

Everyday practices and the (un)making of 'Fortress Europe': Introduction to the special issue

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Abstract

The borders of Europe are erected and guarded through cultural practices as much as through border control and security technologies. Cultural Studies have been crucial in revealing how everyday, particularly media-oriented practices, make and unmake this 'Fortress'. Yet, until now, the focus has been mostly on how migrants use or are represented through media discourses and technologies. This introduction essay argues that the signifier 'Fortress Europe'—and its central premise of restraining mobility for some in order to enable freedom for others—also gains meaning in and through socio-cultural practices that we may not (as) immediately associate with the physical crossing of European borders. Particular practices that are discussed in this introduction and examined in the seven original articles of the special issue are: public opinion research, the public mobilization of emotions, negotiating identity in an 'ancestral homeland', the consumption of (sports) media, the production of a radio talk show and film archives, as well as the activist use of social media. Broadening scholarly attention to these kinds of sociocultural practices provides an important addition to understanding how power operates across social spheres and discursive orders. In addition, their identification also offers valuable opportunities to understand how and why some practices are particularly pertinent or effective in cementing or destabilizing Fortress Europe. This line of inquiry is visible throughout this special issue, despite the diversity of theoretical frameworks and empirical sites used in the contributing articles.

Keywords

Cultural studies, discourse, socio-cultural practices, Europe, racism, liberal paradox, borders, social exclusion

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, a border is not just a line on a map; it is a system for filtering people that stretches from the edges of a territory into its heart. (Trilling, 2018: 10–11)

Like in other academic, policy-oriented and media reporting (e.g. Batha, 2017; Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2017; Wodak, 2018), the title of this special issue places Fortress Europe between quotation marks. We do this, first, to highlight the starting point of our thinking about Europe, namely, that there is nothing natural or straightforward about ‘fortress’ being an attribute of Europe. This is not in the least because Europe is often associated with freedom of movement and the disappearance of borders. In fact, the notion of ‘fortress’ invokes associations with historical experiences that Europe has proudly left behind, including the hostile fortification of continental Europe by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. After all, the European Union (EU) was established, through the Treaty of Rome in 1957, precisely to eschew hostility and division.

Second, we use quotation marks to underscore that the very term ‘Europe’ is far from singular or unequivocal in meaning. In contrast, ‘Europe’ is a political project that ideologically (re-)produces Europe not only in terms of territory, but also, and arguably increasingly more, in terms of a population connected in its ‘Europeanness’. The political discourse of Fortress Europe thus features as part of efforts to shape Europe as bounded territory *and* as population. Following from this point, we use quotation marks to indicate that Fortress Europe is not set in stone, but, instead, is built on porous foundations that are cemented by a range of everyday practices, many of which are media-related.

Because Fortress Europe is as much produced by contexts and configurations of power in which language, culture and media circulate, as it is by economic and political institutions, cultural studies scholarship is crucially equipped to illuminate how it is being made and unmade and to offer concrete strategies for intervention. Indeed, the last years have seen a proliferation of cultural studies work on this topic. This scholarship can be broadly categorized into two branches. The first demonstrates how European borders and identities are upheld through a range of (mediated) discourses and practices, including, for example, representations of migrants and migration in journalism and political communication (Horsti, 2016), the ‘communicative architecture’ of border practices (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2017), and the discursive construction of European identities (Wodak et al., 2009). The other branch explores how media technologies can be used, especially by migrants themselves, in the construction of connectedness (Morley, 2002), the formation of identities (De Leeuw and Rydin, 2007), the re-imagining of the diaspora (Bailey, 2007) and the digital management of ‘throwntogetherness’ (Leurs, 2014).

In this way, cultural studies have attended to the construction of Fortress Europe through a focus on everyday practices that explicitly concern migration or physical boundaries. In this special issue, we expand this line of inquiry through analyses that underscore how the signifier Fortress Europe also gains meaning in and through practices that we may not (as) immediately associate with the crossing of European borders. Broadening scholarly attention to sociocultural practices that play an inconspicuous role in this respect provides an important addition to understanding how power operates

across social spheres and discursive orders. In addition, their identification also offers valuable opportunities to understand how and why *some* practices are particularly pertinent or effective in cementing or destabilizing Fortress Europe, a line of inquiry that is visible throughout this special issue, despite the diversity of theoretical frameworks and empirical sites used in the contributing articles.

