so. It is a product of *praxis*. Historically, ‘racial ideology did not precede racist practices’ (Camfield 2016: 43). Rather, racist

ideologies emerge and reproduce to justify practices of oppression that have psychological, social and/or economic benefits for the privileged groups.⁷ Or, as explained by Adam Kotsko (2017): '[B]eing a member of a certain race is not something inherent, it is something that is *done* to you. And it is done to you in order to mark you out as something that needs to be tamed, controlled, and subdued. It is a way of naturalizing an order of domination.' By giving praxis and action ontological precedence over ideas and language, it becomes understandable how racism reproduces in a historical situation where the notion of races is widely discredited – 'racism without races' (Balibar 1991a: 21) – and virtually nobody wants to be a racist – 'racism without racists' (Bonilla-Silva 2017). Still, even if 'a materialist method should prioritise human activity' (Camfield 2016: 43), it should not do so in a one-dimensional way. The challenge is to analyse the interplay between praxis and discourse. Racist essentialisation 'happens both in practice and in how racially-oppressed groups are presented ideologically; we should not limit ourselves to the latter' (Camfield 2016: 47).

Fourth, to interpret racism as a distinct social relation of oppression means that, although it is often highly functional for the regulation of capitalist contradictions, it is not reducible to class or capitalist relations of production. 'Although processes of racialization are always embedded in other forms of hierarchy, they acquire autonomy and have independent social effects' (Bonilla-Silva 2001: 37). To see racism as a constantly contested social relation also follows Stuart Hall's (1980: 336) argument that there are only ever 'historically-specific racisms' shaped and shifted by social struggles and numerous facets of historical context. One might say, then, that there is never 'pure racism'. There is only ever an intersectional racism, intertwined with and formed by the dynamic interdependence with other relations of oppression. 'Racism is no fixed ideological pattern, instead it changes its character, its arguments, its objects, its appearance, its aims, its forms of organisation. In this sense, we can only analyse conjunctures of racism in history' (Bojadžijev 2006; my translation). Despite this fluidity, there are of course historical continuities. In Germany and Austria, for example, the social imagery of current racist discourses is infused with the old ontology of the German *Volk*, understood not only as a cultural and linguistic group, but, ultimately, as a biological 'community of blood' (*Blutsgemeinschaft*) to which 'outsiders' can never truly belong (see Mense 2017). Thus, historical racisms are characterised by both discontinuities and the persistence of key aspects.

One challenge in analysing the current conjuncture of racism with regard to the European border regime, then, is to understand how racist power relationships intersect with other relations of oppression. Another is how to explain the dynamics of racism as the result of specific social conflicts (see Bonilla-Silva 2001: 45). This means, for example, that the struggles of refugees or communities of colour have to be understood as key actors because they force racism to adapt: '[I]n order to interpret the way racism fluctuate[s] . . . one must take account of the groups against whom it is aimed and their actions and reactions' (Balibar 1991b: 41). Still, neither border regimes nor the conjunctures of racism are driven alone or primarily by the groups oppressed by them – nor should they be portrayed in this way. Instead, in my view, they have to be reconstructed as the complex conflicts they are.⁸ These conflicts are structurally conditioned and fought out by a whole range of different social forces, including the movements of refugees and migrant workers, communities of colour, the protests of liberal institutions and left-wing activists, the ambivalent position of trade unions and welfare organisations, the pressure of different capital factions, and the chauvinist reactions of nationalist and racist forces. Thus, if we want to understand the current crisis of the European border regime and the role of racism within it, we have to analyse the struggles between these and other forces and reconstruct their shifting alliances, political offensives and defensive manoeuvres.

