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The Precarious Dialectic of Border Regimes: On the Relationship between the Construction of Borders and the Dismantling of Democracy in the Trump Era

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Abstract: In her book *Walled States: Waning Sovereignty* (2010), the American political theorist Wendy Brown shows that today's massive wall-building projects – whether in the United States, Israel, or Europe – are not primarily protective measures but rather must be understood as the expression of a fundamental crisis of the modern state. In her view, the erection of barricades is a desperate act of resistance of national sovereignty against its unavoidable demise in a globalized world. Therefore, according to Brown, the current border regimes represent but a final stage act that reflects the desire for clearly defined identities and must be deciphered as fear of a world that becomes ever more complex.

In my paper, I agree only in part with Brown's theory of a 'ruse of reason' – that the building of border walls signifies, all appearances to the contrary, the demise of the sovereignty of the nation state. As convincing as her analyses may be, the staging of border regimes, which comprises not just the factual control of borders but also the bellicose political rhetoric surrounding the building of walls, is also a consciously used political instrument to transform democratic conditions, legal institutions, and social policy achievements within nation states. In my paper, I probe into this peculiar dialectic between, on the one hand, building walls at the borders and, on the other, dismantling borders of political discourse, both theoretically and by means of empirical examples.

To underpin my argument, I shall first focus on the United States under Donald Trump to show that the concentration on the building of a border wall between the United States and Mexico is accompanied by a weakening of security services vis-à-vis right-wing terror. After that, I shall demonstrate that Sebastian Kurz's talk of shutting the Balkan route for migrants and shielding Austria from third-country migration implies a focused attack on the social partnership and the welfare state.

Keywords: *Wall, Dialectic, political Rhetoric, Democracy.*

1. Introduction

In many ways, the question of the border is one of the most urgent challenges of the present. A number of remarkable economic, political, and cultural transformations in the past decades have contributed to this development. With the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989), the establishing of free trade zones – think of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (1994), the *European*

Economic Area (1992), and the *Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement* (2005) – and the wide-ranging globalization[1] of capital flows, trade, data exchange, cultures, and religions, the dawn of a true world community seemed within reach. Soon, however, critical voices were to be heard. The uprising of the Zapatistas in Mexico (1994) and the violent crackdown on critics of globalization during the third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle (1999) and the G8 Summit in Genoa brought to the fore for the first time what is, since the 2008 financial crisis, the bitter reality of many: Globalization produces not just winners but a considerable number of losers. Austerity policies repealed achievements of the welfare state; in Europe, several states sought to protect their own wealth, putting their national interest before solidarity with both members and nonmembers of the EU. This trend became even more pronounced during the mass movement of migrants in 2015, triggered by war, terror, and economic hardship. Politicians' feeling of helplessness did not lead to a search for common, long-term solutions but spawned reactionary discussions about new border facilities, border protection, and border crossings. And these have been at the center of political debates and discussions within political theory ever since.[2] Under the heading "border regimes,"[3] institutional, administrative, juridical, and technical measures of border management have entered political discourse. They are extensively discussed by the public and in the media, and they are thoroughly reflected upon in the humanities and the sciences.[4]

In response to the challenges of the 21st century, various positions gathering under the label of "global justice" support cosmopolitan solutions (see Brooks 2008; Broszies/Hahn 2010), thus turning against a form of particularism that, for the most part, takes its cue from John Rawls (see Rawls 1999). They argue that a national approach fails to do justice to the complexity of our current predicament (see. Brock 2017). But despite their showing that questions concerning exploitation, poverty, inequality, migration, dwindling resources, the protection of the climate and the environment, the financial system, security, and terrorism must be tackled on a trans- or international level, the last decade has seen a resurgence of national forms of politics.

The most conspicuous among these is the construction of border walls, the premise being that the inclusion and exclusion of people is a proper means to deal with the challenges of globalization. Long derided as anachronistic and inefficient, megalomaniac projects such as Trump's wall at the US-Mexico border, Europe's attempt to seal itself off by erecting fences in Macedonia, Hungary, and Lithuania, and the border fortifications in Israel are not merely deemed viable options but have become a reality.

Of course, borders neither stop migration nor solve it as a problem; a glance at current statistics confirms as much.[5] At the most, they delay the movement of migrants momentarily, forcing them to take new, often more dangerous routes or wait in camps until their fate is decided upon. In other words, if refugees from the Middle East and Africa have, by and large, ceased to take the Balkan route, it is because after the deal between the EU and Turkey and Libya they are now,

1 For a critical analysis of globalization, see Sassen (2007).

2 There is an extensive literature on the question of the border. Aside from Brown (2010), my main reference points are Agier (2016), Balibar (2002), Bauman (2016), De Genova (2017), Mezzadra/Neilson (2015), and Weizman (2007).

3 Fiedler (2007) offers an instructive introduction to the research on migration and border regimes.

4 For an overview of the recent debates, see *A Companion to Border Studies*, edited by Wilson/Donnan (2012).

5 The *UNHRC Population Statistics Database* is very clear on this. Since 2010, the number of people fleeing their country has been rising continuously. In 2018, there were 70.8 million refugees (see http://popstats.unhcr.org./en/overview#_ga=2.174729771.840998682.1591604732-45704192-1591604732)

more often than not, confined under inhumane conditions, wasting away in isolation, without politicians or the media caring much about this shameful fact.[6] Europe frantically constricts itself to treating the symptoms of its own border politics, refusing to look for wide-ranging political solutions that conform to human rights law.