We use this introduction to carve out what we think are particularly fruitful conceptual lines to examine the relation between everyday sociocultural practices and Fortress Europe. We start, in the section ‘The “liberal paradox” of EU migration regulation’, by exploring the tangible bricks of this fortress: actual policies, agreements and decisions that lead to the refusal of refugees, the re-erection of national borders, and intense policing of Europe’s external borders. We argue that the foundational reasoning behind these actions – that is, the logic used to rationalize and legitimize them – is the so-called ‘liberal paradox’ (Hollifield, 1992, 2004). In the section “‘Recited truths’ of the liberal paradox’, we translate the liberal paradox into two recited ‘truths’ about the regulation of freedom and risk in Europe. We underscore how paying attention to these truths, how they circulate and can be halted, enables critical – and much needed – inquiries and interventions into the making and unmaking of Fortress Europe. In the section ‘Cultural practices that “stick”’, we explain and illustrate how the articles in this special issue theoretically and empirically develop and push this agenda forward.

The ‘liberal paradox’ of EU migration regulation

In late 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was hailed as the moral compass of Europe’s migration stance. Not only had she ‘taken in’ one million Syrian refugees, she had also defied or, to use official terminology, ‘suspended’ the ‘Dublin Regulation’. This regulation refers to a set of agreements, ratified in 1990 by almost all EU member states at the time and amended twice, in 2003 and in 2015. The ‘Dublin I’ regulation from 1990 was designed to accommodate the Geneva Charter of Human Rights in European migration policy, by securing the rights of refugees and protecting them from what has been termed ‘orbiting’ in Europe.

However, its updates – notably timed and presented as responses to ‘9/11’ and the ‘refugee crisis’ – gradually moved away from stipulating the rights of refugees to outlining the responsibilities of EU member states vis-a-vis each other. According to ‘Dublin II’ (2003) and ‘Dublin III’ (2015), member states where refugees enter the EU are administratively responsible for documenting and assessing residency application data. In the late summer of 2015, Merkel’s government ignored this procedure: It decided to welcome all Syrian asylum seekers, independently of the country through which they had entered the EU (Hall and Lichfield, 2015). In defending this measure, Merkel appealed to Europe’s basic principles of free movement and respect for universal civil rights. ‘If Europe fails on the question of refugees, this close connection with universal civil rights ... will be destroyed and it won’t be the Europe we want’, she said (Dearden, 2015).

Merkel was praised by the Council of Europe (2015; Muižnieks, 2015) and the European Commission’s (2015a) Migration and Home affairs. Moreover, on 9 September 2015, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, echoed the German Chancellor’s arguments. In his state of the union address, Juncker claimed that welcoming

refugees was ‘a matter of humanity and of human dignity. And for Europe it is also a matter of historical fairness’. That so many people were fleeing to Europe to be safe was ‘something to be proud of and not something to fear’, he explained (Juncker, 2015).

Yet, less than a week after Juncker’s address, the German government decided to temporarily re-erect its national borders with Austria, allegedly forced by the ‘extraordinary’ high numbers of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees trying to enter Germany through the Balkan route. And so the same German government that had claimed that the country would welcome those seeking protection on the basis of their humanity was now essentially pushing refugees ‘back’ south and reintroducing border controls.