DYNAMICS OF RACISM IN THE EUROPEAN BORDER REGIME

On the defensive I: Counter-reaction to post-migrant societies

Starting out on such an analysis, the current resurgence of racism in Europe can be interpreted as a counter-reaction to a series of political defeats inflicted on chauvinist forces in Europe. Racism and racist forces are on the defensive in at least two respects. First, in the previous decades, anti-racist forces, migrant communities and communities of colour have made substantial political, social and cultural gains, thereby creating what has been termed 'post-migrant societies' (Foroutan 2015). Compared to the 1990s, European societies have become more ethnically and culturally diverse as a result of movements and struggles of migration. The share of people of colour and persons whose families have often complex migration histories has increased in almost all European countries, especially within cities (see IOM 2015). Furthermore, as a result of

anti-racist struggles, the acceptance of these processes has unequally spread to larger sections of European societies, being affirmed not only by the political left, but, at least in some countries, by the centre-right. Together with a higher visibility and recognition of people of colour in business, politics, media, culture and sports, has gone a stronger rejection of the old-style, open racism still prevalent in the 1980s and early 1990s. 'More frequent and more successful than ever before, (former) immigrants and their descendants demand equal participation and force new opportunities to reject and legally challenge discrimination and racist exclusions' (Espahangizi et al. 2016: 11; my translation). Thus, despite constant political push-back, one example being assimilationist discourses in Germany that demand immigrants and their descendants should follow an allegedly existing German *Leitkultur* or 'leading culture' (cf. Pautz 2005), anti-racist struggles did make actual strides forward.

On a theoretical level, these dynamics can be interpreted as results of a relational autonomy of migration (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010). A key contention of this concept is that, as a tendency, human beings do not passively accept situations, living conditions or social relations they perceive as negative. Instead, they struggle, either at their present localities, or by using escape options: they move, leave, abscond, desert, flee or emigrate to achieve a better life elsewhere (see Papadopoulos, Stephenson and Tsianos 2008). Within the European border regime, the practices of refugee and migrant communities constitute a powerful force to which racist actors and migration controls are constantly forced to react. The Long Summer of Migration is a case in point. After a quarter century in which the EU attempted to integrate and perfect its border controls, the movements of migration pushed this regime into its gravest crisis so far. Despite massive EU attempts to prevent this and despite the fierce resistance of nationalist and racist forces, the number of asylum claims in the EU rose to record highs, many of them made by people of colour and Muslims, who are especially targeted by European racism.⁹

From a materialist perspective, these movements of refugees, (illegalised) migrant workers and their families can be understood as strategies with which people from the European periphery and the global South tend to react to the creative destruction inflicted on their countries of origin by processes of 'accumulation by dispossession' and the multi-dimensional crises of contemporary capitalism, among them a severe overaccumulation of capital on a world scale, crises of (wage) labour, of food sovereignty and climate change. These social, economic and ecological problems often escalate into political crises that turn

violent and erupt into uprisings and civil wars, which then frequently have their own ethnicised and religious dynamics. The Arab Spring and its consequences are obvious examples (see Heydarian 2014; Parenti 2012).

These processes point to two crucial insights: first, the bitter sense of defeat articulated by the European far-right, who lament the emergence and increasing acceptance of culturally diverse post-migrant societies in Europe, is, *from their perspective*, actually justified. The gains made by the relational autonomy of migration and anti-racist struggles, since the 1990s, have weakened racist forces. Their current resurgence is a backlash to these successes. Second, given the multiple crisis tendencies of global capitalism and the inability of the EU to effectively control the escape practices with which people react to such crises, it becomes clear that right-wing 'racial projects' (Winant 2001) are unlikely to succeed because they have strong structural tendencies against them.

On the defensive II: A shifting migration management compromise

Besides suffering defeats as a result of the struggles of migration, right-wing racist forces are on the defensive in a second respect. According to my analysis, the implicit coalition between right-wing conservative and neoliberal forces that has underpinned the hegemonic compromise of an EU 'migration management', since the late 1990s, has increasingly frayed and partially broken down. Instead, since around 2010, neoliberal actors have aligned their rhetoric closer with the migration policy of liberal and centre-left forces, pushing a positive and rights-based discourse on migration and thereby putting right-wing racist forces on the defensive.