In her 2010 book *Walled States: Waning Sovereignty*, the American political theorist Wendy Brown examines the impact the attempt by states to seal themselves off has on the citizens of the global North. The erection of borders, she argues, is not so much a protection against migrants as the paradoxical expression of a fundamental crisis of the modern territorial state:

"Rather than resurgent expressions of nation-state sovereignty, the new walls are icons of its erosion. While they may appear as hyperbolic tokens of such sovereignty, like all hyperbole, they reveal a tremulousness, vulnerability, dubiousness, or instability at the core of what they aim to express – qualities that are themselves antithetical to sovereignty and thus elements of its undoing. Hence the visual paradox of these walls: What appears at first blush as the articulation of state sovereignty actually expresses its diminution relative to other kinds of global forces – the waning relevance and cohesiveness of the form." (Brown 2010, 17)

This change of perspective – to consider the construction of walls as a reaction to migration and ponder the consequences of this symbolical act for the way nation-states see themselves – makes possible a new interpretation of the current situation: Following Brown, the erection of border fortifications is but a last, desperate revolt of nation-state sovereignty against its gradual loss of power. In this sense, today's border regimes are just a final theatrical gesture that says more about the way we see ourselves than about an external threat. They reflect the desire for a closed and homogeneous identity and must be deciphered as fear of a world that is becoming ever more complex. As a consequence, and contrary to what proponents of right-wing populism and the far right want to make us believe, xenophobia and racism are not, so Brown thinks, the (seemingly inevitable) response to the arrival of migrants. Rather, they must be seen as a reaction to economic, political, and cultural transformations.[7] According to Brown, walls are a phantasmagoric projection that testifies to the waning power of the nation-state. Their erection is a transitional phenomenon that functions as a political sedative, veiling and at the same time accelerating the dwindling of nation-state sovereignty. As she sees it, the new border fortifications must be interpreted as both a symptom of and a catalyst for the loss of nation-state sovereignty.

Brown harbors the secret hope that the construction of walls will turn out to be the downfall of nation-state identity politics. Those trying to lock others out by erecting walls, she assumes, will realize that they are, in fact, locking themselves in, and this realization will prompt them to rethink their position. What her convincing analysis misses, however, is that the theatrical staging of border regimes comprises not just border control but also the calculated *undermining of democracy*, *legal institutions*, *and achievements of the welfare state* that makes it possible for one's own position of power to evade pluriperspective deliberation. Brown considers neither the ramifications for domestic politics nor the power-stabilizing effect of this symbolic politics.

In an effort to broaden Brown's reflections, I will turn my attention in what follows to these two dimensions. I subscribe to the thesis that behind the constantly communicated assertion

6 See the warnings of *Amnesty International* (https://newsweek.com/eu-refugee-crisis-migrants-brussels-policies-libya-628178).

7 See also Brown's more recent books *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (2015) and *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Anti-Democratic Politics in the West* (2019).

that only the building of a wall may provide protection against dangers from without and thus guarantee safety and peace within, there is a hidden strategy at once stabilizing power and promoting discriminatory practices. The exclusion of everything and everyone alien corresponds to an aggressive segregation inside the borders. The building of a wall has nothing to do with a security policy safeguarding political rights in connection with the democratic apparatus (*dispositif*) of freedom, equality, and solidarity; rather, it promotes a form of power politics that, by stirring up conflicts, presents one's own claim to power as being without alternative and leads to repression. There is a calculated promotion of discrimination and inequality within the *demos* in order to brush aside every criticism of the existing political order as inimical and thwart pluri-perspectivism. In short, there is a dialectical relationship between the construction of borders and the dismantling of democracy.

To flesh out this thesis, I turn to the US under President Trump. I will begin by showing that the focus on the erection of a wall at the US-Mexico border goes hand in hand with a calculated weakening of national security vis-à-vis domestic right-wing terrorism (section 2). As I will argue, this domestic destabilization has the paradoxical effect of stabilizing Trump's position, since the fear of terrorism mobilizes his voters. The wall turns out to be a cipher that redirects domestic problems toward a substitutive object. Advancing a socio-political interpretation of the psychoanalytical reflections of the early Frankfurt School, I will argue that authoritarian characteristics manifest themselves not only in obedience to authority but also in the humiliation of the excluded, thus perpetuating the existing hegemony (section 3). Trump caters to this sadomasochistic need in an exemplary way, not least with a view to undermine the plurality and equality of all citizens that is enshrined in the US constitution. I will take up this issue by analyzing Trump's attack on *The Squad*, four young female politicians who oppose his identity politics and exclusion of plurality (section 4). Drawing on discourse analysis, I will focus on the rhetorical strategies Trump uses (mainly on Twitter) to render discriminatory speech acts acceptable and to withdraw from rational discourse by fostering an emotionally charged polarization of society. In this context, I will home in on Trump's attempt to undermine established egalitarian achievements and draw up new borders, vilifying his political opponents via bland stereotypes and defining his electoral base in contradistinction to them. I will show that this strategy of Trump's not only draws on and then spreads sexist and racist forms of discrimination but also contributes to a shift away from democratic processes of deliberation toward authoritarian structures. Finally, I will sum up my findings (section 5).

2. In the Shadow of Trump's Wall: Domestic Right-Wing Terrorism in the US

Over the past years, Trump's election-campaign promise to build a wall at the US-Mexico border to ward off migrants from Middle and South America – despite a decline in so-called *undocumented immigrants* (from 1.7 million in 1999 to below 0.4 million in 2015) –[8] has been the dominant theme in US domestic politics. The necessity to build a wall has been underlined by the US President time and again. In his *State of the Union Address* on February 5, 2019, he warned – as he had done before and continues to do – that "large, organized caravans are on the march to the United States," and blamed social ills such as drug trafficking, increasing unemployment, and

8 https://www.theatlas.com/charts/VypzRL6Ug

crime on "illegal immigrants."[9] To prevent an invasion, so says Trump, existing barriers at the US-Mexico border must be supplanted by a 30-foot-high 1,900-mile-long concrete wall.

These colossal dimensions defy imagination. And so do the estimated costs of building the wall of up to $21 billion, showcasing the hubris of the whole project.[10] Trump's failure to include the funding of the wall in the new budget led to a Government shutdown, lasting from December 2018 to January 2019. Trump could not reach an agreement on the budget for the new year. Not even his attempt to circumvent the Senate by declaring a state of emergency was successful. Instead, sixteen states filed a lawsuit against the President, pointing out that he had acted unconstitutionally.[11] It was only in February that the Republicans and Democrats reached a compromise and thus ended the budget debate, reserving $1.38 billion – and not, as Trump had originally demanded, $5.7 billion – for the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border.[12]

In his *State of the Union Address*, Trump not only presented his solution that "walls work and walls save lives," but also declared, "In the past, most of the people in this room voted for a wall – but the proper wall never got built. I'll get it built."[13] His ambitious plan is presented as a panacea that will solve all domestic problems at once. According to Trump, the success of border fortifications is borne out by the restoration of public order. In his *State of the Union Address*, he invoked El Paso, a city in Texas, that had been surrounded by an 18-foot-high 57-mile-long fence, as proof of the usefulness of walls as regards security.[14] Trump proudly remarked, "The border city of El Paso, Texas, used to have extremely high rates of violent crime – one of the highest in the country, and considered one of our Nation's most dangerous cities. Now, with a powerful barrier in place, El Paso is one of our safest cities."[15]

