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Final Report

Reproductive Politics East and West: The Representation of a Cold War Tension by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

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My research focuses on population and reproductive politics in Cold War Eastern Europe, in specific in Hungary. Reproductive political questions related to fertility rates and population growth, such as birth control, abortion and family planning were hotly debated topics behind and across the Iron Curtain. In fact, a population and reproductive political Cold War divide existed between the state socialist countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (including the Soviet Union) that drove to increase their populations after World War II and United Nations-driven efforts towards limiting global population size. The latter movement that cannot be described in greater detail here was supported by the United States due to fears of the spread of communism. The activities of the UN and international organizations, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Population Council as global actors in the field of population politics were based on a strong Malthusian tradition in demographic thinking that argued for controlling unlimited population growth, especially those of the lower classes, in order to avoid an outgrowth of resources and the ensuing social-economic problems. UN demography experts applied eugenic and racist discourses that were previously part of domestic discussions around "the reproduction rate of the racially different lower classes" to talk about global problems related to "third world" populations.¹ While "third world" populations (and especially women) were addressed by fertility control campaigns, from the 1960s onwards family planning became an expectation towards those living in the global center. Representatives of the global population control movement encouraged state socialist countries of the "second world" to popularize family planning too. These efforts met the goals of local medical and population experts in postwar Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, who not only wanted to improve fertility rates but also the health of their populations. Thus while reproductive politics east and west of the Iron Curtain differed in their goals concerning population size, they shared concerns about population quality. This brought about the reappearance of eugenic discourses after World War II in the framework of family planning and the related propagation of modern contraceptives.

Situated at the crossroads of this biopolitical conflict between "East" and "West," my research has so far examined state socialist Hungarian reproductive politics, including sex education, from a gender and race/ethnicity intersectional perspective (focusing on Roma), and I have compared reproductive political discourses in Austria and Hungary between the 1950s and the 1980s. I have considered local/national reproductive political discourses, policies and practices as parts of the above described larger Cold War

¹ A. Bashford, "World population from eugenics to climate change," in: N. Hopwood, L. Kassel, and R. Flemming (eds.) *Reproduction. From antiquity to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 505-520.

tensions and global hierarchies. Local actors in the field were both affected by and actively shaped these contexts.

Material that was relevant for my research at the OSA relate to the part of my research that is devoted to how Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty constructed the “East-West conflict” on reproductive issues. Since the radio worked with different generations of Eastern European emigrants and broadcasted to Central, East and Southeast European countries but was a United States’ supported institution stationed in Western Europe I was curious to see how RFE/RL texts created on the “Western” side of the Iron Curtain presented discourses and practices of the “East.” In other words, I was interested to find out how RFE/RL researchers and staff constructed information (information items that served as sources for programs, background reports and subject files) on reproductive politics in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, in particular concerning the topics of population growth, abortion, birth control and family planning. This question addresses how RFE/RL professionals constructed “objective” reports on reproductive issues, which “facts” they selected as worth of mentioning amidst this Cold War controversy about population control, and thus how they were involved in shaping Cold War reproductive discourses.

In order to find answers to these questions I used at the OSA situation and background reports, Hungarian and English language subject files from the RFE/RL Research Institute, especially those related to Hungary, the Open Media Research Institute and the Monitoring Department, as well as the personal documents of individuals who worked at the radio, and photographs about RFE/RL from the 1970s. I also browsed through Mária Heller’s research documentation concerning reproductive political discourses in Hungary between the 1960s and the 1980s.

Detailed list of consulted archival material

HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute

HU OSA 300-10-2 Box 1 RFE/RL Research Institute, Balkan Section, Yugoslav Subject Files I. Abortion 1962-1984

HU OSA 300-120-13 Box 2 East Europe Files, Birth control, abortion: East Europe: Poland 1975-1993

HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1 RFE/RL Research Institute Hungarian Unit, Subject files, Abortusz 1970-76

HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 2 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Subject Files, Abortusz 1977-90

HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 174 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Subject Files, Family 1952-1970

HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 175 RFE/RL Research Institute Hungarian Unit, Subject files, Family 1971-72

HU OSA 300-40-4 Box 6. RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Information Items, Women, abortion

HU OSA 300-40-2 Box 30 RFE/RL Research Institute Hungarian Unit, Subject files, Health: Abortion, birth control 1964-1988

HU OSA 300-40-8 Box 127 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Hungarian Monitoring Feb 1965

HU OSA 300-40-8 Box 182 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Hungarian Monitoring Hungarian Monitoring Sep 1969

HU OSA 300-5-44 RFE/RL Research Institute Analytic Research Department, Records of Aurél Bereznai, Hungarian Program Summary May 1955-Jul 1963, Boxes 1-3

HU OSA 300-5-43 RFE/RL Research Institute Analytic Research Department, Records of Aurél Bereznai Hungarian research materials, Reports 1961-1965

HU OSA 300-40-14 Box 1 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Telephone Calls Aug 1985-Mar 1987

HU OSA 300-40-14 Box 2 RFE/RL Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Telephone Calls 1988-89

HU OSA 205-4-20 Box 118 Open Media Research Institute, Information Services Department, EEA Bulgarian Unit, Subject Files, Social issues, abortion

HU OSA 205-4-140 Box 1 Open Media Research Institute, Information Services Department, Hungarian Subject Files, Abortusz, Situation Reports, 1971-1990

HU OSA 205-4-140 Box 111 Open Media Research Institute Information Services Department, Hungarian Subject Files, Nők 1976-89

HU OSA 335-0-1 Box 1 Mária Heller Research Documentation (Annotations of Intellectual Debates and Datasheets of Researchers)

Collections from the OSA Digital Repository:

- Free Europe Committee Encrypted Telex Communication
- RFE Information Items
- RFE/RL Background Reports
- RFE/RL Situation Reports
- RFE/RL Public Affairs Photographic Files

Literature at OSA Library and CEU Library