In the 2000s, the migration management concept dominated much of international and European migration policy (Georgi 2010: 55). From a historical materialist perspective, migration management can be understood as a political project with which neoliberal actors tried to subordinate migration and refugee policy – like virtually all other policy fields – under the imperatives of competitiveness, profits and economic growth. Representatives of European industry and service capital, and their ideological allies in civil society and (international) state apparatuses, have relentlessly tried to 'se[t] societies on a course to reap the positive economic and social benefits that migration can continue to offer' (IOM 1993: 2). From their perspective, migration is positive as long as it is economically beneficial to the dominant forces of the immigration countries. Led by the European Commission (2000), EU migration policy became

increasingly seen as a strategy to solve specific labour problems, be it farming labour from Morocco in Spain or Brazilian IT workers in the United Kingdom.

Since the 1990s, the main resistance against such neoliberal strategies has come from those large segments of the European population who – motivated by a mix of nationalism, welfare chauvinism and racism – oppose immigration, especially of people of colour. Neoliberal experts time and again have expressed their frustrations with this ‘irrational’ resistance. For example, in 2011 a representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) complained: ‘Human capital had the potential to be one of the key resources of exchange for global economic growth and prosperity. However, in reality, attitudes remained largely ambivalent towards migration’ (IOM 2012: 14). The migration management concept was a strategic attempt by neoliberal actors to incorporate these chauvinist forces into a compromise. The migration of refugees and migrant workers who were deemed not to be economically beneficial, or to be a security risk, were to be so restrictively and effectively controlled that Europe’s anti-immigration electorates could be convinced to accept a ‘regulated openness’ (Ghosh 2000: 25) for the select groups who were ‘truly needed’ in the labour market.

This strategy had mixed results. While EU border and refugee policy became in fact evermore restrictive, neoliberal forces never fully succeeded in achieving the liberal labour immigration policy they desired. The failure of the EU Blue Card directive, passed in 2009, to attract a substantial number of ‘highly qualified migrants’ into the EU, illustrates this (Bellini 2016). This failure of neoliberal forces to overcome the resistance of anti-immigration electorates, in my analysis, led some neoliberal actors to change their approach and follow a strategy that Nancy Fraser (2017) has described as ‘progressive neoliberalism’. Instead of primarily pushing for evermore restrictive controls, they now attempted to convince hostile electorates with a new, meritocratic rhetoric of diversity and multiculturalism, stressing economic gains and other positive effects of migration. For example, in 2012, the director general of the IOM, William Lacy Swing (2012: 26), expressed this strategy: ‘[I]t would be important to actively support . . . intensive public information and public education efforts on the part of all industrialized countries to prepare their populations for the substantial implications that a growing mobile population holds for destination countries.’

The new liberal elements of German migration policy in 2015 can be interpreted as an expression of this same reorientation, evidenced by the

significant support some factions of German capital gave to the partial opening of Germany's borders. In September 2015, more than 60 per cent of German managers believed their companies could profit from a fast integration of the refugees.¹⁰ The president of the Federation of German Industries, Ulrich Grillo, defended Merkel's policy: 'We have a demographic problem in the future. That is, we have a shortage of labour. This shortage can be reduced' (Grillo 2015; my translation). In January 2016, the president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, Ingo Kramer, made it clear that German capital was opposed to right-wing demands for border closures because it threatened the free circulation of goods, services and labour in the EU internal market, a key condition for profits: 'The closing of borders is the opposite of what has made this nation great. What is accepted here as collateral damage in order to appease the *Stammtisch* is ludicrous.'¹¹ The strategy to circumvent the conservative blockade against increased immigration by a legally dubious opening of the border outraged racist forces. It was perceived by them as a bitter political defeat. The current resurgence of racism in Europe started, therefore, as a backlash first to the successes of anti-racist struggles and communities of colour that gave rise to post-migrant societies in Europe, and, second, to an at least temporary and partial reorientation of neoliberal capital factions.