It is an irony that history should give the lie to Trump's bold claims during the summer of the same year. Crucially, however, terror was brought to El Paso neither by migrants from Middle or South America nor by Islamists. Instead, it was a white supremacist who committed an act of terrorism: On August 3, 2019, a young white man killed 22 people and injured 24 others in a supermarket. A manifesto that he had published on the Internet shortly before committing his crime makes clear that his awful deed was racially motivated and inspired by the ideology of white supremacy. In it, the terrorist not only expresses his sympathy for the Christchurch terrorist, who, in March, had killed 50 people during an attack on two mosques, and takes up the latter's talk of a "Great Replacement" but also conjures up the phantom of a "Hispanic invasion of Texas." Using a number of shopworn stereotypes, he warns of an "increasing Hispanic population," of "race mixing," and of politicians trying to get the vote of migrants, neglecting the native population in the course of doing so. Trump, the manifesto implies, is an exception; he should not, however, be made responsible for the terrorist attack – despite the similarities the wording of the manifesto

9 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address-2/

10 See https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/grenze-zu-mexiko-us-regierung-legt-plaene-fuer-trumps-mauer-vor/19538314.html?ticket=ST-52441074-0NYKKGFsJsLwGlEmH6rR-ap5

11 http://m.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/donald-trump-und-der-notstand-16-bundesstaaten-klage-gegen-regierung-a-1253930.html

12 https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/trumps-praesidentschaft/pentagon-zahlt-eine-milliarde-fuer-grenzzaun-zu-mexiko-161088333.html

13 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address-2/

14 For the progress of this project, see https://www.trumpwall.construction/el-paso-sector

15 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address-2/

bears to the President's rhetoric.[16]

The attack did not affect Trump's popularity; nor did it lead to a rethinking of his security policy or rhetoric. Rather, Trump knew how to use the attack to his advantage, accepting a systematic destabilization of the country in order to further galvanize support for his agenda. On Twitter, Trump called the attack in a first statement an "act of cowardice,"[17] and condemned it as a "hateful act." But he did not categorize the attack as domestic terrorism – that is, a terrorist attack carried out by a US citizen on American soil – or call it a hate crime – that is, an offense directed at a certain social group or race; nor did he mention the ideology behind the attack, let alone reflect critically on his own rhetoric.[18] When, a couple of hours later, nine people were killed in an attack in Dayton, Ohio, the media dubbed the terrorist – purportedly in agreement with his own description of himself – a "pro-Satan leftist."[19] The terrorist, another white young man, indiscriminately killed people of different ethnicities and genders, including his own sister. In a speech addressing both attacks, Trump suddenly found clear words to commemorate the victims: "In one voice, our nation must condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy. These sinister ideologies must be defeated."[20] Trump then called for the death penalty for such offenses,[21] apparently oblivious to the fact that in several states hate crimes may already be punished with a death sentence; he also demanded background checks on mentally unstable gun buyers. Tellingly, Trump avoided calling such attacks *hate crimes*, and he made sure not to draw attention to *domestic right-wing terrorism*. The phenomenon was – and still is – simply ignored by not being called its proper name. The attacks were followed neither by an analysis of the existing structures nor by a rethinking of security policies.

The statistics, however, speak a clear language. A look at the *Anti-Defamation League*'s *H.E.A.T. Map* shows that in 2019 alone 3,700 crimes were committed that are attributable to hate, extremism, anti-Semitism, and terrorism, with 34 attacks having an extremist background.[22] The majority of these crimes were carried out by people with radical right-wing and racist views. While Islamist terrorism has been pushed back the world over, the number of right-wing terrorist attacks has risen threefold in the global North.[23]

Due to the temporal proximity between the attack in Dayton and the one in El Paso, the public (not least because of Trump's speeches) tended not to differentiate adequately between them. Both attacks were categorized as "mass shootings" committed by (mentally ill) lone wolfs;[24] and,

16 https://grabancijas.com/patrick-crusius-manifesto-the-inconventient-truth/

17 https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1157868518823596032?land=de; https://www.foxnews.com/politics/end-this-carnage-donald-trump-2020-dems-joe-biden-cory-booker-pete-buttigieg

18 See https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/el-paso-walmart-shooting.html

19 See, for example, the article in the *Washington Times*: https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/aug/4/connor-betts-ohio-gunman-was-elizabeth-warren-supp/. A closer look reveals, however, that this description comes from a number of different contexts. See https://heavy.com/news/2019/08/connor-betts-twitter-politics-social-media/.

20 https://twitter.com/cnn/status/1158381875888476161

21 https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/watch-trump-calls-for-death-penalty-for-hate-crimes

22 https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/adl-heat-map; statistics by the *Anti-Defamation League* also show that between 2018 and 2017 70 percent of all terrorist attacks were committed by members of the radical right and the White Power Movement.

23 https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2019-11/terror-index-terroropfer-weltweit-gesunken-is-taliban

24 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_El_Paso_shooting; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Dayton_shooting; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mass_shootings_in_the_United_States_in_2019

so popular opinion has it, security is powerless against the increasing number of such crimes. Note that in 2019 the right-wing terrorist attacks in Gilroy, Escondido, Poway, and Pittsburgh had to be added to the list. That is to say, on closer inspection, these crimes are not at all isolated incidents (though they are often treated as such). They must be viewed within the context of domestic right-wing terrorism – a fact that officials fail to acknowledge.

The problem of right-wing terrorism in the US is, for the most part, on the US itself. Structural deficiencies have contributed to a lasting destabilization of domestic security.[25] Following massive cuts to the *Department of Homeland Security*, officials have lost track of the networks the radical right has built over decades; under Trump's watch, its budget was reduced from $21 million to $3 million, and half the staff was dismissed. Thus, against the warnings of the FBI, the institution responsible for monitoring radicalization was more or less eliminated. Reports and publications by high-ranking employees of the *Department of Homeland Security*, such as Daryl Johnson's leaked report "Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment,"[26] were ignored or labeled by Republicans a political attack on conservative America.[27] Some journalists were even told off the record that, according to former agents, "the reason the FBI hardly ever investigates the right-wing milieu is that they have little hope the Department of Justice will act independently and bring charges against people Trump considers his supporters."[28]

The one-sided focus on Islamist terrorism and the shift in domestic politics toward right-wing populism lead to officials' failure to adequately investigate the right-wing milieu, since it represents Trump's base. At the same time domestic terrorism pushes more and more people who feel threatened by the attacks into the arms of Trump. Hushed-up yet politically tolerated domestic terrorism and the destabilization it brings about allow Trump to expand his power. It also helps that he offers simple solutions to confront the diffuse atmosphere of fear and terror. The bogeyman of invasion is a clever formula to tackle the confusion of the American people. Trump's well-staged strategy of simplification presents the construction of a wall as the solution to all problems, thus effectively channeling the insecurity of his voters.

