

**BETWEEN GLOBAL AND LOCAL HIERARCHIES:  
POPULATION MANAGEMENT IN THE FIRST HALF OF  
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study proposes new ways of comparing discourses on population and argues that these discourses concern both management of the reproduction of human bodies on a massive scale, and competition at global and local levels for resources and/or an improved position in global and local hierarchies. This interface between global and local hierarchies actually reveals how we can understand the comparative politics of population management. We aim to establish some of the basic types of such positioning, linking global and local hierarchies in order to start the work of a truly comparative analysis of patterns of population policy, which cannot be sufficiently explained by demographic processes or the specific ideologies of ruling groups.*

**I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS**

In this study I propose new ways of comparing discourses on population. I argue that these discourses concern both management of the reproduction of human bodies on a massive scale, and competition at global and local levels for resources and/or an improved position in global and local hierarchies. In this sense I propose that Foucauldian biopolitical concerns need to be reintegrated into global versus local social inequality systems and related class-conflict discourses (Dean 2001; Stoler 1995). My aim is to provide concrete examples of biopolitical and competition (e.g. class conflict) discourses and relate these at a global level so as to enable comparative understanding of population policies.

History shows that world capitalism has been a system of competitive struggle to control management of resources. This fight in the early twentieth

<sup>1</sup> The present study utilises some of my previous research on population discourses, but even these results have been recontextualised (Melegh 2002, 2005, 2006). An early version of this paper has been published in Hungarian “Nemzeti és etnikai identitások globális kontextusban. Kísérleti lépések a globális hierarchiák szociológiája felé. In Feischmidt Margit (ed.): Etnicitás. Különbségteremtő társadalom. Bp. Gondolat. MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 126–140. In this work I am especially grateful for the comments of József Böröcz, Arland Thornton, Dirk J. van de Kaa, Susan Zimmermann, Mahua Sarkar, Margit Feischmidt and Éva Kovács.

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century was all the more acute as global hegemonies were challenged (Chase-Dunn et al. 1999; Böröcz 2009, 93–99; Hobsbawm 1994, 6–8 86–89). Europe was fighting to regain some of its dominance in the face of economic weakness, in an era when its colonial system was on the brink of collapse. Intra- and extra-European struggles to dominate led to two world wars, during which France, Germany, Britain and Italy challenged each other to secure more intra- and extra-European influence. The United States was quickly becoming a 'heavy weight' nation in terms of per-capita income and economic weight whilst the pre-nineteenth-century great powers – India and China – were still declining in economic terms; Latin-American countries had already had a chance to experience some real independence and higher economic growth during the First World War (Frank 1968). It was a period of hegemonic transition, during which some states saw a chance to advance and secure a better position for themselves in global hierarchies.

This international geopolitical re-arrangement was coupled with another massive form of global social change: the decline and subordination of rural groups and economies, both internationally and internally, in a period characterised by global population growth. Writing about agriculture in world history, Mark Tauger describes this change as follows:

*The world's agrarian economies and societies went through a series of complex economic, social and political crises during 1900-1940. Governments responded with unprecedented policy initiatives, most of which are still in effect. The crises in Europe and North America had particular significance, because of the dominant role of the U.S. economy and agriculture in the world and because European countries and colonies controlled most of the rest of the world's farmland (Tauger 2011, 107–108).*

This integration of peasants and farmers into the world market and their subsequent subordination was the basis of an unequal relationship between industrial capitalism and agrarian economies. This was due to a gap between agrarian and industrial prices, an economic relationship that was embedded in larger colonial frameworks and larger and smaller imperialisms (Chayanov 1986; Tauger 2011, 106–138). The key result of this subordination was not only the creation of numerous "poor", "delinquent" and "labouring" classes throughout the world (from Latin America and Europe to the huge states of Asia,) and the subsequent "social-hygenic" problems as perceived by the local colonial or ruling classes.<sup>3</sup> These problems increased dramatically when the world economic crisis hit most economies of the world in the late 1920s. Peasant economies (privately owned, small-scale, rural-economic entities based on the labour of the family or co-residing household) and even larger estates with

<sup>3</sup> For the rise of inequality see O'Rourke, 1999, 181–83, 185–206.

lower capital intensity faced enormous problems in adapting to markets over the longer term due to relatively low and often stagnating agrarian prices with very short periods of improvement in terms of trade for agriculture in relation to industry (Abel 1978, 306–307; Hobsbawm 1987, 34–55; Tóth 2006, 81–86; Tauger 2011, 106–137). The exploitability of peasant or family economies can partly be explained by internal factors, most notably the fact that wages could not be calculated and thus profits as related to the market prices could not be measured “properly”, thereby leading to “irrational” (i.e. self-exploitative) behaviour (Chayanov 1986, 70–89; Tóth 2006, 42–43; Frank 1968; Macfarlane 1978, 7–33). This subordination was related to the functioning of massive migratory systems, in which increasing rural populations fled to areas with demand for industrial work in the home country or abroad, or simply migrated to colonies (Sassen 1999, 51–88; O’Rourke 1999, 185–06). This floating ex-agrarian population was seen by the ruling classes as one of the most pressing social problems to be dealt with (Schneider and Schneider 1996, 271–73; Quine 1999; Stepan 1991, 35–39; Hobsbawm 1987, chapters 2 and 5). These changes strengthened an already intensified feeling that there was a need to intervene in social processes in order to manage populations, in effect treating them as resources to be managed locally and globally as part of a struggle to improve position within global hierarchies.

Thus we can see that local political elites in Europe, in North America, and also in the formerly independent Latin-American countries and colonies like British India, started adopting measures that not only aimed to manage some of the consequences of this crisis, but also sought remedies so as to secure better positions. Among the remedies, the issue of the size, the “quality”, the health and varying fertility rates of populations became very important issues, which no state or social group could completely ignore. This is what Foucault describes as “biopolitics”, meaning the systematic attempt of governments or systems of governments to advance the welfare and control certain groups on the basis of mass statistical analysis, and to intervene when “unfortunate” balances emerge in the societies concerned. In such situations of “imbalance”, arguments to exclude or even exterminate certain “unwanted” groups appear in political discourses (Foucault 1991; Dean 2001). This “shepherd-flock game” was not only coupled with the problem of who the citizen was in the relevant political communities, but, as this paper strongly argues, was embedded in global competition for resources by the relevant and highly unequal political communities concerned.

