

***Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class: Working-Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe.* Eds. Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011. viii, 222 pp. Bibliography. Notes on Contributors. Index. \$70, hard bound.**

**Nitzan Shoshan, El Colegio de México, México D.F.**

The strange scarcity of the category of class in current scholarly debates about populist nationalism in today's Europe backgrounds this timely intervention by Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai. Mindful of the failure of traditional class analysis to account for the successes of right wing nationalism precisely where one expected to find the banner of socialism, and with a view to processes of neoliberal globalization, recent studies of the rise of nationalist populism among the European working classes (and elsewhere) have tended to formulate their explanations in cultural terms, for example as the impact of abstract global forces upon the traditions of local communities, or as the creeping corrosion of intimate frameworks of meaning and cultural coherence. Backed by an impressive collection of ethnographic studies, in *Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class* Kalb and Halmai make a strong case that the analysis of class has remained indispensable for understanding the gains of populist nationalism in Europe. In order to decipher the current conjuncture between (mostly right wing, as the Kalb puts it in his rich introduction to the volume) populism and the European working class, the editors argue, we must pay heed to the broad dispossessions that accompanied processes of neoliberalization across the continent, and which, for those still traumatized by the experience, have become all but impossible to signify in any other form than neo-nationalist politics. This unarticulated displacement of what amounts to class experience onto the fantasy of nation, Kalb and Halmai tell us, bears the footprints of neoliberal transnationalization and of the concomitant decline of class-based politics, revealing the double crisis of both labor and popular sovereignty that marks our post-Fordist moment.

On the one hand, then, *Headlines of Nation, Subtexts of Class* belongs with what has by now become an ample literature on the relation between neoliberal global capitalism and populist, often violently racist nationalisms. Don Kalb, in the introduction, helpfully lays out some of these lineages. On the other hand, the compilation distinguishes itself in its analytical focus on social relations and class experiences, rather than on cultural difference and localized communities. This reorientation of the debate is dutifully born out in all of the eight ethnographic case studies, starting with Theodora Vetta's analysis of how the transition from socialist-era industrial self-management to privatized property rights rendered Serbian workers vulnerable to the extreme nationalism of the *Radikali* party. Looking at Romanian nationalism in the city of Cluj, Norbert Petrovici levels a critique of Roger Brubaker's cognitivist theory of ethnicity, arguing that the success of ethno-nationalist political entrepreneurs finds its roots in the generation of indigenist networks at the socialist workplace. Florin Faje examines how football

fandom in Cluj has come to reference an ethnicized political polarization between working class populism and middle class cosmopolitanism. Next, Eszter Bartha analyses the ethnicization of class that accompanied the decline of a once socialist “model” factory in Hungary. Gábor Halmai, also writing on Hungary, describes an “ideological chaos” in which a nationalist far right has come to stand for a socially-oriented political alternative to the neoliberal, capitalist ex-communists. Turning now to Western Europe, in the following chapter Michael Blim traces how the industrial decline of the traditionally leftist-dominated Marche region in Italy has opened the way for a marked shift to the right. Jaro Stacul explores the conjuncture of regionalist populism and entrepreneurial neoliberalism in the economically transformed landscape of the Trentino region in the Italian Alps. Finally, Paul Gilfillan argues that a younger generation in a deindustrialized mining region of Scotland articulates social intimacy as separatist nationalism in response to the perceived class betrayal of the English left.

The book helpfully illustrates how the analytical focus on class helps us to move beyond the conventional scholarly separation of East and West and to think critically, too, about the no less conventional distinction between the left and the right. Across the continent, and in what are no doubt very different political configurations, historical legacies, and cultural contexts, we find widespread experiences of dispossession among the European working classes, often matched with nostalgic narratives of decline and with a sense of political alienation and resentment. Labor seems to maintain a strong hold as an axis of identification, even as class has become increasingly ethnicized. One could have wished for a better geographical distribution of the case studies, which, while intended to hold up an argument about Europe in general, in fact focus on relatively few—and repetitive—national contexts. The different contributions, including the introduction, would also have benefitted from more analytical attention to the problems of racism and xenophobia, which have strongly marked European nationalist populisms but which receive passing mentions at best in this book. The most critical lacuna, however, is the absence of a rigorous, informed discussion of the concept of populism itself, as the editors understand it. The brief definition of populism as a rejection of cosmopolitan liberal elites and as a symptom for class dispossession on pages 13-14 does justice neither to the complexity of the concept nor to the controversies that surround it. We find a few more comments in Stacul’s contribution (158), but these too are cursory and come too late. Still, the insights offered in the detailed ethnographic case studies of *Headlines of Nation*, *Subtexts of Class* surely appear more relevant than ever against the present economic trouble that, having already devastated certain European economies, is looming over others nearby, and which raises deep anxieties about the prospects of nationalist populism on the continent. Students of populist and nationalist movements, of contemporary political cultures, and of post-socialism and post-Fordism in Europe and beyond it are certain to find this volume innovative and enlightening.