On the offensive: Opportunities for racist mobilisations

To argue that racist forces in Europe are actually on the defensive begs the question of why there is currently a clear resurgence of racism in Europe. Why did so many Europeans react in chauvinist ways to the increased arrivals of refugees and migrants? And in what sense is this chauvinism driven by racism? In my view, the persistence of racism and its current conjuncture in Europe can be explained if we ask what 'problems' racism 'solves' for individuals and societies and why people, therefore, continue to reproduce it through their actions. A first hint is given by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: 'Racial structures remain in place for the same reasons that other structures do. Since actors racialised as 'white' – or as members of the dominant race – receive material benefits from the racial order, they struggle (or passively receive the manifold wages of whiteness) to maintain their privileges' (cited in Camfield 2016: 57).

Thus, the task is to ask which benefits, if indeed any, racism has for *white* Europeans in the current context. The main argument of the following section is that the counter-mobilisations of right-wing racist actors occurs in a historical situation in which large segments of the *white* European working and middle

classes experience the negative effects of a multi-dimensional crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Not since the global financial crisis of 2008/2009 and its aftermath (the Eurozone crisis, secular stagnation) have large parts of the European populations faced unemployment or underemployment with precarious, low-wage jobs, experienced justified fears, or have actual experience of social descent and poverty, especially in old age, and are excluded from adequate housing, health and child care and other social services. While those who have no work, or not enough of it, suffer from social stigmatisation and workfare regimes, many who do have jobs are subjected to high-pressure competition, unpaid overtime and stress. Even in countries where official unemployment statistics are relatively low (Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands), widespread precarity produces feelings of frustration and powerlessness, resulting in a rise of mental illness, including anxiety and depression. My hypothesis is, then, that in this situation, racist and nationalist mechanisms intersect to fulfil psychological, political and economic functions for large parts of the European populations. The analytical challenge is to dissect these mechanisms.

First, the persistence of racism and its current resurgence is partially based on the psychological functions it fulfils for many individuals and groups whose lives are dominated by the frustrations experienced as the result of capitalist dynamics and other relations of oppression. The argument was first made by Theodor W. Adorno et al. ([1950] 1993) in their classic study *The Authoritarian Personality*. Under capitalist conditions, many individuals, inevitably, suffer from an 'ego weakness', resulting from the denial of basic needs and emotional desires – and the inability to change these conditions. Confronted with the degradations of capitalist life, many people compensate these frustrations through an aggressive collective narcissism, directed against minority groups. Racism enables them to feel superior while looking down on groups racialised in an inferior position. Moreover, racism can offer psychological benefits of world explanation and of scapegoating: if the real reasons for narcissistic insults, frustrated hopes and damaged lives are beyond comprehension or power to change, it makes psychological sense to project the resulting resentments to inferior groups (see Hall 2012). The upsurge of anti-Muslim racism and its conspiracy theories, eerily similar to late nineteenth-century anti-Semitism, are a case in point (Schiffer and Wagner 2011). Crucially, not all people subjected to the heteronomy of capitalist and other relations of oppression react in this pathological way. Instead, different authoritarian personality types – who are themselves a product of historical conditions – are more likely to use racism to

fulfil their psychological needs. Today, numerous studies use updated versions of Adorno's approach to explain the resurgence of racism in Europe and beyond (Cornelis and Van Hiel 2015; Gordon 2016).