But why is there still so much support for Trump when it seems obvious that cuts to security are wrongheaded and the money spent on the erection of the border wall does not protect the US from crime and terrorism? Drawing on Adorno's interpretation of Freud's group psychology, the next section elaborates on the power-stabilizing function of the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. It will become clear that this is the aspect Brown fails to consider.

3. A Sociopsychological Perspective on the Logic of Inclusion and Exclusion

Starting in the interwar period, the Frankfurt School addressed the question as to why authoritarian forms of government gain a lot of support precisely from those who suffer the most under unequal economic and political conditions. To put this question differently, Why does the exploited working class accept what may be called a "voluntary bondage"? The sociopsychological

25 https://www.zeit.de/2019/33/rechtsextreme-usa-white-power-donald-trump
26 https://foxnews.com/projects/pdf/041609_extremism.pdf
27 https://theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/07/white-supermacist-terrorism-intelligence-analyst; see Johnson (2012).
28 https://www.zeit.de/2019/33/rechtsextreme-usa-white-power-donald-trump

analysis of the so-called "authoritarian personality" and of the habitual disposition of a large swath of the population to submit to a leader provides a (partial) response to this question. While the early, extensive study *Authority and the Family* (1936) was premised on the ramifications of the educational conventions of Wilhelmine Germany, Theodor W. Adorno took it upon himself, during and shortly after the Second World War, to analyze, based on wide-ranging empirical research (see Adorno et al 1950), the servility of the US middle class in a society shaped not by discipline and submission but by liberalism.

In these investigations, Adorno not only seeks to trace the submissive and uncritical attitude toward idealized leaders; referring to Erich Fromm's conception of a sadomasochistic personality (Fromm 1936), he also addresses the question as to how and why conflicts of one's own are transferred to stigmatized groups. In other words, Adorno provides an explanation as to why a certain form of political collectivization manifests itself not merely as satisfaction derived from obedience but also through aggressive forms of inclusion and exclusion. In the following, I will sketch out Adorno's major insights by turning to his text "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (Adorno 1951). Here Adorno elucidates the functioning of processes of collectivization by means of antagonisms against the backdrop of a psychoanalytical approach. Drawing on Freud's influential *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1922)[29], he argues that the libidinal bonding with demagogues cannot do without certain distinctions occurring on different levels. The sociopsychological explanation of these is not only helpful when it comes to understanding right-wing populism and Trump's course of action but also makes clear why the stability of societies today is based on the practice of inclusion and exclusion. In what follows, I will present Adorno's reflections in three steps, and pit them against Brown's thesis that there will be an implosion of the nation-state in the foreseeable future. Indeed, Adorno lets us see that, despite the inequalities it produces, the sociopolitical institution of identity via the process of exclusion has a tenacious stability.[30]

The main question of "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (Adorno 1951) is the following: How do authoritarian processes of collectivization come about, and what is the "bond" (Freud 1922, 7) that makes masses what they are? Demagogues, it seems, know how to renew that bond time and again, providing the individual the satisfaction of surrendering to a mass and submitting to a leader. Crucially, liberal societies are not immune to agitators knowing how to win the masses and operating with stereotypes and discriminatory tropes. What is the explanation for this?

In a first step, Adorno, following Freud, argues that the individual's voluntary surrender to a mass must be understood as a reactivation of the conflict between the ego and the super-ego. According to Freud's structural model of the psyche, the ego is not only haunted by unconscious drives (the "id") but is also limited in many ways by the super-ego – that is, societal rules and prohibitions that are mediated through the father figure. Instead of negotiating between their desire and their conscience as individuals, persons obedient to authority accept societal guidelines unquestioningly, not working through them based on their own experience or with the goal of making their own decisions. As Freud has it, sheer idleness or a feeling of not being equal to the

29 The German original, *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, was published in 1921; the English translation was published a year later.

30 I am neither the first nor the only one to make this connection. In addition to Weyand's illuminating reflections, Gordon (2018) has recently drawn attention to certain parallels with the US under Trump.

task cannot explain the individual's renunciation of this process of negotiation. What we have to do, then, is trace the specific libidinal bond that manifests itself in the individual's surrender to a mass.

Following Freud, Adorno advances the thesis that the rigid acceptance of rules of behavior is supported by a bond with the authority of a leader. The figure of the leader serves "as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal of our own" (Freud 1922, 74) and successfully compensates for "the continuous failure to satisfy ... ego demands" (Adorno 1951, 419). In other words, the identification with an authority allows the ego to accept its own failure by successfully projecting its ego ideal onto someone else.

From a sociopolitical perspective, this insight is crucial: The discrepancy within the ego between the general expectations of success, which are produced by and mediated through society, and the failure to meet them can be managed only by means of an identification with an externalized ego ideal. As a consequence, this mechanism works particularly well in societies with high demands as regards self-fulfillment and getting one's own way. In a meritocratic society, one's coming up short lends itself to being offset by the identification and idealization of an authority as a means to at last satisfy one's own narcissistic drives. As Adorno puts it, "By making the leader his ideal he loves himself, as it were, but gets rid of the stains of frustration and discontent which mar his picture of his own empirical self. This pattern of identification through idealization [...] is, however, a collective one. It is effective in vast numbers of people with similar characterological dispositions and libidinal leanings." (Adorno 1951, 419) Thus, Adorno offers an explanation as to why meritocratic societies, very often thinking of themselves as being based on equality (of rights) and (contractual) freedom, show a surprisingly strong affinity for authoritarianism: Their members fail one after another to meet the outward expectation to get their own way and fulfill themselves. The identification with a leader in the form of an idealization of authority not only satisfies the ego whose narcissistic impulses have been frustrated but also manages to gather together a number of individuals with a similar personality, since the ego ideal at the same time functions as the group ideal.[31]