This biopolitical positioning game in the interface of local and global hierarchies can be seen clearly in the reasoning put forward by Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliiski and his radical reformist Bulgarian Agrarian National Union when introducing the Bulgarian law of People’s Health in 1923:

*It is only the radical reorganization of our healthcare legislation which would yield the desired results expected by the state's investment – a healthy and strong nation, capable of meeting all the challenges of civilization and preserving its independence amongst the culturally elevated countries of the world (cited by Baloutzova 2011, 47).*

So, as we can see above, imagining itself as somewhere on the “middle” level and emerging from a long period of Ottoman rule and the First World War and the territorial debates which followed, the Bulgarian state started to introduce new laws on improving the healthcare of the “people”. This constituted a biopolitical policy aiming to improve the health of the agrarian masses, so as to secure a position among other “culturally elevated” countries.

It is also important to note that the fight over resources and its links to a hierarchical world economy stemmed from an imaginary hierarchy structured by racist ideas and notions of internal and international civilisational hierarchy. A massive amount of literature has been published describing the internal mechanisms of positioning, though mainly from the perspective of the top position (colonisers and westerners) (see amongst others Böröcz 2006; Said 1978; Amin 1989; Stoler 1995).

Here we introduce this sense of hierarchy as perceived in the middling positions. It is exemplified by the “defence” speech of Count Apponyi, who pleaded in his capacity as high state representative of the Kingdom of Hungary to “the civilised” nations of France and Britain during the peace negotiation of Hungary in January, 1920, in an effort to secure Hungarian control over “lost” territories (vast areas of Hungary attached to neighbouring countries like Romania, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, etc.):

*Among the Hungarians the percentage of those literate is close to 80%; among the Germans in Hungary 82%; among the Romanians 33%; among the Serbians almost 60%. In case we look at the higher social classes and we take into account those who have finished secondary schools and took the exam called the baccalaureat in France, then we observe that among those having completed such studies or educational levels equivalent to the concerned final exam, the proportion of Hungarians reaches 84%, although their overall proportion in the population is 54.5%; while among those completing such studies the percentage of Romanians is 4%, as opposed to their proportion of 16% in the total population; while in the case of the Serbians this is 1% related to their 2.5% overall population ratio. I repeat my remarks are not hostile towards anybody. The only reason for this situation is that due to the unfortunate events of their histories, our neighbours joined the family of civilised nations later than us. But the fact is undeniable. In my view, the assignment of national hegemony to a lower level of cultural development is not without consequences from the point of view of the greater cultural interests*

*of humanity* (from <http://www.freeweb.hu/tarogato/apponyi.html>, accessed November 6, 2011 Translated by A. M.).

Just as in the Bulgarian example above, there is very clear sense of global hierarchy. It is related to internal hierarchies, which become clear when there is actually a break-up of a country and a loss of territory and large segments of ethnically diverse populations. The claim is that Hungarians are of a higher quality, and they should therefore rule and manage the region and improve the standing of “lower” level groups – a fact that should be acknowledged by the “superpowers” of the era, England and France.

This interface between global and local hierarchies actually reveals how we can understand the comparative politics of population management. This study aims to establish some of the basic types of such positioning, linking global and local hierarchies in order to start the work of a truly comparative analysis of patterns of population policy, which cannot be sufficiently explained by demographic processes or the specific ideologies of the relevant ruling groups.

This fascinating – and sometimes literally horrifying – story of the first half of the twentieth century has only been partially analysed in recent European and post-colonial historiography:

- There are historical demographic analyses of population processes and the development of relevant models for these demographic “transitions” (e.g. Coale and Watkins 1986; Livi-Bacci 2001; Saito 1996; Óri and Melegh 2003; van de Kaa 1996; Sassen 1999).
- There are histories of certain aspects of population development and policy, such as the history of contraception, divorce, family in the modern period, etc. (e.g. Bardet-Dupaquier 1997–99; Phillips 1991; McLaren 1990; Kertzer and Barbagli 2001, 2002).
- There are comparative histories of population policies based on their links to major political ideologies (for example Teitelbaum 1988, 1998; Weindling 1989; Quine 1996).
- There are specific histories of population policies and discourses concerning certain periods of modern European societies including extremist periods (e.g. Baloutzova 2011; Bock 2002; Hodgson 1991, 1997; Cole 2000; Greenhlagh 1996; Schneider 1982, 1990; Schneider and Schneider 1996, Turda and Weindling 2007; Turda 2010).
- And there are histories of population policies and practices in the previously colonised world in the era of modernity, based partially on post-colonial comparative insights (e.g. Bashford 2007; McClintock 1995; Caldwell 1998; Stepan 1991; Stoler 1995, 2000; Panandiker 1994; Melegh 2005; Ahluwalia 2008).

Many of the insights and empirical findings of the above histories are relevant to us, but the global linkages and their consequences have not been properly investigated. A more appropriate analysis starts with the notion that biopolitical concerns of high modernity are based on hierarchical conceptions of various social groups within and (very importantly) across “nations”. This hierarchy appears to direct the exclusion of “deviant” groups (racially subordinate groups, working classes, the urban proletariat who are putatively “too fertile”, over-fertile peasants or those who on the contrary practice birth control, the supposed “flood” of immigrants, the assumed sexual deviance of subordinate groups or the ostensibly “too prolific” Third World populations, etc.) (Melegh 2006, chapter 2). These imagined local hierarchies are different in distinct parts of the world – and even within Europe – but they are not arbitrary: they follow a basic underlying logic of positioning in the interface of local and global hierarchies, and for this reason they ought to be linked analytically.

