The Recent Discourse on Nationalism and Minorities

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Abstract

The recent years have witnessed the widespread of the concepts of nationalism and populism in the discourse of political leaders in different EU countries. In spite of the noble ends of this discourse in giving priority to the domestic and security issues for those inside the borders and preserving the national identities and cultures, such discourse usually assumes that the rights of migrants and refugees come at the expense of the nation’s expense which consequently has negative impacts on the lives and rights of the migrants and refugees in these countries. Different reports indicate that the nationalist and populist discourse has led to many problems for the migrants and refugees including the danger of deportation which is a death sentence for many of them. In the light of this argument, the article is concerned with investigating the impact of the nationalist and populist discourse of the radical right wing parties and anti-immigration groups in the EU countries on the rights of migrants and refugees within the International Law, the UN Resolutions for the Refugees and Migrants, and the Islamic jurisprudence and sharia in relation to the protection of the rights of refugees, migrants, and minorities.

Keywords: Nationalism, Minorities, Refugees, Rights, Migrants, Cultures

Scope of the study

This study is limited to the problems of people who left his/her countries, in the EU countries since 2014. It is also limited to the speeches of politicians and decision makers in these countries in response to what came to be called the migration crisis in Europe since 2014. The rationale is that this period represents the biggest influx of migrants and refugees to the EU countries which led to the release of different laws, regulations, proposals and controls with the purpose of reducing the flow of migrants and refugees to the EU countries. These laws, regulations, proposals, and controls came as a result from the increasing power and influence of the nationalist parties and movements in the EU state members. It can be claimed that the rise of nationalism and populism coincided with the increasing flow of migrants and refugees. The social and economic problems that hit Europe gave the far-right wing political leaders an opportunity to dominate politics and manipulate the migration issue for their success.

For the analysis of the Populists and nationalistic discourse, the data was collected from select speeches of political leaders and ministers, excerpts of press conferences and media reports. To explore how the issue of migration and refugees is framed and constructed, a few research questions were formulated as a set of guidelines for this research. About 30 speeches were selected from major EU countries during the last three years (2015 to 2018). The rationale behind the selection is to develop a thematic content (in the form of examples of rhetorical and persuasive discourse) and manage the research questions through choosing the right use of vocabulary. For the purpose of thematic analysis, keywords are used for narrowing down the scope of sampling which included themes like terrorism, illegal immigration, unemployment, poverty, economic and financial problems, security, oppression and political unrest.
Statement of the problem

The latest years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of migrants and refugees to many European countries due to different social, economic, political, and environmental factors. In the face of the violence acts due to the Arab Spring revolutions in different Arab countries, the acceleration of tensions between Palestinians and citizens, the conflicts and civil wars in Africa and different parts in Asia, huge number of citizens countries on these regions fled to save their lives and the lives of their families by migrating to different EU countries due to the political stability in such countries.

According to the European Union statistics on international migration flows, more than 1.8 million refugees have arrived in Europe since 2014. The highest number of these refugees - 1,015,078 - was recorded in 2015. The majority of these migrants, around 75% were trafficked by sea from Turkey to Greece then continued to move through Europe to reach the final destinations of Germany and Sweden.

In the face of the increasing number of migrants and refugees to EU countries, different politicians and government leaders in these countries have come to argue for the risks and problems of admitting migrants and refugees to their countries. This has come to be defined as the nationalist and populist discourse. The so-called right-wing populist politicians use different linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetoric devices in ways that construct fear and relate various dangers including terrorism, unemployment, and instability to the flow of migrants and refugees. In their speeches, Wodak (2015) argues, ‘migrants and refugees are always blamed and used as scapegoats for threatening and damaging the EU societies’1. The purpose of this study is to investigate the implications of this new nationalist and populist discourse on the rights of migrants and refugees in the EU countries.

The status of migrants and refugees in the International Law

Perhaps the first of the branches of Public International Law that regulates the principles and rules that limit the use of violence during armed conflict, whether international or non-international, or the effects of war on human beings in general, is the International Humanitarian Law. It is true to claim that refugees are defined and protected in the International Law. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”4.

According to the International Law, refugees are victims who escape of victims from the dangers of armed conflict to places where they are protected. The first place where victims resort is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), mandated by the Geneva Convention to protect the most vulnerable individuals, whether prisoners of war or civilians. In the event of an armed conflict, the citizens of any country are protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The refugees may also be other states in the middle of a civil war in the state of asylum.