A second reason why racism persists and currently surges in Europe is that *white* Europeans enjoy real material privileges from their superior position in the racist hierarchy and therefore tend either to actively defend these privileges or resist political measures that would undermine them. The advantages of racism are not illusions. 'Preferential access to information about job openings, treatment in competition for employment, jobs with better pay and conditions, and promotion are not imaginary. Nor is preferential treatment by landlords, service providers, business owners and the police' (Camfield 2016: 55; see also Bonilla-Silva 2001: 37). In the current social and economic crisis in Europe, many *white* Europeans perceive refugees and migrants as increased competition and threat to their social privileges. Thus, the defence of privileges incurred from a superior position in racist and nationalist hierarchies does have a certain rationality. The key contribution of a materialist perspective, however, is to contextualise these racist privileges in the economic and social order. Such an analysis can start with Étienne Balibar's (1991c: 92) concept of the 'national-social state'. Balibar argues that the European welfare states established in the post-war decades combined nationalism with social policy in order to regulate, that is, to temporarily pacify and contain the class struggles and economic crises that had destabilised Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. The welfare state became the central condition for capitalist hegemony in Europe. However, the social rights granted by these welfare states were limited by citizenship, thereby 'nationalising' the European working classes and tying them to the success of 'their' nation-state in the global competition. Crucially, these national-social states depend for their political and economic stability on the hierarchised exclusion of non-citizens. If borders were open and all newcomers were to receive full social rights, at least under neoliberal conditions, the viability of the European welfare models, a key mechanism of hegemony, would be threatened. Thus, the social chauvinism directed by European populations against mass immigration has a rational core. In the current situation of a multiplicity of European crises, this latent chauvinism intensifies. European populations try to defend their precarious social rights by struggling for new 'racial projects' and a nationalist re-regulation of capitalism.

This drive towards exclusion, facilitated by the national-social state, however, does not remain on the level of formal civic statutes, that is nationality

or citizenship. Almost inevitably, it takes on a racist character that is connected to imperialism. From the start, European colonialism and imperialism were interwoven with racism. People of colour (and certain *white* populations) became associated with imperialised territories – and thereby located in inferior positions on racist hierarchies that were used to justify and defend imperialist exploitation. Importantly, these old hierarchies still strongly resemble the imperialist hierarchies of the present. Imperialism today creates 'a worldwide pattern of employment discrimination, violence, morbidity, impoverishment, pollution, and unequal exchange' and functions as 'a global system of social stratification' that 'correlates very well with racial criteria' (Winant, cited in Camfield 2016: 58). Among other factors, the exacerbation of these hierarchies in the last decades results from cold war interventions, the neoliberal regulation of transnational capitalism and climate change. 'None of these recent processes are explicitly racialised. Yet they build on and entrench an already racialised structural distribution of property and economic power, locally and globally, which is the product of the long history of global racialised dispossession' (Jones 2008: 924; see also Camfield 2016: 59). Even as the exclusionary practices of the European border regime are no longer openly justified by racist ideologies (and instead are officially based on citizenship), this exclusion is still partially driven by, relies on and reproduces racism. Thus, when EU citizens today implicitly support or openly demand a restrictive expansion of the European border regime to defend their national-social privileges, they inevitably do so in a strongly racialised context, which they then reproduce. *This* is the structural racism of the European border regime.

The current conjuncture: A national-social and neoliberal racism

Based on the analysis so far, it is now possible to summarise some key elements of the current conjuncture of racism in Europe. The European 'refugee crisis' or 'migration crisis' of 2015/2016 provided a crucial opportunity structure for a resurgence of right-wing racist forces and for the spread of racist discourses to large sections of European populations, which normally occupy the political centre ground (see Decker, Kiess and Brähler 2016). Partially, this resurgence was a counter-reaction to a series of political defeats that chauvinist forces suffered through the emergence of post-migrant societies and the more liberal rhetoric of capital factions on EU migration policy. Coming out of a defensive

position, right-wing populists and large segments of the European populations used racist mechanisms to incur psychological benefits and defend their material privileges in a situation of social and economic crisis.