In addition to generating a proper comparative framework, taking into account global hierarchical conceptions, the diverse “national” and local perspectives can also be reflected onto each other. This could serve as the basis for a new kind of “global” history, one that does not eliminate national and local histories, only reconfigures them. In other words, anti-natalist and eugenic concerns in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s are in fact linked – and hence to be analysed jointly – with the pro-natalist hysteria of Italian fascism (and the fascisms of many other European countries), or to eugenic concerns in India and Latin America. This link is based upon on the spread of certain “universal” scientific and social beliefs, closely aligned with the national-imperial geopolitical positioning of the various countries and regions embedded in the global inequality systems created by colonial capitalism.

It is important to note that local and global hierarchies refer to webs of inequalities, which have cognitive and non-cognitive structures in terms of economic and social power, and a web of unequal social relationships. This study combines them in the sense that they are “in the making”, with both factors playing strong roles (Melegh 2011; Melegh, Thornton, Philipov and Young-De Marco 2010) In other words, in this ‘glocal’ positioning the management of population development, the applied categorisation, the various discursive patterns, policy targets and the demographic processes themselves play equally important roles. It is also important to see that the positioning patterns and the related hierarchies I present below are gendered – revealing how nation building and gender are related in a comparative way.

We can now present a preliminary table based on how targets and controls in these population discourses are formulated in the context of local and global hierarchies. We have selected those discourses which formed parts of national “revitalisation” or development programmes in the first half of the twentieth century or between the two world wars. They represent countries and areas with

widely differing experiences of demographic processes in terms of mortality, fertility and migration. It is important to note that we cannot claim that any of these discourses and patterns were dominant, excluding alternative competing discourses. But we do claim that they represented definite strong currents embedded in global versus local positioning, or in other words the glocal politics of managing population development. The rest of the paper elaborates upon the seven cases in more detail.

	<b>Anti-natalism in the United States, Britain and the Netherlands</b>	<b>Anti-natalism in India</b>	<b>Pro-natalism in Italy and France</b>	<b>Eastern European conservative pro-natalism</b>	<b>Eugenic ideas in India</b>	<b>Hungarian populist movement, Romania, Bulgaria</b>	<b>Pro-peasant movement in India</b>
<b>Perspectives (positioning concerning local and global hierarchies)</b>	Top-down perspective and local and global control. Globalising local hierarchies without questioning them.	Pro-Western, upward-looking local elite, internalising outer anti-natalism, fixing local hierarchies.	Frustrated nationalism (trying to improve position), top-down perspective locally and freezing of local hierarchies: colonial, national rivalry.	Fragile and frustrated national position to be strengthened, globally critical and locally conservative, no real change in social structure: national and local ethnic rivalry.	Anti-colonial, anti-Western nationalism. Locally repressive toward middle and lower classes: ethnic, religious and social rivalry.	Frustrated nationalism, globally challenging, looking for substantial change in local social structure. Involved in local ethnic rivalries.	Anti-colonial, pro-peasant, liberating and socially-radical nationalism. Calming of ethnic and religious rivalries.
<b>Demographic processes</b>	Substantially declining fertility, mortality and substantial immigration.	Increasing rates of population growth, high fertility, somewhat declining mortality, high infant mortality. Out-migration to other parts of Asia and of Africa. De-industrialised agrarian population.	Declining fertility, improving mortality and infant mortality, high emigration rates in the beginning of the period. Substantial but declining agrarian population.	Stagnant or declining fertility, somewhat improving mortality and infant mortality, high rates of emigration at the beginning of the period. Substantial agrarian population.	Increasing rates of population growth, high fertility, somewhat declining mortality, high infant mortality. Out-migration to other parts of Asia and Africa. De-industrialised agrarian population.	Stagnant or declining fertility, somewhat improving mortality and infant mortality, high emigration rates in the beginning of the period. Substantial agrarian population.	Increasing rates of population growth, high fertility, somewhat declining mortality, high infant mortality. Out-migration to other parts of Asia and Africa. De-industrialised agrarian population.

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<b>Targets</b>	Working and lower-class, racial criteria, immigrants and women in non-Western areas.	Lower status women in India.	Working class and lower status rural women and men.	Civil servants, industrial working-class agrarian groups (farm servants). Focus on women.	Middle and lower class men and women. Muslims.	Peasantry, "alien" rural and middle-class urban groups.	Low status agrarian masses (men and women).
<b>Method and policy</b>	Anti-natalism, information and incentives for contraception.	Anti-natalism, information and incentives for contraception, educating local groups.	Pro-natalism, state support and control: family allowance, institutions, anti-abortion, housing programmes. Maintaining colonial links and patterns.	Introducing varying levels of social support to different social groups with pro-natalist and social stabilisation aims. Consideration of some eugenic methods.	Anti-natalism, eugenic intervention into marriage, child bearing and explicit militarism.	Pro-natalism, requesting state support, agrarian groups. Change in property structure and exclusion of "alien" groups. Consideration of eugenic methods.	Decrease of tax burden, pro-national economic policy, liberation from foreign rule, return to traditional patterns of subsistence. Self control in fertility, anti-contraception.

## II. ACCEPTING GLOBAL AND LOCAL HIERARCHIES

Below we present two types of positioning which do not question global and local hierarchies with regard to the management of population issues. One is the strong anti-natalist movement in the United States and Britain, two countries that had by that time experienced substantial declines in fertility. The other is internalisation of Western perspectives into local hierarchies in colonial India in the 1920s and 30s, which had just started going through a period of rapid population growth.

*II.1. Anti-natalist movements in the United States and Britain, globalising local hierarchies*

Neo-Malthusianism as a complex combination of different discourses (anti-immigration, conscious birth control, feminism, eugenics, etc.) moved increasingly towards the idea of controlling the “quality” of a population by the end of the nineteenth century (Quine 1996; Stepan 1996). These coalitions and animosities were not without a certain logic built into the neo-Malthusian ideas themselves – as a justification for selective population control based on social, ethnic and racist exclusion. Malthusian control was to be practiced within a very complex environment, so as to save the privileged positions of propertied “upper and middle classes” in the West, and also the West itself when confronted with a non-Western world in the global order (Stoler 1995, 124–126; Melegh 2006, 55–62).