In a second step, Adorno demonstrates that the idealization of the leader is marked by a striking ambivalence. For, indeed, the idealizing stylization is not only and not even primarily directed at someone with exceptional qualities. Rather, and counterintuitively, the mass orients itself towards the mediocrity of what it knows all too well. Drawing on the "concept of the 'great little man'" (Adorno 1951, 421), Adorno points out that for the identification with a demagogue to be effective, the latter must have altogether trivial qualities that are shared by everyone. Upon closer inspection, what is seemingly special about populist leaders turns out to be ordinary, something they have in common with many others. The only difference is that they, to use Freud's words, "possess the typical qualities of the individuals concerned in a particularly clearly marked and pure form" (Freud 1922, 102). Accordingly, agitators are not special because they are endowed with some exceptional qualities, which would render their idealization rational; rather, what sets them apart is that they express and act out without any inhibition what has always been present in those inclined to submissiveness, even if only latently so. From this it follows that the great number of

31 In his extensive study *La fatigue d'être soi – depression et société* (Ehrenberg 1998), French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg, not drawing on Adorno's insights, addresses society's excessive demands on the ego in connection with current mental disorders. Ehrenberg inquires exclusively into the pathologies of late capitalism, without pondering the political implications of his findings.

people who vote for and admire populists such as Salvini, Bolsonaro, and Trump do so not despite but precisely because of their sexist and racist remarks. The calculated way in which they, time and again, cross the line not only gets them the attention of the media but also makes it possible for those humiliated by society to gather under the impertinence of their respective leader. Upon closer inspection, the apparent breach of social conventions turns out to be a reactivation of (racist and/or sexist) stereotypes many people hold but have so far not dared to utter aloud. Thus, in his shamelessness, the populist leader emerges as the mouthpiece of the shamed. With his insight into the fact that demagogues purposively and openly draw on well-known stereotypes, Adorno deciphers the widely held idea of an "emancipatory" rhetoric of the right supposedly associated with the promise to enable people to tell it like it is, without having to heed conventions and rules. Rather than doing away with old forms of speech, this rhetoric of the right is at the service of the normalization of chauvinistic thought patterns.

According to Adorno, the loss of inhibitions that is at stake here expresses the submissive's "twofold wish to submit to authority and to be the authority himself" (Adorno 1951, 421). This contradictory desire for submission and power brings to the fore the sadomasochistic nature of the authoritarian personality. In a third step, Adorno shows that this sadomasochism cannot do without enemies. Aside from the libidinal bonding with an ego ideal, the person obedient to authority must have an object of hatred. Since the positive identification with the leader alone will not do because of his banality (he is, after all, merely a reduplication of one's own banality), populism must seek recourse to a "negatively integrating force" (Adorno 1951, 424) that manifests itself "in the persecution of weak and helpless minorities" and the "hatred against those outside" (Adorno 1951, 422). The process of submission to authority and bonding with one's in-group is accompanied, in Adorno's view, by the simultaneous rejection of those one considers below oneself and/or an out-group.

Those who are at a disadvantage and left behind by society may only bear their lack of privilege if they are at least considered superior to some group of subalterns. Crucially, they neither direct their anger at those above them nor question the existing conditions as regards the inequalities they permanently (re-)produce. According to the mechanism described above, all of their aggression is directed at those who fare even worse than they do. The necessity those who are left behind by society feel to form a common bulwark is realized by means of the harsh exclusion of others. In connection with this phenomenon, Adorno aptly uses the term "repressive egalitarianism" (Adorno 1951, 425) to point out that what is at stake here has nothing with political rights to freedom and equality but is a form of leveling disregarding every form of individuality. Differences within one's own group and commonalities with other precarious forms of life are categorically negated. However, the authoritarian capturing does not only consist in this reduction to identity categories. Adorno also notes that authoritarian forms of collectivization rage against the criticism of existing structures, the questioning of stereotypical demarcations, and the search for alternative modes of living together. There is a systematic suppression of democratic and plural forms of community and the complex forms of negotiation, ego strength, and managing diverse experiences that are connected with these.

Importantly, in response to this problematic situation, Adorno does not seek recourse to some version of liberal antipopulism, which would reject large swaths of the population due to their mental constitution and present fascism as a natural fact. Instead, he shows that demagogues make use of existing economic and political conditions to strengthen their own position of power

via a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, it is not the psychic structure of the individual that must be changed but the prevailing social conditions.

"This, however, corroborates the assumption that Fascism as such is not a psychological issue and that any attempt to understand its roots and its historical role in psychological terms still remains on the level of ideologies such as the one of 'irrational forces' promoted by Fascism itself. Although the Fascist agitator doubtlessly takes up certain tendencies within those he addresses, he does so as the mandatory of powerful economic and political interests. Psychological dispositions do not actually cause Fascism; rather, Fascism defines a psychological area which can be successfully exploited by the forces which promote it for entirely nonpsychological reasons of self-interest. What happens when masses are caught by Fascist propaganda is not a spontaneous primary expression of instincts and urges but a quasi-scientific revitalization of their psychology – the artificial regression described by Freud in his discussion of organized groups." (Adorno 1951, 430)

The exploration of counter-hegemonic practices is beyond the scope of this paper. The sole reason for the inclusion of Adorno's reflections has been to show that the system of inclusion and exclusion does not simple collapse of its own accord but can gain a relative stability by means of the differentiation between friend and enemy. For this to happen, the threat the out-group poses for the in-group must constantly be called to mind. And Trump succeeds in perpetuating this dichotomy like no one else. He does everything he can in order for the latent fear that is caused by domestic terrorism to be withdrawn from its real object and redirected, by means of a "pathic projection,"[32] toward a substitutive object onto which the aggression fueled by this fear may be projected. In the US, the nonwhite population takes the place of this substitutive object: Trump's voters are sufficiently familiar with them from everyday life; it is easy to attribute racialized characteristics to them; yet they are not at the center of society. Is there a group more apt to be associated with the figment of a refugee caravan supposedly on its way to the US and ready to bring about the downfall of its people, to foment a feeling of paranoia that solidifies power and mobilizes voters? They are not here yet, but they soon will be if nothing is done about it. Against this background, it is easy to present right-wing terrorism as a desperate outburst from the "autochthonous" population, as a last resort of people who have been let down by politicians. This fantasy of doom needs both Trump the savior and his foes, with the wall functioning as a means to make a clear distinction between good and evil, suggesting the homogeneity of the US population in the course of doing so. That this scenario does not make much sense in a nation of immigrants such as the US does not bother Trump's supporters. They deny both their own heterogeneous origins and the importance of the more than 10 million undocumented immigrants to the economy, a fact to which the *Day Without Immigrants* (2017) successfully drew attention. Trump uses domestic hate crimes and terrorist attacks again and again to mobilize his voters. The racist discourse surrounding the construction of the wall keeps domestic terrorism at a steady simmer, and domestic terrorism in turn legitimizes the construction of the wall.