A number of other EU countries followed the German example and temporarily closed their borders. The decision effectively meant dismantling ‘Schengen’. The Schengen agreements, originally drawn up by five European countries in 1985, prescribe the removal of border control and document checks within the Schengen area, thus known as Europe’s free travel zone. As explained in a special European Commission (2015b) brochure:

On a continent where nations once shed blood to defend their territories, today borders only exist on maps ... The creation of the Schengen area is one of the greatest achievements of the EU and it is irreversible. Now, free movement makes Europe smaller and unites us. (p. 3)

Like the EU’s key ‘constitutional’ treaties of Rome and Maastricht, the agreements of Dublin and Schengen rely heavily on discursive practices, quite literally in terms of writing down visions, ratifying them through signatures of heads of state and making them effective through specific trade policies, migration regimes, monetary measures and constitutional agendas. However, these two sets of agreements – the constitutional treaties of Rome and Maastricht, on one hand, and the agreements signed in Dublin and Schengen, on the other hand – put forward contrasting visions of Europe’s openness. This contrast is worth a more detailed examination.

The vision of Europe contained in the Treaty of Rome of 1957 was that of a single market, the one of the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 that of a monetary union. ‘Rome’ and ‘Maastricht’ can thus be read as efforts to extend and accommodate the free movement of people, goods, services and capital within Europe. ‘Dublin’ and ‘Schengen’, in contrast, can be seen as instructions on whose free movement may be limited or privileged. More specifically, the Dublin regulations, initially posited to secure the rights of refugees, are now used to legitimize their rejection. In fact, the ‘Turkey deal’, the ‘Sudan deal’ and other joint efforts to remove EU entry points and refugees from European sight and soil further normalize the Dublin logic that the best way to protect refugees is by discouraging them from coming to Europe. The same holds for the Schengen agreement. As in the re-installation of borders between EU countries in late 2015, the ‘once-you-are-in-you-are-in’ logic of Schengen no longer guarantees the privilege of travelling freely. Instead, it is used to licence measures to scale up and step up the patrol of Europe’s internal and external borders. This makes clear a notable clash between the ‘original’ constitutional conviction that only the collective opening of borders and facilitation of free movement can build and maintain a European ‘union’ and the philosophy that, in fact, only the collective policing of borders and regulating of free movement can do so.

This deviation from the original focus on Europe's openness is particularly meaningful in relation to what political scientist James Hollifield (1992, 2004) calls Europe's 'liberal paradox', the idea that Europe is 'caught' in the need to simultaneously manage the opportunities *and* the political risks of openness. The free movement of people, Hollifield (2004) argues, poses a much bigger 'political risk' to the protection of 'the demos, ... the integrity of the community, and ... the social contract' than the movement of goods, capitals and services does (p. 884, 900). Governments of liberal states can 'escape' the liberal paradox through what he terms the *institutionalization of openness*. They can, for example, simultaneously roll out specific EU trade politics and migration regimes to enable an 'equilibrium' between openness and closure (Hollifield, 2004: 900).

The liberal paradox – albeit not necessarily flagged in these terms – has become a pervasive concept that informs the decisions and sensitivities of many politicians, policy makers and ordinary citizens today. The concept assumes an intrinsic tension between the advantages of Europe's free movement and the cultural and political risks this freedom brings. Moreover, the concept suggests that this tension can be resolved through adequate political management, as visible in the nature and timing of the German government's suspension of the Dublin regulations and then the Schengen agreement. The German moves – and those of other European countries that followed – also aptly illustrate the importance of 'clever' political mixing, matching and interpreting of policies and agreements in 'resolving' the dilemma. Thus, the veracity of the liberal paradox is heavily contingent on political or ideological principles and discursive work. We argue that such discursive work translates the liberal paradox into hegemonic 'truths' about what Europe is and what it should be within a wider context of global migration. In the following section, we distinguish and discuss two of these crucial 'truths'.

'Recited truths' of the liberal paradox

The first undisputed 'truth' of the liberal paradox is that regulating freedom and regulating risk are two sides of the same coin. As in the example of Germany's political manoeuvring in 2015, the two are treated as resources that can be strategically accessed and exploited in order to create an 'acceptable' balance between openness and closure. The ideological nature of the idea that freedom and security are inextricable is underscored by Jef Huysmans' extensive work on the '(in-) securitization' of migration (e.g. Huysmans, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006). Of particular relevance here is his analysis of how the EU's restrictive security measures have become inextricably connected to the celebration and fostering of the openness of EU's internal market (Huysmans, 2004). Drawing on Foucault, Huysmans explores the modalities and technologies of government that rationalize and normalize this connection. He shows how the existence of an 'internal security field' is posited as an inevitable ramification – or a 'spill-over' (Huysmans, 2004: 295) – of the elimination of internal borders. This supposedly 'functional' relationship between freedom and security is reinforced by the premise that, when not 'orderly conduct[ed]', people overindulge in freedom and infringe the freedom of others (Huysmans, 2004: 305). Thus, the architects and bureaucrats of the internal security market have a vested interest in politicizing the relationship between freedom and security as essentially functional and inevitable. As the governance of freedom in Europe

