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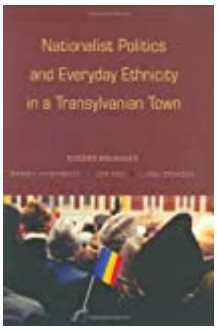

Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, Liana Grancea. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 502 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-12834-4.

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Doing Things with Ethnicity in Cluj (Kolozsvar)

Shortly after Rogers Brubaker's collection of essays, *Ethnicity without Groups*, was published in 2004, HABSBURG dedicated a special discussion to the book. Keith Brown, Patrice Dabrowski, Pieter Judson, Charles King, and Jeremy King offered their overwhelming support for the theoretical work of Brubaker, which has decisively influenced interpretations of Eastern European nationalism.[1] In this volume, the historical sociologist introduced the concept of "groupism," or the propensity of scholars to talk about social aggregates, such as the nation, in terms of well-defined, bounded groups capable of collective action. Instead, he claimed that ethnicity, race, and nationhood are not "things *in* the world," but "perspectives *on* the world."[2] Despite the enthusiastic support for the volume, some reviewers expressed eagerness to see how he applies these categories to his empirical work on Transylvania and how a *theory* of social relations could be implemented to explain *specific* historical situations. If one can judge from Brubaker's newest study, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, completed in collaboration with Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, there has been a two-way communication process between him and historians of Eastern Europe.[3] The product is a comprehensive examination of nationalism and ethnicity in the Transylvanian town of Cluj-Napoca, where Romanian and Hungarian ideas of nationness intersect.

The book explores politics and perceptions of nationhood in Cluj from two viewpoints: it charts the development of nationalist politics as articulated by political leaders and underscores the more ambiguous role of ethnicity in everyday life. It begins with the overly nationalistic, anti-Hungarian Mayor Gheorghe Funar and the "paradox" that despite the existence of preconditions of ethnonational conflict, the city of Cluj responded with indifference to the national rhetoric. This does not mean that ethnicity and nationhood have no meaning for citizens of Cluj. Yet, as the coauthors insist, the crucial questions regarding ethnicity concern not what ethnicity *is* but rather "where it is, when it matters, and how it works" (p. 7).

Criticizing the "unhappy marriage between cliched constructionism and engrained groupism," the collaborators offer a new interpretive framework for analyzing ethnicity (p. 8). Brubaker and his coinvestigators at-

tack the complacency of constructivism, which has become the new orthodoxy in studies of nationhood; according to them, "that ethnicity and nationhood are constructed is commonplace; how they are constructed is seldom specified" (p. 7). The authors admonish groupist tendencies to discuss "ethnic groups" as coherent entities or social actors and seek to "develop an analytical vocabulary for talking about ethnicity without (necessarily) talking about ethnic groups" (p. 8). They scorn scholars who have tended to adopt the nationalist language in their own work and call for a "relational, processual, and dynamic understanding of ethnicity and 'nation' " (p. 10). This approach involves analyzing nationhood without reifying the nation or "treating 'the Romanians' or 'the Hungarians' as the protagonists of national struggles" (p. 11). Quoting Eric Hobsbawm, whose *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (1990) reads refreshingly and timely, the authors seek to explain nationhood and ethnicity as categories and processes, and not groups, and to examine how they are both institutionalized "from above" and internalized "from below" (p. 13). This is an impressive theoretical synthesis that promises to become a reference point for future studies of nationalism in a variety of fields.

The first part of the book presents an overview of nationalist politics in Cluj (Kolozsvar) by juxtaposing macro- and micro-analysis and charting the history of nationalism in East Central Europe, the area of Transylvania, and the city of Cluj. Nationalists started linking the nation to specific territories in nineteenth-century East Central Europe but the heterogeneity of the area made impossible an easy drawing of boundaries between the diverse populations. As secessionist demands developed among the constituent ethnic groups of Austria-Hungary, the politicization of ethnicity exploded with World War I and radicalized further in the interwar years and World War II. It is in this summary that Brubaker and his colleagues are on thin ice. While their reminder of the dangers of groupism is still fresh from the compelling introduction, the historical "actors" here are nationalist or nationalizing "projects," "stances," "claims," "arguments," and "appeals," emphasizing how difficult it is to avoid groupism even when criticizing it.