Trump not only represents the authority to which one must be obedient in order to regain one's former strength ("Make America Great Again!") but supplies the object of sadism in the form of migrants. In this context, it is worth returning to Adorno, as he makes clear that stereotypes help

32 In *Dialecting of Enlightenment*, Adorno/Horkheimer use the concept of "pathic projection," which they borrow from Freud, to show how suppressed drives and unconscious desires of the ego are projected onto an outside object (see Adorno/Horkheimer 2002, 165).

solidify power constellations: "The more primitive his drastic formulae are, due to their stereotypy, the more appealing they are at the same time, since they reduce the complicated to the elementary, no matter how the logic of this reduction may work. The superiority thus gained does not remain on the intellectual level. Since the cliché regularly makes the outgroup bad and the ingroup good, the anti-Semitic pattern of orientation offers emotional, narcissistic gratifications which tend to break down the barriers of rational self-criticism." (Adorno 1950, 619)[33] The mechanism of this sadomasochistic satisfaction derived from obedience to authority and discrimination against the worse-off not only thwarts self-criticism but also stabilizes existing power relations. Again, the poor state of the welfare system can only be tolerated as long as one can rest assured that there are others still worse off than oneself.

Against the backdrop of this insight into the authoritarian personality, one cannot fully agree with Brown's position. The construction of walls is not just a desperate revolt of nation-state sovereignty against its own demise. Rather, it is, together with the destabilization of domestic security, a proper means to satisfy people who are submissive to authority and thus to keep right-wing populist governments of states that are becoming ever more authoritarian in power. Paradoxically, it is not just those who have to lead an existence as refugees and paperless migrants who have to pay the price for this kind of power but also those who voted for Trump (and will do so again). Rather than focusing on domestic security, preventing radicalization, and opening up perspectives for the young through social-policy measures, the Government wastes huge sums of money on an entirely irrational project. The cipher of the wall detracts attention from the restructuring of the domestic order and projects society's woes onto an outside threat, thus furthering Trump's agenda.

Drawing on Adorno, it becomes clear why Trump, with a view to stabilizing his power, systematically silences a polyphony of voices and prevents people from drawing attention to racializing discourses and the processes of antidiscrimination connected therewith. In the next section, concentrating on a specific example, I will home in on the rhetorical strategies Trump has developed in order to undermine (mostly via Twitter) common rules of political communication and withdraw from rational discourse. In doing so, I will focus on the new borders Trump draws up within the US with a view to denounce his political opponents by means of stereotypes and cause the erosion of democratic achievements. I will show that in contrast to Trump's self-presentation as the champion of "true" democracy and the interests of the "little man," he, in fact, aggressively fights every form of democratic polyphony. For the claim that now people can tell it like is, no longer have to bow to the linguistic conventions of political correctness, and take on the political elites does not lead to egalitarian conditions. On the contrary, focusing on a specific example, I will show that Trump seeks to stifle every form of democratic dissent and questioning of the existing structures. Again, it will become evident that the symbolic homogeneity of the US and the sham feeling of unity in a world lacking solidarity brought about by the construction of the wall are at the expense of a plural society. Trump transposes the friend/enemy scheme that corresponds with the logic of the wall to domestic relations: Dissenting politicians who have different ideas are openly branded as migrants who, because of their origin and the color of their skin, have no right to participate in domestic politics.

33 This section is about anti-Semitic stereotypes and prejudices; note, however, that Adorno also shows that authoritarian personalities are willing to transfer their denunciation of Jews to other minorities.

4. Rhetorical Strategies of Defamation: Trump's Construction of Domestic Borders

In August 2018, Ilhan Omar drew attention to Trump's strategy to concentrate on artificial problems rather than on real ones in an interview with Al Jazeera. She pointed out that Trump strengthens xenophobic and racist elements in order to veil blatant domestic deficits. What is needed instead, she argued, is a change in security policy that takes into consideration the danger coming from the right in the form of domestic terrorism: "We should be profiling, monitoring, and creating policies to fight the radicalization of white men."[34] In the course of the right-wing terrorism of 2019, she repeatedly called attention to gaps in security and demanded that the problem be called by its name.[35]

In the context of an analysis of how Trump handles this kind of rational political discourse, it is necessary to mention that Omar is not merely one of Trump's political opponents but stands for a societal change. Together with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and Ayanna Pressley, she is part of an informal group called *The Squad*.[36] The group does not consider itself an exclusive and monolithic club but, using the label *Justice Democrats*, tries to attract new members to fight for equality and justice in the name of the excluded and voiceless.[37] Over the last months, they have made a name for themselves inside and outside the US as vociferous opposition to Trump, representing a "different" America and pursuing an anti-hegemonic agenda. Here, it is important to note that Trump – despite his populist social-policy demands during the election campaign – also represents well-known Republican policy positions: Against the President's earlier claims, the Trump administration neither raised taxes for the rich nor improved health-insurance services. Trump mobilizes his core supporters of white men, who are among the losers from globalization, by means of an aggressive fight against everything democratic, ecological, or cosmopolitan as well as an identity politics-driven pursuit of a great nation, racializing practices, and sexist statements (see Cooley/Nexon 2020, 137–158).

The protagonists of *The Squad* – all Democrats and members of the US Congress – counter Trump's agenda. They stand for a progressive politics in terms of an egalitarian society. They support "Medicare for All," student loan forgiveness, a debt-free college, a guaranteed 15-dollar minimum wage, stricter gun laws, and the abolition of private prisons; and they strongly oppose the detention of illegal migrant children and US military intervention abroad.[38] Within the left, the four women also advocate contentious positions: Omar and Tlaib vehemently criticize the Israeli settlement policy and support the pro-Palestinian campaign *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions*, which aims at isolating the state of Israel economically, culturally, and politically. When Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, and Tlaib (but not Pressley) voted against a Congressional resolution to condemn

34 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/ilhan-omar-wins-minnesota-democratic-house-primary-180815062641859.html

35 https://twitter.com/ilhanmn/status/1157801274605211648?lang=de In a recent empirical study, Piazza (2020) shows that politicians' use of hate speech leads both to the polarization of the *demos* and the spread of domestic terrorism.