becomes a ‘security question’ (Huysmans, 2004: 296), it is necessary to figure out *which* and *whose freedoms* are allegedly excessive or risky, as well as how these freedoms are rendered governable.

These questions, and their answers, bring us to what we consider the second undisputed truth of the liberal paradox, namely, that not all or everyone’s freedom in Europe is good or safe. Some uses of freedom are deemed politically ‘risky’. Returning, again, to the strategic ‘flip-flopping’ of the German government in 2015, we can gather that the political delineation of risky freedom in Europe is not fixed. Whereas the entry of one million Syrian refugees was deemed ‘safe’ in early September 2015, something had apparently changed a couple weeks later in the calculation of the refugees’ risk. If anything, these risk-calculating efforts essentialize and normalize what is a heavily ideological – in fact, heavily racialized and gendered – construct, namely, that all people are inclined to excessive uses of freedom, but some more than others.

To summarize, we argue that the liberal paradox – which assumes a necessary tension between opportunities and risks in European openness – operates ideologically in the politics and policies of Fortress Europe through two commonplace logics or ‘truths’. The first is that freedom in Europe is inherently vulnerable and thus a security question. The second is that *some* (people’s) uses of freedom are particularly risk-prone. We treat these two ‘undisputable’ logics as ‘recited truths’ (Lentin and Titley, 2011), that is, beliefs that obtain their hegemonic or unchallenged status through their circulation and, in particular, through the political and affective investment in both the beliefs and their circulation. Applying the notion of recited truths – originally developed to examine the justification for ‘post-multicultural’ policies (Lentin and Titley, 2011) – to the realm of migration and security policies helps understand how the liberal paradox gives legitimacy to actual policies and decisions, including the re-erection of national borders, the refusal to accept refugees, the monitoring of migration through the prism of risk and the ‘outsourcing’ of permit assessments to countries far away from European territory.

While the *bricks* of Fortress Europe are international treaties, migration policies, border patrol in the Mediterranean, biometric airport technologies and Frontex’s risk statistics, the two recited truths of the liberal paradox are the *cement* that closes holes between bricks and that, in turn, allows for the ideological configuration and justification of individual bricks. This cement, however, is often put in place or corroded through everyday cultural and media practices, the impact of which remains largely unacknowledged and unchallenged. In the section that follows, we explain what this means for a cultural studies inquiry into the making and unmaking of Fortress Europe, drawing from the contributions to this special issue.

Cultural practices that ‘stick’

The argument that the recited truths of the liberal paradox play a key role in keeping the bricks of Fortress Europe together fits into cultural studies’ efforts to examine how cultural practices, discourses and technologies sanction boundaries or take them down. However, as suggested above, the relation between these practices, discourses or technologies and European boundaries is not always readily recognizable. The problem is that they commonly take place far away from physical borders (Loong, 2018), entrenched in practices of racism and social exclusion (Morning, 2009; Van Sterkenburg, 2017; Wekker, 2016), or embedded

in broader security frames (Engelbert and Awad, 2014). That is why our goal is to find out how and why some cultural practices, particularly the kinds that have not been explicitly explored as crucial to European border-making, make the recited truths of the liberal paradox ‘stick’ even more or make them lose their adhesiveness.