There was also a science-based belief in Eurocentric progress, a cognitive structure in which scientific control of social and economic processes and human development was a key idea (Hobsbawm 1987, 251–69; Stoler 1995, 55–94; Amin 1989, 79–89). In this respect, the hierarchical categorisation of living species (including mankind), and the idea of evolution based on genetic inheritance and control of related social and demographic behaviour was a brutal and practical mix of science and intervention (Hannaford 1996, 325–368). Neo-Malthusianism was also an appealing (seemingly non culture-based) set of ideas, which could easily be exported and imported throughout the world, particularly because it came from the top of the hierarchy, the “West”. It was also handy because growing global inequality in the early twentieth century was a suitable basis for its spread.

The world at this time was confronted with several additional issues. First of all, huge demographic changes were taking place: mortality (most importantly infant mortality) was declining or starting a long-term decline, in conjunction with changes in patterns of marriage and fertility. These later developments in patterns of partnership were related to the growing practice of fertility control and changes in culture such as newspapers, leaflets and propaganda materials (McLaren, 1990; Phillips 1991; Livi-Bacci 2001; Coale and Watkins, 1986).

This idea of fertility control was most popular in Britain and the United States. The establishment of population control groups (like the Population Association of America) and their ideological manoeuvrings between eugenic, feminist, xenophobic and anti-immigrant ideas has been widely discussed in the literature (Quine 1996; Caldwell 1998; Hodgson 1991; Szreter 1993; Greenhalgh 1996). The key factor behind this development was the formation of a “strange” coalition of racist eugenicists, doctors, anti-immigration campaigners, some feminists, and population experts between the two world wars, all interested in “improving” the social situation of the “unworthy”, by gaining control

over the fecundity of certain groups of marginalised people (Meleg 2006, 52–56).

This approach focused on local exclusion, but with its racist structure it fit into continued colonial and global patterns of exclusion. It positioned itself positively as something related to the “defence” of the Western middle classes which were, according to activists, the most receptive to the idea of birth control and medical progress. For this reason, they argued that they had to be defended from being overwhelmed by lower classes, such as immigrant groups from southern or eastern Europe (Szreter 1993). This combination of anti-natalism in the name of balanced development of resources and population selection, and of imagining Western middle classes as being at the top of social development is made clear in the following text by Notestein, one of the fathers of demographic transition theory. It is tellingly titled *Demographic Sources of Power*. The talk was given to the US military in 1949, but this can also be seen also as reflecting on the previous period and on global hierarchies in general:

*Let's put that all together, if we can, in terms of power, resources and problems. Western Europe: huge, high skilled, at the end of its growth period but plenty powerful in the trading world, politically organized, no fundamental difficulties here... The United States: roughly the same thing with an awfully favourable balance of people and resources, one, if it solves its political and economic problems which are not very fundamental ones, that adds up to a very effective power in the world... Asia is quite a different thing. We hear a lot of nonsense talked about population growth there as though it means power. It is a source of disturbance (Notestein, F. W. (1949): Demographic sources of power. Lecture: 20 September, Manuscript (Office of Population Research, Library, Princeton p.23)).*

We witness here the evolution of a global positioning process that not only sees Western middle classes as being in a top position globally and locally but also as being empowered to introduce these population developments into countries with “disturbed” development (Thornton 2005; see Thornton also in this volume). Notestein also expresses the common view that relationships which work in the West do not work the same way in Asia. This difference is not explained directly, and mainly essentialised cultural and/or racial differences are invoked in a world imagined as inherently hierarchical (Meleg 2006, 63).

*II.2. Approving global and local hierarchies in a high-fertility colonial setting: pro-Western family planning in India between the two world wars*

The campaign for birth control by the elite and certain civil groups also appeared in colonial India, which underwent rapid population growth in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period the population increased from roughly 300 million to 390 million in 1941, with a growth rate of more than 10 per cent in a decade (Chandarasekhar 1943, 166; see also Livi-Bacci 2001, 128–123). Supported by two prominent family planning advocates in Britain and the United States (Stopes and Sanger) and also the colonial authorities themselves, the idea of controlling fertility in India received enormous external support (Caldwell 1998; Ahluwalia 2008, 2–5 and 50–77). A neo-Malthusian group was established as early as 1916 at Madras Presidency College by the Maharajah of Mysore and Lady Rama Rao (Caldwell, 1998, 688). Acceptance and use of population control (at least by certain political elites) later proved to be important in the development of the international population control movement.

The gendered and hierarchical image of population processes and fertility in India, even as early as the late nineteenth century, was situated within an extremely dubious framework. On the one hand, local women were seen as suitable subjects for exploitation and control, an idea that derived from the aim of saving them from brutal customs and the burden of high fertility (Sarkar 2008, 45). These “liberal contradictions” were further twisted by some local representatives of population control in the local elite, who created a rather complex positioning system in colonial India. This positioning referred not only to the strength of global hierarchies, but also tried to fix certain social groups within local hierarchies. Here we can refer to Sir Vepa Rameson’s presidential address at the 2<sup>nd</sup> All India Population and 1<sup>st</sup> Family Hygiene Conference in 1938 in Mumbai (then Bombay): we see the unproblematic acceptance of racist European ideas, which actually opposed the elite represented by the author:

*Bertrand Russel in his “Icarus” discusses the possibility of the white races being outrun in numbers by the backward races. The real solution of such a problem is by international agreement under which all civilized nations practice some degree of Birth Control. Until such an agreement is reached family limitation must be cautiously practiced and modified in degrees so as not to endanger the proper defence of the country. But for us Indians, all this is academic (The 2nd All-India Population and 1st Family Hygiene Conference. Bodleian Library, Oxford BOD OFFSITE 24762 d.117 (p. 10).*