36 https://instagram.com/p/BqGTlEPBXXD/?utm_source=ig_embed&utm_medium=loading

37 https://justicedemocrats.com; as Ayanna Pressley puts it: "We are more than four people. We ran on a mandate to advocate for and to represent those ignored, left out, and left behind. Out squad is big. Our squad includes any person committed to creating a more equitable and just world." (https://twitter.com/justicedems/status/1150885904308981760?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1150885904308981760&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2F2019%2F7%2F17%2F20696474%2Fsquad-congresswomen-trump-pressley-aoc-omar-tlaib)

38 https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/15/politics/who-are-the-squad/index.html

the boycott campaign, they were accused of anti-Semitism.[39]

But it is not just their political positions that make the four women embodiments of a new form of political plurality; it is also their origin, their religious affiliation, their age, their skin color, and their gender. Ocasio-Cortez is of Puerto Rican decent; at age 29, she became the youngest woman ever to be elected to Congress.[40] Pressley is Massachusetts's first black congresswoman.[41] Omar is the first woman of color from Minnesota in Congress; she was born in Mogadishu and came to the US as a refugee fleeing the Somali Civil War; at age 17, she became a US citizen. She and Tlaib, who is the first Palestinian-American woman to serve in Congress, are the first Muslim congresswomen. They were both sworn in on the Quran,[42] with Tlaib wearing a thobe and Omar donning the hijab; for Omar, the House of Representatives even lifted its 181-year-old ban on religious headwear on the House floor.[43]

That these women are perceived by Trump and his supporters as a threat, since both their policies and their biographies represent an America directed toward emancipation, is born out by the following tweet,[44] posted by Trump on July 14, 2019:

"So interesting to see 'Progressive' Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have functioning government at all), now loudly and viciously telling the people in the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run. Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how it is done. These places need your help badly, you can't leave fast enough. I'm sure that Nancy Pelosi would be very happy to quickly work out free travel arrangements!"[45]

This tweet makes it possible to bring into relief some of Trump's rhetorical strategies when dealing with political opponents. I will interpret these strategies as another manifestation of Trump's border politics. Contrary to the theatrically staged claim that it merely tries to break with the regulations imposed on people by political correctness, right-wing rhetoric forecloses the opportunity of equal and plural speech in order to strengthen patriarchal power.[46]

To begin with, and drawing on discourse analysis, note that the President pursues a *referential strategy* (see Reisigl/Wodak 2001, 47). This strategy allows him via the binary opposition of friend and enemy to construct dichotomous groups.[47] The nominalization Trump uses is, at least at the

39 https://forward.com/fast-forward/428179/congress-bds-aoc-tlaib-omar/

40 https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/06/politics/ocasio-cortez-youngest-woman-ever-/index.html

41 https://www.boston.com/news/politics/2018/11/08/ayanna-pressley-is-officially-massachusetts-first-black-congresswoman

42 https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-01-03/two-reps-are-being-sworn-quran-it-s-symbolic-moment-muslim-americans

43 https://ndlyss.com/2018/11/19/ilhan-omar-convinces-house-to-lift-181-year-old-ban-that-prohibited-head-garbs/

44 Trump's communication via social media is the subject of a great variety of studies. Kreis (2017) and Ahmadian/Azarshahi/Paulhus (2017) trace Trump's strategies of dissemination. Against the backdrop of a form of critical discourse analysis drawing on Reyes (2011), Ross/Rivers (2020) focus specifically on the construction of the wall, drawing the rather toothless conclusion that "Trump has utilised his new rhetorical style to seek legitimacy for his proposed border wall in accordance with the strategies of appealing to emotions, presenting a hypothetical future, demonstrating rationality, utilising voices of expertise, and demonstrating altruism" (Ross/Rivers 2020, 12).

45 https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1150381394234941448?lang=de

46 Within the field of critical discourse analysis, there are various takes on the reproduction of xenophobia and racism (see Fairclough 1995, van Dijk 2008 and 2009, Hart 2015).

47 In his study *EuroMayDay-Bewegung*, Marchart, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe, shows that discourse analysis

beginning, not explicit – he talks, rather vaguely and generically, about "'Progressive' Democrat Congresswomen;" follow-up tweets,[48] however, clarify at whom Trump's attack is directed: the signifier designates, above all, the four women portrayed above. The label Trump avails himself of is intended to draw a clear line between these women and his voter base. By referring to their purported foreign descent (again, all four women are US citizens, and, with the exception of Omar, all were born in the US), Trump splits US citizens in two camps. On the one hand, there is the "greatest and most powerful Nation on earth;" on the other, there are the governments of other countries, which Trump calls "the worst, most corrupt and inept" and among which he counts the four women because of their skin color and their descent. This differentiation between the heroic US and incompetent rogue states[49] also suggests that the women's migrant background decides their future. The divide between the righteous white (male) population and the "un-American," disqualified, and, as it were, excluded proportion of people of color or women of color may be (re-) actualized at every instant. The latter – like other nonwhite members of American society – are second-class citizens.[50]

Using a *predicational stategy* (see Reisigl/Wodak 2001, 45), Trump then goes on to deny that they are in the same sense a legitimate part of the *demos* as the white population is. He not only ignores that the US is a traditional nation of immigrants brutally appropriated by European imperialism (see Hsueh 2010) but also refuses to acknowledge that the opportunity of political participation is based on the fact of citizenship – and not on race, class, or gender.[51] Against all democratic conventions, according to which the self-government of a state is bound up with the equality and freedom of all citizens (as laid down unequivocally in the *Declaration of Independence* (1776)), Trump claims an exclusive right to representation and brands every form of plurality of opinion illegitimate (see Fraser 2017). Trump transposes the possibility of counter-speech, which is constitutive of democracy and must be guaranteed and protected by the rule of law, from the juridico-political level to a chauvinistic level in order to obliquely suggest that members of the white "malestream *Leitkultur*" merely tolerate people of color but do not view them as their equals. And if, so this line of argument seems to go, those who are merely tolerated do not abide by what are purportedly the conventions and traditions of the US, they must be sent back to where they supposedly came from. There, these know-it-alls can prove what they are capable of – which, by implication, is to say that so far they have not contributed to the welfare of the US. The recurrent use of the adverb "back" ties in with the discourse on migration presented in the section above. For as "illegals," migrants, too, should be send *back* to their countries of origin. In this vein, Trump said in a speech he held on October 17, 2019: "When countries send them, they're not sending their finest, okay? Use your heads. They are not sending the finest. You've got to see some

may also be used by emancipatory forms of protest (see Marchart 2013).

