

The Budapest Demographic Summit and Great Replacement Theories

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Demographic change poses major challenges for many countries, but the discussions at the Budapest Demographic Summit rarely focus on mortality or ageing, but on fertility and reproduction ideologies instead.

Budapest has hosted the fifth so called Demographic Summit between September 14 and 16 (<https://budapestidemografiaicsucs2023.hu/en>).



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Such events can be very important terrains of discussing demographic development, which in terms of fertility, family formation, mortality, ageing is going through a new and challenging period. At the moment these discussions are shaped by different historical-political blocks namely a liberal pro market and pro-opening-up and an anti-liberal, “illiberal”, often nationalist bloc.

This summit is a key event among neo-conservative thinkers and politicians all around the world. Very interestingly on a political level South East European and Central European heads of states and prime ministers frequently show up beside Western neoconservative intellectuals and combatant political figures. Anxiety and mobilization are key elements of the meetings of this anti-liberal historical-political

block, which combines ideas of revitalizing “irresponsible” societies and claims of a need to achieve hegemony.

They have mainly focused on how policies concerning the strengthening the social and demographic position of families and children, and how the “traditional” values can be protected. This is linked to the issue of “extreme” levels of immigration due to a push from poorly developed, often Muslim countries and/or organized plots of liberal elites. This criticism does aim at ideas of strong control without a systematic critique of socio-economic factors.

Discussions rarely focus on mortality, not to mention ageing. This could have come in the context of too low fertility and the problems of maintaining and reproducing “traditional” communities. As they put it to avoid “great replacement” via “uncontrolled” migration and low reproduction rates. As we can see below, this year’s topic is in line with this and the organizers continue neo-conservative politicians and experts like before. Here is the guide for this year:

Family: The Key to Security

How can we strengthen traditional communities? How can we strengthen the sense of security of children, parents and grandparents? And what does security mean for families? How does (social) media influence the way we think about families and what does science tell us about the future of our communities? How can we protect our children from the dangers of the real and virtual worlds, and what should we do about the new challenges brought to life by the developers of artificial intelligence? Why are not enough children born in Europe and what can we do to reverse the trend? Can the demographic winter that has hit our continent ever end and, if so, what kind of renewal can follow? What are the problems faced where populations are growing and how are we affected? This year we are looking for answers to these and similar questions.

Danger, security and anxiety are key words in these summits and thus they fit very well into our research topic on demographic anxieties. Europe and the West is in danger to be protected by “true” Europeans and Westerners, who have not forgotten lessons of the “Christian” and “white” history. We will come back to this event and analyze some of the key speeches, but before let us give a brief introduction into this anxiety of “grand replacement”.

The theory and its key elements

The theory of the Great Replacement direct biopolitical competition has a conceptual framework (originating in France in its present form) that merges or recombines very different discursive traditions and is clearly based on a personified critique of globalization.[1] It became a specific, essentialized form of the critique of globalization that personified the danger as migrants and elite groups. It rebelled against migration as a purely market calculus, without systematic consideration of market institutions, using inherited or often ideologically alien critical vocabulary, while claiming that during globalization

there was a massive and coordinated attempt to replace local populations with migrants. Renaud Camus, a Frenchman, was one of the most striking figures of this school of thought. In an interview published in Hungarian, Camus put his ideas as follows:

“The Great Replacement is not a theory, but a more or less appropriate name for a gigantic, indisputably real and catastrophic phenomenon: the replacement of populations, a genocide by substitution. Global replacement, however, is very much a theory, a worldview. I believe that the emblematic motif of post-industrial modernity is the action and the fact of substitution: replacing the true with the false, the real with the fake, the indigenous with the outsider, the natural with the artificial, the expensive with the cheap, the complicated with the simple, Velence in Hungary with Venice in Las Vegas, Paris in France with Paris in Beijing, Versailles with Disneyland, the real world with the tourist replica, stone and marble with chipboard, wood with plastic, literature with journalism, journalism with ‘news flashes’, art with science, science with ‘social sciences’, Europe with Africa, culture with entertainment, nature with buildings, urban and rural places with universal suburbia, music with thundering noise, mountains with mechanical elevators, man with woman, man and woman with robots, mothers with surrogate mothers, humanity with post-humanity, humanism with transhumanism, the human race with the Uniformed Human Matter—yes, man as a product, the human Nutella, that dubious, non-stop produced industrial mass.”^[2]

What is interesting here is not only the extremely eclectic and confusing set of claims, but also the fact that the key element is the idea of a replaceable and interchangeable population, which clearly reflects the cultural critique of the abstract category of reified and replaceable people for instance through substituting emigrants with immigrants. It is therefore crucial to see that this conspiracy theory is not simply a theory in itself, but specifically informed by, or rather linked to marketization without a systematic critique. It is a mythical and personified critique of a real social and discursive processes:

“...what I call global replacement, and for some time now ‘Davocracy’, or rather ‘direct Davocracy’. The human zoo is run by Davos, you know, the Swiss town where the world’s financial leaders hold their annual Nuremberg Congress. The Marx of global replacement is none other than Frederick Winslow Taylor, and his Capital is titled The Principles of Scientific Management. The interests here are the same as economic interests, in two senses of the word: in addition to a purely economic, or rather financial, world view, we find the desire for cost-effectiveness, for the lowest possible price, for frugality, for the generalized inexpensiveness made possible by egalitarianism and standardization. To translate this into the language of cinema, we could say that global replacement equals Modern Times plus Metropolis plus Soylent Green. The hyper-rich, the capitalists who have distanced themselves from reality, have set themselves the goal of generalized dehumanization, which they achieve by forcing the intermingling of populations, and by grinding human raw material into a homogeneous, industrial mass.”^[3]

It is a crucial point of the above argument that market rationality is not a social institution that affects

the whole of society, including migrants, but a principle imposed by particular individuals and groups on the otherwise “innocent” masses through “Davocracy.” Authors associated with this discourse spoke of a perpetuated propaganda: according to them, a liberal, cosmopolitan elite was suppressing the basic instincts of the population by implementing and propagating a “genderist deconstruction,” thus making “white,” “European,” and “Christian” peoples vulnerable to invasion by Muslims and other non-European groups. Zémour argued at the Fourth Demographic Summit in Budapest that, in defiance of Tocqueville’s principle of sovereignty, the unsuspecting majority that was overly supportive of minorities had become subjugated to a minority and the lobbies that are implementing the Great Replacement.[4]

The Budapest Demographic Summits are thus pessimistic, but combatant block events to find policy and political interventions in order to strengthen national and regional reproduction ideologies. In this process it seems that there are local factors which make South Eastern Europe particularly apt for such factors, which enter into a global-local interplay.

Bibliography

[1] See this in detail: Melegh, A. (2023). *The Migration Turn and Eastern Europe. A Global Historical Sociological Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[2] Translated from Hungarian: Leimeiszter B. (2018, March 4). Mentsük Európából azt, ami még menthető! – Renaud Camus a Mandinernek. Mandiner.
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[3] Translated from Hungarian: Leimeiszter B. (2018, March 4). Mentsük Európából azt, ami még menthető! – Renaud Camus a Mandinernek. Mandiner.
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[4] Földi-Kovács, A. (2021, September 24). *Panelbeszélgetés: Éric Zemmour, Szánthó Miklós, Dr. Szilvay Gergely. Budapesti Demográfiai Csúcs. 2021. Szeptember 24. 15:30-16:30.*
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