This is combined with a sense of the need to catch up with the West, which had already started a move towards family planning:

*The growth of unemployment with all the suffering that it involves, vis underfeeding, disease, maternal mortality, wastage in infant life, has reached appalling magnitude in recent years. In India it has become accentuated for about 20 or 25 years. But in Western Countries it was felt for more than a century and western nations had begun to think about this matter from the 19th century. But even there it is only in recent years that the problem has reached dimensions compelling the urgent adoption of remedies (ibid p. 6).*

And this was combined with an extremely rigid Malthusian social view on links between social inequality and fertility:

*Thus it is easy to see that equality of human beings is a futile idea, even if we start distributing property equally between all human beings. One man is intelligent and earns more, another man is dull and earns less; one man is prudent and cautious and saves more; another man is improvident and reckless and spends more; one gets eight children and another has got two children (ibid p. 7).*

The smooth fit into imagined global hierarchies and its direct translation into local hierarchies is of course not the only positioning accepting “Western” family planning. The ones we analyse later, however, challenge global and/or local hierarchies and therefore belong in the next part of this study on population management ideas challenging global and/or local hierarchies. First we examine some European examples and then we return to India in the same period. As a starting point, we analyse those European or Indian perspectives that challenged or were anxious about “unfavourable” global positions of the populations concerned, and then move to ones that sought internal reforms as well. With this analysis complete, we start analysing various forms of demographic nationalisms, focusing on the “uplift” or “vitalisation” of the nation in the designated period.

### III. CHALLENGING GLOBAL HIERARCHIES WITHOUT RESTRUCTURING LOCAL HIERARCHIES

#### *III.1. European pro-natalist colonial powers*

France was a unique country in this respect. It was a major colonial power on the first level of the global hierarchy, but due to constant rivalry with the British Empire and other European powers, most importantly Germany, it understood itself as being in constant struggle for dominance. France harboured ideologies of “familism” and stable public support for patriarchal families with

a great number of children. As a result, the idea of limiting number of children in a family was considered a sign of deviation and was even negatively termed the “Malthusian family”. Malthus was therefore clearly seen as irrelevant to the national-colonial imaginary of France (Quine 1996, 52–88; Schneider 1982, 1990).

But this pro-natalism can easily be connected to elements of the neo-Malthusian package other than population control, most notably to positive eugenics. Thus, we can conclude that the link between neo-Malthusianism and strong pro-natalism could be the strong emphasis on combining “quality and quantity”. Schneider wrote about this “strange” mix in the following way:

*French eugenicists supported programs which were much more popular in a country like France where fear of depopulation was very strong. Rather than emphasizing the need to limit births among any segment of the population in order to screen for negative traits, French eugenicists could emphasize a positive program that called for improving the general health of the populace as well as treating specific diseases thought most likely to be hereditary. Hence, eugenicists could avoid coming into conflict with the powerful French natalist organizations, which resisted any measures that might inhibit the birthrate. Both groups could support the French eugenics slogan, “quality goes hand in hand with quantity” (Schneider 1982, 279).*

It is to be noted that the socially and universally protective French policies morphed into the repressive, conservative, socially and “racially” selective approach of Vichy France in the early 1940s. This government introduced harsh anti-abortion laws, tried to control women and marital behaviour, and in some ways was very close to Italian policies.

In between the two world wars, Italy was understood as a second rank power, even at a European level in the investigated period. Great emphasis was placed on the need to be much more populous and the need for “revitalisation” so as to move to the forefront of development. “Number means force” as Mussolini put it in 1928 in his infamous Ascension Day Speech, and there was a combined policy of reorganising and re-channelling population development via control over fertility, as well as international migration (Quine 1996, 17–51; Wanrooij 2002, 175–195; Smith 2003). This complex discourse is present in the speech of nationalist Alfredo Rocco in 1923, who later became Justice Minister under Mussolini:

*Expansion is for us a necessity. Our land is limited and relatively poor while we have a scarcity of capital and an exuberant population... Spontaneously, instinctively, the nation found a solution... it resolved the problem of expansion by means of emigration... Too many in Italy view with pleasure*

*and approval this solution... The phenomenon of emigration today is grave... The fertility of the Italian population is considerable, but cannot long resist a bleeding of this sort. Remember: our true and greatest wealth is population, because in numbers is the greatest strength of all races. The most numerous peoples are not simply those militarily most important... but economically every man has a value and represents capital. To lose millions of Italians means to lose billions of lire. Up until now our high fertility has allowed us to endure this open wound in the side of the nation. It has even allowed us to enjoy population increase in spite of emigration... And even though the birth rate remains high, the tendency in Italy is one of decline (Boll. CGE, iii (1923): 821–22) (cited in Ipsen 1993, 79. p.).*

This discourse on population development, focusing on revitalising the nation and improving global positioning, included the following main interconnected elements, showing the complexity of this pattern re-strengthening local gendered hierarchies for the sake of “strength” in a period of crisis (Quine 1996, 17–51; Wanrooij 2002, 175–195; Ipsen 1993; Smith 2003):

- Peasant families unite capital and labour, and are thus superior to market enterprises.
- Young wives are to be controlled if they look for amusement and do not accept the authority of men. Hedonism and moral decay must be stopped.
- Maternity is a civic duty. Breastfeeding is to be obligatory.
- Reduce female employment in industry and in the service sector.
- Extra-marital sex for men is permitted. Remaining single is criminalised.
- Tax breaks and career opportunities should be provided to fathers.
- The National Foundation for the Protection of Maternity and Infancy (ONMI) is set up. In 1925, children’s “colonies” are set up under fascist control to protect child welfare.
- Military strength and population are closely linked.
- A need for positive eugenics: both quantity and quality is to be improved.
- Rigid defence of “race” is to be maintained, especially in colonies like Libya.
- A need to control migration from rural areas to cities.
- Control and selection of international migrants, particularly those from Asian areas.