48 https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1152912995938443269; as Uhlmann (2020) convincingly shows in her analysis of Trump's attacks on Elizabeth Warren, the President often uses humiliating nicknames to ridicule his opponents.

49 Derrida (2003) demonstrates that this differentiation must problematized in a number of ways, since it disseminates certain stereotypes via the use of strategies of dehumanization.

50 On this strategy of defamation, see Downing/Husband 2005.

51 Winberg (2017) shows convincingly that far from breaking in a novel way with traditional patterns (see Rowland 2019), Trump uses a well-established discriminatory rhetoric. As I have argued above with Adorno, this form of repetition contradicts the image Trump has of himself. Schneiker (2018) addresses this discrepancy.

of the people. But now we send them back."[52] This equation of political opponents with refugees seeking asylum underlines the illegitimacy of alternative political positions. How much Trump wants his opponents to disappear from the political stage is also evidenced, in the last sentence of his tweet, by his jab at Nancy Pelosi, who, as Speaker of the House of Representatives, was mainly responsible for fending off Trump's attempt to simply include the funding of the wall in its entirety in the state budget (see Martin 2019).

Thus causing a shift in political discourse, Trump legitimizes radical right-wing and anti-democratic positions and ridicules his opponents by means of sexist and racist language; and he also succeeds in making the (supposed) descent of his opponents the center of the debate, so that neither their politics nor his own failure as regards domestic politics receive any attention. In accordance with this phenomenon, the House of Representatives confined itself to platitudes in its condemnation of Trump's claims:

"The House of Representatives [...] believes that immigrants and their descendants have made America stronger, and that those who take the oath of citizenship are every bit as American as those whose families have lived in the United States for many generations [...]"[53]

Trump makes it necessary to defend the minimal standards of democracy. Under his presidency, well-established democratic achievements are once again at risk. The normalization of right-wing positions calls egalitarian and pluralist conditions into question and undermines democracy. His perfidious mixture of different rhetorical strategies – the combination of referential, predicational, and argumentative dimensions – forces the Democrats to counter his attacks one by one and to fight for and defend things that are usually taken for granted. Under Trump, all walls of political discourse seem to be coming down; in fact, however, he constantly draws up new borders. Trump's ever renewed discrimination against others, rendered legitimate by the cachet that comes with a presidency, not only affords him the attention of the media but also mobilizes his supporters to back his patriarchal claim to power. And it frees him of the nuisance of having to participate in rational debate. He can focus exclusively on sabotaging democracy and transforming political discourse.[54]

5. Concluding Remarks

To sump up, Trump's symbolic politics seeks, via the erection of a wall at the US-Mexico border, to present the *demos* as homogeneous, while at the same time erecting new borders within the US. Contrary to what Brown assumes, border regimes are not about to come to an end, since the divisions within society that go and hand in hand with the exclusion of migrants prove to stabilize power. Pointing out this reciprocal relationship, I have shown that the Trump administration uses the feeling of insecurity consequent on a foul security policy to justify anti-democratic measures. Crucially, this form of anti-egalitarian border politics does not weaken

52 https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2019/10/17/trump_the_same_people_who_want_us_to_fight_endless_wars_want_us_to_open_our_borders.html

53 https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-116hres489ih/pdf/BILLS-116hres489ih.pdf

54 Berlet aptly sums up this broad strategy of dismantling democracy, which in the US reaches back to Reagan, with the phrase "Trumping Democracy" (Berlet 2019). He entertains the hope, however, that the alt-right movement and similar groups are nearing their end. Consequently, he fails to ask why and how existing inequalities are upheld and strengthened by capitalism.

the political elite but strengthens it by conjuring up an external threat. Drawing on Adorno's sociopsychological reflections, I have demonstrated that in times of crisis even those parts of the population who are, according to their class consciousness, liberal and bourgeois yet are afraid to lose their social status may be radicalized due to their fear of social decline. The ongoing erosion of domestic politics and a steadily growing proportion of citizens with racist or fascist views promote authoritarianism and help transform the US. That this transformation happens at the expense of those who voted Trump into office reflects the paradoxical interaction between the dismantling of welfare-state achievements in the name of the subaltern and the continuation of existing forms of exploitation. Thanks to a pathic projection onto subalterns, which satisfies both the sadistic desire and the masochistic desire to submit to a leader, Trump's plan to stabilize existing unequal distributions gets the support of a great proportion of the (white) population. Those belonging to the middle and the lower classes are particularly liable to fall for the distorted images and ideological manipulation deployed by right-wing populists. As a consequence, they tend to blame the humiliation they experience not on the bad performance of the political elites, who are at least partly responsible for the crises we are facing, but on those who are even worse off than they are. I have also shown that against the widely held notion that the supposedly emancipatory rhetoric of the right finally enables people to tell it like it is, we are not so much witnessing the decline of political correctness as the erection of new walls, with the normalization of right-wing discourse subverting every form of plurality. Again, the pent-up rage within society is directed not at those eroding the democratic conditions of freedom and equality but at those who criticize the system and try to create new forms of living together. The effects of Trump's rhetoric of walls and borders on the political debate attest to the effectiveness of the alliance between right-wing politics and economic inequality. Trump seeks to weaken his political opponents not only by ruling by decree and enfeebling parliamentarism but also – as evidenced by the example of *The Squad* – by publicly defaming them. Discourse analysis makes clear the extent to which Trump adopts the friend/enemy scheme surrounding the construction of the wall in order to, via predicational attributions, deny the legitimacy of opposing positions and weave the discourse on migrants into the political debate. This strategy forces his opponents to spend considerable time countering false accusations and defending the minimal standards of democracy; thanks to it, Trump no longer has to deal with dissenting views or the complex process of democratic decision-making. In this sense, the current state of the US can be described in terms of a precarious dialectic: The construction of a wall at the border corresponds with the erection of barriers within the US, pushing back social mobility, plurality, and equality.

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