Still, the growing strength of racist actors in the European relationship of forces is not the only reason why the European border regime has become more restrictive since 2015. As argued above, it is not a 'pure racism' but one that specifically intersects with the dynamics of other relations of oppression. Thus, racism is almost indistinguishably intertwined with fierce (anti-EU) nationalism and a social welfare chauvinism that rejects immigration because it is seen as a danger to already precarious welfare states. Moreover, racist hierarchies in Europe are modified by the neoliberal profit rationality. The attempts of capital to utilise and exploit migrant labour result in a form of 'neoliberal racism' that modifies racist hierarchies along perceived economic utility, while at the same time resisting effective anti-racist reforms. As Camfield (2016: 61) points out, there is 'widespread opposition of capitalists and their political advocates to measures that would substantially improve the bargaining power of racially oppressed workers in labour markets, such as granting citizenship or permanent-resident status to non-status migrants and those with temporary residency rights and instituting effective anti-racist reforms to employment law'. A key reason for this ambivalence of European capital towards racism and a restrictive border regime is that capitalists continue to reap the 'profits of racism' (Camfield 2016: 59). Workers who are racially discriminated against can be forced to work harder for less. Racism still often functions as a 'magic formula' (Wallerstein 1991: 33), allowing capitalists to mobilise new (immigrant) workers while forestalling resistance of the existing labour force through the disenfranchisement of the newcomers.

Thus, only on a superficial level can the resurgence of racism in Europe be understood as a reaction to increased immigration. Instead, it needs to be interpreted as one element of a much broader dynamic. Right-wing factions from the French Front National to the Alternative for Germany have created an authoritarian, ultra-conservative and deeply chauvinistic challenge to the multi-dimensional crisis of European neoliberalism whose mantra of 'austerity forever' has lost almost all of its hegemonic appeal. Not unlike in the 1930s, the European Left is faced with the double challenge to overcome a crisis-ridden liberal capitalist formation while at the same time stopping a reactionary, even fascist, solution to the crisis.

CONCLUSION

What is to be done? How can anti-racist movements and the European left meet this double challenge, push racist forces back and, if abolishing racism seems like a far-fetched goal under present conditions, at least stop its current offensive? In this concluding section, I point to three anti-racist strategies that target today's national-social and neoliberal racism.

The first attack needs to be on racism directly. Because racism is a social relation that encompasses whole societies and a racist world system, this attack has to be directed at proximate targets. These are racist discourses, ideologies, everyday practices and right-wing groups and parties but also the exponents of racism from the political centre. A critical self-reflection of *white* Europeans on their racist knowledge and privileges is one key part of this, practical anti-fascism is another. The Long Summer of Migration in Europe, especially in Germany, has shown that such efforts are not in vain. Despite its profound ambivalences, the organic 'Welcome Culture' created by countless citizens in, often paternalistic, support of refugees can be seen as a dialectical step in the right direction. A more radical push-back against racism could be based on the egalitarian principles inherent in radical interpretation of human rights, visions of a post-Eurocentric world and in the rich history of internationalism.

The second attack, in my view, should be inspired by this internationalist tradition. It has to be directed against racism's close and sometimes almost indistinguishable ally, *nationalism*. While at least on a rhetorical level, racism is almost universally rejected, this is not true for the basic tenets of nationalism. The idea of national communities where one owes more solidarity to one's compatriots than to foreigners, the idea that certain people are not part of 'our society' and are seen as 'refugees' and 'migrants' and, therefore, can be excluded, hierarchised and deported, is very much alive. This nationalist common sense has been questioned by the No Border movement and an internationalist left in Europe that has become, in part, explicitly *anti-national*. It does not take much today to proclaim oneself in opposition to racism. To directly attack nationalism is more difficult but may be politically more productive. Anti-racism has to be internationalist. Common interests and strategies have to be created among 'old' and 'new' Europeans in order to overcome nationalist and imperialist divisions and struggle together.