This combination of ideas was first of all a reaction to local economic problems due to Italy’s semi-peripheric position in the world, and secondly to some

of the discourses of major powers at the time who looked down on the region (England, United States) – there was therefore an urge to counterbalance them. This counterbalance is also related to attempts to control emigration and promote national revitalisation. There is also the strengthening of control over the lower classes, most important of which, women. These measures were in some ways “rational” reactions to the agrarian crisis evolving in the development of world capitalism. And first and foremost they were strategies to secure a better place among “civilised” nations, by looking for further opportunities to “colonise” further down (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005). Italian fascist discourse might be seen as a clear prototype of inferiorised imperialism in a hierarchical world economy and imaginary. In this way it was not only a local or even just a European product.

### *III.2 Eastern European conservative demographic nationalism*

It is important to note that eastern European ruling elite were following some of the above: globally challenging, locally repressive, conservative or fascist approaches to social and population policy. These discourses were challenged by more radical “populist” movements throughout the region, which represented a different pattern, to be discussed later on in our study.

Conservative eastern European pro-natalism could be characterised as a belated response to the social problems of the peasantry, systematic, step-by-step progress in the institutional and material support of civil servants and industrial workers, and the rather rigid defence of local social hierarchies. Nonetheless, this advancement did not propose an actual break in the current local system of inequalities; in fact quite the contrary: proponents wanted to preserve them as much as possible. But these ideas were coupled with nationalist and ethnic panic concerning changes of population and territories, as exemplified by the above quote from count Apponyi on the territorial changes of Hungary (Kövéér and Gyáni 1998, 363–378; Baloutzova 2011, 58–122).

Most eastern European countries either underwent a dramatic redrawing of borders or were formed shortly after the First World War. These changes to the fragile geopolitical status quo led to dramatic ethnic biopolitical struggles amongst each other, so as to achieve a better and more secure position, as exemplified perhaps by the earlier quote on Hungarian territorial claims. These struggles and concerns framed most of the laws and policies relating to population management. Lost or conquered territories were seen as targets of state policies, for “filling” them with population of the “right” social and ethnic composition. In Bulgaria for instance, family allowance was greater for civil servant (later worker) families who chose to settle in the newly acquired Aegean territories in 1942 (Baloutzova 2011, 92–96). The same ethno-political

fight within eastern European demographic nationalism can also be found in the text of a Hungarian conservative academic and politician, Czettler, who focused on agrarian policies in 1921 in the Hungarian parliament, and argued against individual aspirations, particularly concerning migration:

*The Hungarian race is suppressed into a small territory by the Slavic and Olah [pejorative term, meaning Romanian] ring. There are two ways to assure living; one assures the advancement of the individual, but kills the nation, as it means the single child or emigration, the other is struggle and suffering for the individual, but it leads to the resurrection of the nation and this involves the storage of the strengths of the Hungarian race on the Great Plain [central and eastern part of Hungary] (Czettler 1995, 71).*

The strength of the nation should be the focus of politics, and it is precisely this concern for global positioning which drives management of population migration and fertility. This pattern seeks an improvement in the level attained by the nation in the regional and neighbouring hierarchy, and does not seek to challenge globally, such as France or Italy. Nonetheless, it aims for the disciplining of the nation without restructuring internal social relations, and in this respect it follows major European pro-natalist countries.

### *III.3 Anti-colonial eugenic nationalism in India*

Proponents of family planning in India included representatives (Ahluwalia and Phadke) in favour of eugenic ideas, but who questioned British colonial domination. Phadke, in particular, was a strong opponent of colonial rule and supported Gandhi in his struggle based on peaceful disobedience (Ahluwalia 2008, 30–41). In this manner they represented another (not dominant or institutionalised pattern) of positioning concerning population, resources and local versus global hierarchies. They therefore attempted to break down the global hierarchies repressing India, and wanted to “revitalise” their own nation by eugenic means, without changing its internal hierarchical structure.

In 1923, Ahluwalia wrote “Indian Population problem: selective Lower Birth rate, a Sure Remedy of Extreme Indian Poverty”. In this he claimed that the “thoughtless irresponsible and extensive breeding, particularly among the middle and poor classes” was the cause of Indian poverty. He also complained that “India resembled a vast garden literally choked with weeds, fine roses being few and far between” and he was therefore in favour of strong selection from amongst the people in order to improve the global position of India (Ahluwalia 2008, 31).

Phadke, another proponent of eugenic nationalism, was militantly against the rule of the British, and when writing about birth control in India in 1925, he argued for a non-Western “Aryan” eugenic intervention, as otherwise the Indian population would remain a “race of slaves who will too readily fall a /sic/ prey to the designs of the foreign rulers and exploiters” (Ahluwalia 2008, 35). He was also very clear about the aim of uplifting the country in global hierarchies, believing that the “stalwart physiques /sic/ of the people is one of the greatest assets of a country and an important instrument of its uplift” (Ahluwalia 2008, 32). Proposed measures included controlling “unfit” marriages and therefore achieving “better” breeding.

This simultaneous global challenge and locally repressive notion actually resembles American or British neo-Malthusian panic concerning lower - and in this respect - inferior classes and ethnic or religious groups and their fertility. Thus it was not an accident that upper caste Hindu proponents of neo-Malthusian intervention turned against the Muslims. Ahluwalia aptly cites Wattal and refers to a 1934 piece on population control. According to him, Muslim “cerebral development is so much less” (compared to Hindus), “Wattal claimed that as a consequence their fecundity is so much greater” (Ahluwalia 2008, 38). Mukharjee, another proponent extended this argument further:

*The Muhamaddan, who is less literate than all upper caste Hindus everywhere and in Bihar and Bengal less than even some of the backward castes such as the Santhals, Mahisyas, and Namsudras, increased by 51 per cent in Bengal and Punjab during the last 50 years while the Hindu has declined by 6 in the Punjab and increased by about 7 per cent in the United Provinces and 5 per cent in Bihar and 23 per cent in Bengal... The enormous growth of the Muslims is no doubt due to widow remarriage, to polygamy, and later consummation of marriage than among the Hindus and probably also to the differences of food and economic habits (Ahluwalia 2008, 40).*

Altogether, we can see that globally frustrated positioning in the various forms of repressive demographic nationalisms led to very harsh and in many ways extremist ideas when local inequalities and hierarchies were ignored, or – perhaps more properly –, preserved and re-strengthened. In certain circumstances such patterns and the relevant “glocal” interplay of hierarchies could actually lead to political actions aiming to achieve the immediate demographic or population compositional aims by any possible means. But this was certainly not a necessity, and this can be clearly shown by looking at those perspectives in the same areas which approved or even supported internal structural changes to achieve demographic “national” goals in global competition.