The human rights of migrants and refugees

According to the Human Rights Organization, ‘an estimated 258 million people, approximately 3% of the world’s population, currently live outside their country of origin, many of whose migration is characterised by varying degrees of compulsion’. Many of them were forced to leave their original countries for different reasons including poverty, conflicts, wars, and environmental factors.

Different reports indicate clearly that migrants are usually vulnerable to different problems including discrimination, exploitation and marginalization. They often live and work in the shadows, afraid to complain, and denied their human rights and fundamental freedoms. They also suffer different human rights violations including
denial of civil and political rights such as arbitrary detention, torture, or a lack of due process, as well as economic, social and cultural rights such as the rights to health, housing or education.

Conclusion

This study addressed the issue of the implications of the national and populist discourse on the rights of migrants and refugees in the EU countries. For that purpose, a corpus of 30 political speeches was built and a qualitative analysis was carried out using critical discourse analysis (CDA) and content analysis methods. The remainder of this chapter summarizes the main conclusions, implications and recommendations of the study.

The problem of migration has been one of the most important topics addressed by radical and right wing parties in Europe in recent years, as reflected in recent parliamentary and presidential elections in different European countries where the radical movements and right wing parties heavily armed the nationalist and populist discourse, rejected the ‘Other’ and even demanded the closure of the European gates in the face of migrants and refugees. They are also calling for the revision of the immigration and asylum laws. It is evident that the migration issue is used for making political gains. The recent years have witnessed an increasing dominance of the far right wing parties in different EU countries. This is partly attributed to the nationalist and populist discourse manipulated by political leaders who usually blame migrants and refugees for the security, social, and economic problems in these countries. In this context, it can be claimed that the nationalist and populist discourse embeds different hidden ideologies for political gains. In other words, right wing political leaders are embedding in their political discourse some hidden ideologies that are related to the hate and rejection of migrants, refugees, and Muslims. It can also be concluded that the increasing popularity of anti-immigration movements and radical right wing political leaders hints at the influence of the nationalist and populist discourse on the public opinion in the EU countries. Populist discourse has led to fear and rejection of the “Other”, even to racist acts, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Results indicate clearly that the liberal policies that led Western Europe and America after the Second World War are no longer protected by the internal and domestic interactions that had been buried over the past decades. Britain’s exit (Recently referred to as the Brexit) from the European Union is a significant indication and a reflective scene of the rise of the populist movements in Europe. Today, the British are looking for a different relationship with the EU or more precisely with the liberal tradition embodied by the European Union. What happened in Britain was biased towards populism or otherwise the restoration of Britain to their ancient inheritance that was long dominated by intertwined conflicts with other European societies.

In France, the situation is not almost different. French President Emanuel Macron struggled in order to keep the French far right wings from power in France in the last Presidential elections. It is true that the nationalist and populist views of the French right wing political leader Marine Le Pen helped in the formation of a full-fledged right wing government in Italy whose members blame the refugees for all the social, economic, security, and political problems of Italy. The refugee crisis contributed to the discourse of preserving the European national identity against the dangers of increasing numbers of refugees, a case exploited by radical right wing parties to fuel fears of the loss of national identity in particular and of the European identity in general. A series of unfortunate incidents in many cities Such as the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris, and the suicide bombings in Brussels in increasing the fears of the European citizen so that the European voter has put the concerns of identity above all considerations, and therefore the extremist right has become the populist discourse against the refugees and migrants who still see in Europe a safe haven.

In Germany, for the first time after the Second World War, the radical right wing Alternative for Germany Party is represented in the German Parliament Bundestag. This party is known for its nationalist and populist ideas. It is even against the single European currency. The Party has more than 10 representatives in the German Parliament and it signals the formal emerging of the party into the political life in Germany and even turning Germany from absolute liberalism to populism. In this context, there are real threats for the rights of migrants and refugees in the
EU countries. Unfortunately, there is a Mediterranean that drowns dozens of Africans every day who dream of joining the liberal and free world in Europe. The implication is that the crises of refugees and migrants are not at all intractable, but governments cannot address them alone. Today, millions of refugees and migrants are deprived of their basic rights and the world itself is deprived of the full benefits it can derive from refugees and migrants.

Reference


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