Finally, from a Marxist perspective, it is clear that in order to push racism back or even to abolish it, it is necessary to overcome the social and economic conditions to which racism is not reducible but which make its recurrent resurgences all too likely. Today, the zombie-like continuity of neoliberalism in Europe, despite all its failures and lack of hegemonic support, creates widespread stress, anxiety, social exclusion and bitter competition over jobs and public resources. It is an ideal breeding ground for racism. To challenge the conflagration of neoliberalism, imperialism and racism, a 'new class politics' is necessary, a politics that clarifies 'where and how the specific experiences of workers based on gender, race, citizenship, and other factors converge. It must reveal the overlapping interests of workers as members of the class. This makes common struggles possible' (Friedrich and Kuhn 2017b). Still, to overcome neoliberalism, even to abolish the capitalist mode of reproduction and distribution, would be no guarantee that racism would disappear. Its continuing persistence would depend, among other factors, on which mode of production would replace capitalism and the concrete dynamics of such a post-capitalist formation. Racism is a historical phenomenon. Therefore, there could be historical conditions under which it might be abolished. However, as long as capitalism persists it seems highly unlikely that these conditions will ever be met.

NOTES

- 1 'Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police', *The Guardian*, 16 June 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants> (accessed 9 August 2017).
- 2 R. Ramesh, 'Geert Wilders was beaten, but at the cost of fuelling racism in the Netherlands', *The Guardian*, 17 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/17/geert-wilders-racism-netherlands-far-right> (accessed 9 August 2017).
- 3 I am aware that as a person (read as a *white* male) I am not able to as fully or equally understand racism as people negatively affected by it. For helpful comments and criticism on this chapter, I thank Lars Bretthauer, Sebastian Friedrich, John Kannankulam, Manjiri Palicha, Vishwas Satgar, Matti Traußneck and all participants of the Democratic Marxism workshop in Johannesburg in November 2016.
- 4 The 'Long Summer of Migration' is a word-play on 'The Short Summer of Anarchy', based on the 1972 novel on the Spanish Civil War by the German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

- 5 The opening was only partial because the visa regime and 'carrier sanctions' still prevented refugees from entering the EU safely and legally by plane or ferry. For a detailed reconstruction, see Blume et al. (2016).
- 6 See also 'Migrant influx may give Europe's far right a lift', *New York Times*, 7 September 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/world/europe/right-wing-european-parties-may-benefit-from-migrant-crisis.html?_r=0 (accessed 9 August 2017).
- 7 Moreover, to perceive discourses or ideologies as racism's ontological centres runs the risk of analysing it in isolation from context or, even implicitly, as a functional aspect of the super-structure that will dissolve once the capitalist base has been historically superseded (see Camfield 2016: 49).
- 8 This argument refers to a controversy within German-language critical migration studies where some authors argue, from a post-operaist perspective, that 'it should be the task of critical migration and border regime research to stress those moments in which the movements of migration, together with solidarity, transnational, social and political movements, elude attempts to control and regulate them' (Hess et al. 2016: 18; my translation). While this is surely important, I am concerned that a critical research strategy that narrows its focus in this way is simplifying the societal struggles and structural dynamics associated with migration and border regimes, and, *therefore*, does not realise its full potential to contribute to the kind of complex and fundamental analysis of society that is necessary for its emancipatory transformation.
- 9 In 2015, most of them came from the war-torn states of Syria (363 000), Afghanistan (178 000) and Iraq (122 000), but significant numbers arrived from crisis-ridden countries in Africa and West and South Asia, among them Pakistan (46 000), Eritrea (33 000), Nigeria (30 000) and Iran (25 000) (Eurostat 2016: 3).
- 10 See 'Flüchtlinge: Sie arbeiten am nächsten Wirtschaftswunder', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 September 2015, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/fluechtlings-sie-arbeiten-am-naechsten-wunder-1.2661310> (accessed 9 August 2017).
- 11 *Stammtisch*: literally, the regulars' table at a pub; figuratively, populist, racist, small-minded people. Cited in 'Was Grenzkontrollen für die Wirtschaft bedeuten', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 January 2016, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/fluechtlings-und-die-eu-ein-rueckfall-in-die-er-jahre-1.2827966> (accessed 9 August 2017, my translation). On the support of German capital for a liberal refugee policy, see also their campaign website at <http://www.wir-zusammen.de/>.

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