#### IV. CHALLENGING GLOBAL AND LOCAL HIERARCHIES

As an underlying factor of global-local positioning, we pointed out the key importance of overall agrarian crisis throughout the world, from Mexico to India. This crisis not only created problem groups deserving of population engineering, and nostalgia for more “traditional” periods, but actually led to peasant movements or pro-peasant movements such as that led by Zapata in Mexico, the Russian Narodniks, eastern-European populists and Gandhi himself in colonial India. There is a common thread to all of this: they looked for radical social changes in the fight against landlords, usurpation of taxes and support for peasant holdings or joint peasant farms and co-operatives. They also considered population issues to be very important and represented a more liberating version of demographic nationalism than those analysed above. They were demographic nationalisms, but with an open arm to local labouring classes, who were seen as the ultimate source of social and even ethnic religious revival.

##### *IV.1 Eastern European “populists”*

The movement of “populist” sociographers and reformers, among others the Romanian village monograph movement led by Gusti, the Narodniks in Russia, the Russian agrarianist Chayanov, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union led by Stamboliiski (crushed in the early 1920s) and the Hungarian ‘Népi’ (meaning “people’s”) movement reveal characteristic perspectives as regards population discourses and positioning between global and local hierarchies.

The dramatic changes experienced by the eastern European agrarian sector were followed by deep crisis in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Tóth 2006, 126–133; Tauger 2011, 131–134). This was due to great difficulties caused by lack of proper machinery, low agrarian wages and the unmarketable product structure of small-scale units; all of which resulted from world capitalism. Owing to the combined effects of such imbalances and an unfavourable property structure, the sector relied either on big estates exploiting extremely cheap labour or on inward looking, non-market oriented peasant economies. This made the fate of the peasantry a central issue for certain young politicians, radical writers and social scientists, who were appalled by the “underclass” status of the peasantry (Bibó 1991; Melegh 2006). In the eyes of these radical intellectuals, the most relevant symptom of the agrarian crisis was the deplorable mortality, health and psychological status – and sooner or later the falling fertility rate – of the peasants.

This demographic element actually varied between countries according specific demographic patterns. In Hungary, low fertility was a prime motive, while in Romania and Bulgaria it was not because fertility started to decline one or

two decades later (Kiss 2009; Baloutzova 2011, 128–133). This “lack of vitality” and related social and health problems was not only understood as a sign of social crisis, but also as a sign of the “self-destructive” behaviours of the groups concerned. These movements rejected this phenomenon on moral grounds and called for massive reforms in the rural economy, and for new measure to support these groups. All these measures aimed to “uplift” national status as exemplified above in the Bulgarian quote on the health law, or for its complete reorganisation like Gusti (Kiss 2009).

Similar to the conservative biopolitical discourses we’ve seen, strong natalism and a rejection of Malthusianism were seen as something natural from the perspective of frustrated national development. This is clear in the case of Ferenc Erdei, a Hungarian sociologist writing about how birth control and abortion were not natural in eastern Europe due to problems of social structure:

*Villages practising the single-child system are the best demonstration of the distorted development of the peasantry, for the single-child system is not the same phenomenon as fertility control in bourgeois society. Bourgeois fertility control - as all phenomena of this society - is not a structure crystallised into frozen and objectified forms, but an intermediate phenomenon of life channelled by interests, which immediately change and transform if interests change... By contrast the single-child system of the peasantry is not so directly consequential. This control of fertility is the alleviation of an unmanageable situation through the production of social forms (Erdei 1942, 86. translated by A. M.).*

This element of social structure separates these discourses from the ones that only wished to preserve local structures. Nevertheless, it should be noted that they share a characteristic panic over territories and resources, and they clearly localised ethnic rivalries and panics in the themes of demographic discourses. A Hungarian sociographer wrote about the ethnic composition of an unfavourable rural area of Hungary as follows:

*The life and death struggle of the Transdanubian region was first recognised three years ago, when in Hidas [a Hungarian village in southern Hungary] the Hungarian church was officially transferred to the Germans. The Hungarians have been dispersed in the storms of the centuries and they have been replaced by Germans. The statisticians have not ignored the problem and have shown that the Hungarians of Hidas exist: in the cemetery, in neighbouring villages and in America (Kovács 1989, 97 translated by A.M.).*

This maintenance of ethno-territorial panic could have led to the fact that some of the radical populists ended up in the ultra-conservative camp, or even in fascist groups. But it is important to stress that they originally rejected ultra-nationalist strategies because they were seen as serving the interests of the “aristocratic” elite; they were in fact aiming to completely restructure local agrarian society.

#### *IV.2 The movement of Gandhi in British India*

Interestingly, many of the points made by eastern European populists were shared by Gandhi: leading mass struggle to liberate and restructure an India devastated by colonial rule<sup>4</sup>. He was firmly and systematically anti-colonial, with original techniques of resistance, and worked very hard on social restructuring, even in the face of opposition from other anti-colonial groups. With eastern European populists, and later communists, he shared in the belief that there was no “overpopulation”, and that it was not necessary to reduce fertility. Instead, he argued there was a need to restructure and defend local industry, reduce taxes, and improve irrigation and plant structures:

*This little globe of ours is not a toy of yesterday. It has not suffered from the weight of over-population through its age of countless millions. How can it be that the truth has suddenly dawned upon some people that it is in danger of perishing of shortage of food unless birth rate is checked through the use of contraceptives?* (Harijan, 14-9-35, <http://www.mkgandhi.org/indiadreams/chap56.htm>, accessed 08 November, 2011).