The next two chapters, in which the authors analyze the same processes in Transylvania and Cluj, become increasingly focused. Hungarian centralist policies in Transylvania were reversed after World War I when Romania incorporated the area, but then resumed during World War II when Germany secured northern Transylvania for Hungary. It was Nicolae Ceausescu, however, who completed the nationalization of cities where Hungarians were previously in the majority. At the level of the city, its name changed from Kolozsvar to Cluj to Cluj-Napoca to reflect the respective Hungarian or Romanian attempts at claiming the urban space for their national projects. While these chapters map the historical context of nationalist resurgence, repetition of how nationalization developed in Transylvania vs. Cluj could have been avoided with more vigorous editing, especially since the chapters are based on secondary literature.

Without any doubt, the authors' strength is most obvious when they discuss the postsocialist period. Based on research in Cluj between 1995 and 2001, Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, and Grancea outline developments after the fall of Ceausescu, comparing the relative calm in Cluj to the turmoil in the neighboring and similarly ethnically mixed city of Targu-Mures. The emergence of ethnic parties and nationalist organizations as well as the intervention of official Hungary and Romania underscore the predominance of political actors in ethnonational tensions. Some examples are the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania (DAHR); the various Romanian nationalist organizations, most notably the Greater Romanian Party (GRP), which won 20 percent of the vote in the 2000 parliamentary elections; and the intervention of official Hungary to defend its co-nationals abroad. The struggles over separate schools, a Hungarian-language university, and the census of 2002 became focal points of rallying the nation, and the authors convincingly analyze why Cluj avoided the violent episodes that occurred in Targu-Mures. With Mayor Funar and his Party of Romanian National Unity (PRNU) in power between 1992 and 2004, aggressive anti-Hungarian policies originating in the municipal authorities marked another attempt at redefining the public appearance of the city. But Funar's actions had an unexpected consequence: instead of polarizing the population, overly nationalist rhetoric led to the routinization of national symbols, diminishing their potential for popular mobilization.

For all the impressive synthesis and extensive footnotes, groupism is rampant in the first part of the book as the authors constantly use the all-encompassing "Hungarians" and "Romanians" instead of trying to distinguish between the Hungarian or Romanian national activists, on the one hand, and mundane Hungarian-speaking or Romanian-speaking individuals, on the other. In the compelling description of the riots in Targu-Mures, for example, participants were not simply Romanians and Hungarians, but Romanian and Hungarian *extreme nationalists* who could be identified as individuals or mem-

bers of specific organizations, explaining who bussed Romanians from neighboring villages and for what reason, rather than treating them as bounded and coherent groups. It is the second part of the book, dedicated to everyday ethnicity, which promises to become indispensable reading for everyone interested in the workings of ethnic categories. The authors' goal is to describe everyday notions of ethnicity as "they are experienced and enacted–when they *are* experienced and enacted" (p. 168).

The collaborators focus on the intermittency of ethnicity, paying attention not only to what *is* but also on what is *not* experienced in national or ethnic terms. Ethnicity "happens at particular moments," and thus they prefer to analyze people's behavior not in terms of "*having* an ethnicity" but "*doing* ethnicity," not in terms of "*being* Hungarian or Romanian" but "*becoming* Hungarian or Romanian" (p. 208). The overall conclusion is that most inhabitants of Cluj are occupied with economic matters that are only occasionally articulated in ethnic terms. In this interpretation, ethnicity is "a discursive resource that can be used for specific interactional purposes" (p. 169). To demonstrate this idea, the scholars offer an in-depth analysis of the language of everyday use in Cluj and scrutinize the dynamics of categorizing everyday experience in ethnic or nonethnic terms. They have aptly chosen individuals whose lives span multiple experiences; some inhabiting a largely Romanian milieu, others living in a predominantly Hungarian atmosphere, and still others navigating the two worlds or ignoring ethnicity in their everyday interactions.

