

Unequal exchanges, labor mobility from Eastern Europe and the radicalization of demographic nationalisms in Eastern Europe

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In January 11, 2015, after the attacks in Paris against Charlie Hebdo, the Hungarian prime minister went public with the following statements: “We need to talk about immigration and related cultural questions more openly, honestly and in a more straightforward manner...Economic immigration is a bad thing in Europe, it should not be seen as having any utility, because it brings trouble and danger to the European man, and thus immigration is to be stopped, this is the Hungarian standpoint...We do not want to see a substantial minority having different cultural traits and background among us, we would like to keep Hungary a Hungarian land.” At the first moment, this just looked like a provocative statement, but later it proved to be a successful formulation from a discursive point of view as it successfully combined and revised various major discourses on nationhood and Europe and Europeanness understood in a hierarchical space. Orbán soon followed by other leaders in Eastern Europe utilized the nationalist critique of pro-Western liberal discourses: Hungary and Eastern Europe has always been European and a defender of Europe and we need no “Europeanization,” or liberal preaching about anti-racism. These discourses combined this reclaimed and conservative Europeanness with the social exclusion and social competition discourses against immigrants, who, according to these public discourses, are supposedly taking jobs from local or from European citizens in general. And then, with a stress on defending the East European within and their labor mobility in Europe, the political discourses amalgamated all the above with the topics of securitization and the dangers of the ethnic/racial/religious mixing of populations via referring to the special status of Hungary and Eastern Europe within Europe. This use and recombination of discursive traditions has led to a hegemony in which counter-discourses remain suppressed or unsuccessful (silent), a fact which can be demonstrated not only by the dominance of the above discourses, but also by the knowledge that the 2016 “anti-quota” referendum and the positions of the government were counterbalanced by the silence of opponents and abstentions from voting.

How should we understand such changes? How should we understand and very importantly interpret demographic and migratory discourses which combine selective anti-immigration discourses and regulations with straightforward selective state-sponsored pronatalism and the radicalized defense of Europeanness and nationhood? This approach we term here as radical, East European demographic nationalism, which is a specific form of competitive political demography aimed at controlling and developing a specific group of the “population” who are seen as a source of economic and cultural advancement, the “strength” of the “nation,” as opposed to “other” groups which represent danger in this respect. This balance is further complicated by the loss of “blood” via economic emigration endangering national development. This tradition has an intellectual history going back as far as the early 19th century, including authors like the 18th century philosopher called Herder. The East European case described below is one of these “demographic” competitions, but it has some special features, which we analyze. This paper argues that within this complex dynamic there is an interaction between various global and local changes (e.g. the emergence of new “authoritarianism” from India to the United States, after a longer liberal phase) among which factors we now focus on the historical interplay between an evolving radical demographic nationalisms, and the demographic and migratory structural context of massive labor outflows from the region.

Thus we analyze the discursive traditions in a structural context in which Eastern Europe is becoming (again) an emigrant region as a reaction to the refolding of the these societies into the competitive mechanisms of global capitalism. These changes include the increasing demand for labor within the internally open European Union and other longer-term local developments which have uprooted and

continue to uproot a large number of people in East European societies. This process has been going on in a new economic context in which global (and within it, Western) capitalism operates using various forms of unequal exchange and path-dependencies and is replacing older methods of securing an “appropriate” labor force in the midst of the massive cyclical and structural problems that European economies face.

Following the logic of structure versus discourse interplay in a global context, we first carry out a historical structural analysis of demographic processes. Then, policies and institutionalized norms are reviewed. Finally, we analyze the radicalization of wider and popular political discourses in order to complete a complex and dynamic analysis of demographic nationalism and panic in Eastern Europe in the second decade of the Millennium.