He even shared the idea that use of contraception had been ‘twisted’, as seen above among eastern European populists:

*I have no doubt that those learned men and women who are carrying on propaganda men and with missionary zeal in favour of the use of contraceptives, are doing irreparable harm to the use of contraceptives, are doing irreparable harm to the youth of the country under the false belief that they will be saving... the poor women who may be obliged to bear children against their will. Those who need to limit their children will not be easily reached by them. Our poor women have not the knowledge or the training that the women of the west have. Surely the propaganda is not being carried [out] on behalf of the middle class women, for they do not need the knowl-*

<sup>4</sup> On the economic collapse among others see Böröcz 2009, 55–64; Tauger 2011, 57–59, 94–97, 124–16.

edge, at any rate so much as the poor classes do (Harijan, 28-3-'36, <http://www.mkgandhi.org/indiadreams/chap56.htm>, accessed 08 November, 2011).

In essence, he argues that the social burden of high fertility and family planning can only be managed properly if national sovereignty is achieved. In some parts, he even sounds like Phadke, who proposed demographic change as a means of escaping “slave” status:

*Is it right for us who know the situation to bring forth children in an atmosphere so debasing as I have described? We only multiply slaves and weaklings, if we continue the process of procreation while we feel and remain helpless, diseased and famine stricken. Not till India has become a free nation, able to withstand avoidable starvation, well able to feed herself in times of famine [and] possessing the knowledge to deal with malaria, cholera, influenza, we have we the right to bring forth progeny. I must not conceal from the reader the sorrow I feel when I hear of births in this land... I must express that for years I have contemplated with satisfaction the prospect of suspending procreation by voluntary self-denial. India is today ill-equipped for taking care even of her present population, not because she is over-populated but because she is forced to foreign domination whose creed is progressive exploitation of her resources (Young India, 13-10-1920, 21: 356-360, cited in M. Gandhi Soul Force: Gandhi's Writings on Peace. Edited by V Gentha, London, New Delhi, Tara Publishing Ltd., p. 175).*

He proposed self-restraint as a method of voluntary fertility control, something that appeared in other Indian population discourses as well. Here, it received additional support as a means of maintaining social cohesion. In constant conflict with Western advocates, Gandhi believed in asymmetrical traditional patterns of behaviour. His key point was social and spiritual “dignity” leading to discipline, as an overall political and social concept (Ahluwalia 2008, 70–80; Guha 1997, 147–148). The following quote sums this up very clearly:

*I do not believe that woman is prey to sexual desire to the same extent as man. It is easier for her than for man to exercise self-restraint. I hold that the right education in this country is to teach the woman the art of saying no even to her husband, to teach her that it is not part of her duty to become a mere tool or a doll in her husband's hands. She has rights as well as duties... To ask India's women to take contraceptives is, to say at least, putting the cart before the horse. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery,*

*to teach her dignity of national service and service to humanity* (cited in Ahluwalia, 2008, 71).

This idea of dignity and self-discipline served to position India as distant from the “West”, which in turn served the political purpose of moving towards independence from the British and exercising some control over population growth without extra anti-natalist control over lower social groups, and avoiding immediate competitive fights between religious and social groups. But it maintained gendered hierarchies and a “traditionalist” outlook for the sake of national revitalisation. This challenge concerning global hierarchies was transformed into a kind of moral and spiritual force, a means of challenging the terms of competition in global capitalism.<sup>5</sup>

## V. ROOTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC EXTREMISM: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Global and local hierarchies have always been extremely powerful factors in shaping social processes. In an era when global competition was extremely harsh and open, it was no accident that the population and population development were elevated to the forefront of political and intellectual interest. Population was seen as a resource for development and national revival, in a constant struggle over global and local hierarchies. Which country could stabilise privileged positions, and which ones would advance in the real and imagined hierarchies of the world?

These questions were real questions: nobody challenged the idea that populations competed with each other, regardless of ideological inclination. Both anti-natalist and pro-natalist groups lived in the same world, and these were not antagonistic notions, but ones fundamentally linked in a global hierarchy. They came from very different perspectives in terms of ideology: among them there were fascists, conservatives, populists and other radical groups with differences between them, but whose differences should not be over-emphasised. Even demographic processes themselves had only a limited role, and we cannot therefore claim that they exclusively guided demographic discourses and debates, as we have seen from our comparative analysis of examples coming from widely different demographic profiles.

It seems that population discourses were to a large extent shaped by the rules of competition, and by the ways that local and global hierarchies were linked. This interface is actually the most interesting perspective, as it shows the dynamics of such discourses. Even today, there are great debates about whether certain “demographic” ideas (for instance anti-immigration agitation,

<sup>5</sup> Concerning morality scales – as opposed to development scales – see Thornton et al. 2010.

interventionist anti-natalism or pro-natalism) can be linked to extreme ideologies, and the exact relationships thereof. In this paper we have tried to show that this is not a simple exercise. While we have to acknowledge that focusing on certain ideas, for instance ethnic compositions of nations in the first half of the twentieth century might be considered a dubious exercise, in an age of extreme radicalism the dynamics of certain discourses were of greater importance than certain direct (for instance eugenic) patterns of population management. The dynamics of population discourses were shaped instead by the ways in which collective or individual actors positioned themselves with regard to global and local hierarchies.

In this sense it turns out that the most problematic positions clearly aimed to change global positions and at the same time freeze local hierarchies or get rid of the “heavy baggage” of certain social groups or certain groups of children (etc.) in a global struggle. Such groups can be any kind – immigrant, Roma, Muslim – just so long as they are seen as internally inferior. This global versus local frustration seems to be the real source of what we may term “demographic extremism”. And now, in an era when the “West” is experiencing major losses on the global markets whilst facing challenges in terms of its position in global hierarchies, this would seem to be a very important issue.

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