In their efforts to reveal why and how specific cultural practices are so crucial to the making and unmaking of Fortress Europe, the articles in this special issue pay special attention to the strategies and practices that a multiplicity of actors, in a wide range of settings and geographical contexts, use to construct insiders and outsiders of Europe and, in so doing, engage (often implicitly) with the recited truths of Fortress Europe. Put differently, the articles in this volume examine practices that are strategic and performatively successful to the extent that they address the assumption that migrants and refugees, considered as a population *in* – as opposed to citizens *of* – Europe, are a threat to Europe’s cultural coherence and political wholeness. The focus of the first four articles is on discursive practices that, for the most part, build on (and reinforce) this assumption. They thus are practices that are exclusionary and dehumanizing. In turn, the other three articles deal with initiatives aimed mainly at ‘playing’ the recited truths in the opposite direction, namely, to reveal their absurdity and propose socially inclusive alternatives. While we cannot do justice to the full richness and nuance of these empirical analyses in this introduction, we underscore how they fit into the more general interventionist agenda of undoing Fortress Europe, by bringing to the surface the specific, often unacknowledged, everyday mechanisms that underlie and constitute its existence.

The special issue opens with Slootweg, Van Reekum and Schinkel’s exploration of the 1988 Eurobarometer survey. The survey was ordered by the European Parliament to ‘measure’ racism and was presented, in part, as a response to the electoral success of extreme right-wing parties across Europe in the mid-1980s. Through the prism of science and technology studies, the authors conduct a detailed analysis of the opinion survey, revealing a number of strategic choices that end up producing racism as a problem ‘not of Europe’ (Slootweg et al., this issue), but, at most, as an exceptional deficient attitude in some individuals. To mention some examples, the survey and its report relied on official national registers of citizens, answer categories that precluded any kind of identification between migrants and respondents, and on visualizations and categorizations that concealed racism among European nationals. It would be impossible to understand the acceptance of such methodological choices as legitimate research had it not been for their strong grounding – and at the same time, capacity to strengthen – the, by then, emergent recited truths of Fortress Europe.

Continuing within the realm of political institutions, Ojala, Kaasik and Pantti explore how political elites discursively address the ‘refugee crisis’ in two countries with contrasting approaches to refugees and asylum seekers: Finland and Estonia. The authors focus on national addresses by the two countries’ presidents, both political figures who do not have any ‘real’ political power, but who are expected to show leadership in values, particularly in times of ‘crises’. An examination of the strategic affordances of emotions in these presidential speeches underscores their crucial role in the construction of ‘affective communities’. Further evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies is obtained through an analysis of ‘non-elite’ talk about refugees in online tabloid news fora. The mobilization of emotions appears to be particularly effective when it accommodates anti-elitist and anti-immigration sentiments, and thus when it acknowledges that the ‘nation’ is a politically exclusive community, not for refugees, but for a country’s ‘own’ citizens. Ojala and his colleagues make

visible how emotional positions that build on the idea that asylum seekers – and not ‘nationals’ – should be the ones warranting exclusion, keep the recited truths firmly in their place.

Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan’s analysis further unpacks the discriminatory logic through which social exclusion is legitimized. Their focus is on the subjects of such exclusionary discourses: US women moving to small towns on Italy or Spain’s islands as a ‘return’ to what is considered their ‘ancestral homeland’, the land of their parents. Notably, then, the settings for the study are strongly gendered, traditional societies, at Europe’s Southern migration border. Repatriate women arrive to these settings with what Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan (this issue) call ‘nativity vouchers’ that place them in a somehow privileged position in relation to other immigrants. Yet, their gendered presence is read in terms of risks for local communities and translated into stigmatized positions that underscore the general instability of national and ethnic categories as well as the specific ways in which borders may operate in relation to local cultures. It becomes clear how inclusion takes much more than a passport, language skills and an ancestral history.

Moving to a crucial – albeit relatively unacknowledged – site where hegemonic distinctions between ‘good citizens’ who belong and ‘other populations’ who do not really belong are upheld, Van Sterkenburg, Peeters and Van Amsterdam examine everyday ‘football talk’. Specifically, they focus on audience discourses about football teams and individual players, that are heavily mediated, largely through television. The authors show that this is a crucial platform for the reinforcement of racialized, ethnicized and gendered discourses. Based on focus groups with young people in The Netherlands – meant to elicit ‘multi-ethnic’ football talk – they identify key tactics participants deploy in constructing Muslim Dutch–Moroccan and Dutch–Turkish players (and fans) as different. A particularly important tactic in this respect is the strategic conflating of race and ethnicity. This is a tactic participants deploy when discussing which players in the Dutch national team are ‘proper Dutch’ (Van Sterkenburg et al., this issue) and in identifying intellect and physical force as football’s two key virtues. Van Sterkenburg et al. contextualize their findings within neoliberal racism in The Netherlands and in other European countries, a context that legitimizes everyday racism in the name of meritocracy.

In these first contributions to the special issue, then, the authors problematize and politicize the invoking of recited truths by actors who take strategic advantage of them. In the last contributions, the special issue turns to discursive initiatives, which are themselves deliberate political interventions. In the case of Malmberg and Awad, the focus is on a Finnish public radio talk show called *Ali and Husu*. The authors examine the specific strategies used by the producers to minimize the risks associated with multicultural programming, while putting together a programme that explicitly undermined racism and exclusionary group identities. They pay attention to the decisions involved in both the formal composition of the programme and its content. Formally, the programme involved two hosts – a stand-up comedian and a politician, both immigrants from Iran and from Somalia – as well as a diversity of guests and calls from the audience. In terms of content, Malmberg and Awad show how *Ali and Husu*’s combination of humour and serious talk and their outspoken engagement with cultural prejudices against their own and mainstream groups, as well as against anti-immigrant parties and even against overly protective pro-immigrant activists, turned the programme into a powerful social critique, and a quite popular one.

Horsti’s contribution has a double focus. On one hand, it focuses on the *Archivio delle memorie migranti* (AMM), an online audio-visual archive, which documents and

archives the experiences of migrants in Italy. On the other hand, it focuses on one specific documentary produced by AMM: *Come un uomo sulla terra/Like a Man on Earth*. Horsti's detailed analysis of producers' logistical and aesthetic choices provides a compelling account of how empathetic witnessing of suffering at Europe's borders is made possible and politically effective. These choices include the involvement of scholars, activists, and migrants in participatory production that takes advantage of the accessibility of video and film; the strategic use of language, camera angles, and settings; the incorporation of historical footage; the reliance on an open source licence and transnational screenings among diasporic communities. The result makes visible the violence of EU exclusionary practices to contemporary and future audiences.

Finally, in her analysis of grassroots, local online initiatives of refugee support groups in Greece, Siapera contrasts their practices with the securitization practices of the EU and the 'post-humanitarian' practices of large global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Chouliaraki, 2010). Avoiding the assumption that (social) media themselves favour specific kinds of solidarity, Siapera (this issue) focuses on the Facebook pages of 12 specific volunteer initiatives. Her analysis shows how these small-scale initiatives manage to set in motion a 'political project of solidarity as the connection of various people subjected to different but equally devastating crises, in order to come together as political subjects'. Thus, the specific practices examined by Siapera challenge the dehumanizing dominant discourses and policies that place the interests of refugees against those of dispossessed EU citizens. That their performative force is not as strong as that of mainstream media and global NGOs, Siapera (this issue) argues, does not mean that they can be dismissed; they play an important role in a 'rising politics from below'.

All together, then, the articles in this special issue underscore a crucial role for cultural studies vis-a-vis Fortress Europe. Because such a fortress is not simply a discursive construct that can be taken down through critically reading against the grain, the articles call our attention to the concrete everyday and institutional practices through which Fortress Europe is being both buttressed and destabilized. Moreover, for the most part, contributors examine practices that have remained rather unexplored in this kind of research until now. Specifically, they carefully scrutinize practices related to public opinion research, the public mobilization of emotions, women's return to an 'ancestral homeland', football talk, archival activism and documentary filmmaking, the combination of humour and serious talk, and social media use among pro-refugee activists. Set in a variety of local, national and cross-national settings, all studies are a testimony to the commitment with social justice and intervention that characterizes cultural studies at its best (Grossberg, 1998; Hall, 1992; Hermes et al., 2017).

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