In most cases, people think about ethnicity in terms of status or class, rather than nationality or national loyalty. Such matters as social connections, political power, economic interests, or moral corruption are more frequently used than ethnicity as explanations of social interaction, and the main distinction for most Clujeni is not between Romanians and Hungarians but between "those on top" and "ordinary people" (p. 205). This is not a new observation in studies of ethnicity, but Brubaker and his coinvestigators drive the point home by analyzing the unconscious contradictions and subtle stereotypes evident in the language of everyday life. They show how cliches and prejudices sometimes emerge unconsciously as the *rhetoric* that complies with social expectations, such as being a patriotic Romanian or loyal Hungarian, but rarely do these cliches translate into specific national or nationalist *actions* of individuals. The authors stress, "to understand how ethnicity matters … it is important to bear in mind how little it matters to much of everyday experience" (p. 206).

Even so, there is a crucial distinction between the broadly defined Hungarians and Romanians–because of their minority status, Hungarians are more likely than Romanians to talk about their everyday experiences in ethnic terms. Hungarians more frequently police their ethnic membership, through control of language practices, school choices, and marriage strategies. To further complicate the use of ethnic categories, the authors emphasize the difference between citizenship and ethnicity, because the term "Romanian" could be used to signify both concepts. Regional categories also relativize national and ethnic ones since local solidarity between Transylvanians of both ethnic groups remains strong. Some cues for ethnicity include language use and individuals' names, but people rarely "overcommunicate" their ethnicity (p. 222).

The most interesting part of this analysis is when individuals are likely to "do things with categories" (p. 224). Some of the discursive or interactional functions of ethnicity are to "account for an action or stance, hold others accountable for their actions or stances, claim insider status, preemptively ward off criticism, and police category boundaries" (p. 209). These are theoretical insights that are tremendously useful to any empirical scholar when formulating research questions, searching for evidence, or questioning personal perspectives on ethnicity. For example, Romanians might use ethnicity to hold Hungarians accountable for the revisionist stance that the minority as a group is believed to have over Transylvania. At the same time, Hungarians might use ethnicity to hold Romanians accountable for what Mayor Funar, by acting as a Romanian, said or did. But one might also claim being Romanian to imply the right to criticize Romanian politics and leaders. Ethnicity is not used only to invoke national respect or honor but also to be critical of or distancing from the ethnic group. This analysis confirms that talk in ethnic terms does not automatically mean devotion to the national cause, but "ethnic category membership is often understood, experienced and represented as a matter of degree" (p. 230).[4] This warning urges scholars not to seek national rationale behind every nationally phrased action, something particularly helpful to historians who tend to use source materials written by national activists.

Language is the most visible criterion of ethnic difference in Cluj, but there are profound asymmetries in how language is experienced because a certain linguistic behavior is more frequently expected from Hungarians. In

an all-Hungarian environment, however, the awareness of language disappears and ethnicity becomes "interactionally unproblematic rather than a constant source of friction" (p. 241). Only in certain settings is language likely to be "noticed" or made central to people's experience, while most of the time language is "an unremarkable and unremarked practice" (p. 251). This normalization of minority language usage is refreshing, since studies have tended to emphasize the exclusive rather than the inclusive character of language in minority communities. In Cluj, during interaction with strangers, one is expected to speak Romanian, but there is widespread toleration of occasional, spontaneous Hungarian-language use. Hungarian is used extensively in personal encounters, and stories of Romanian attempts at "policing" Hungarian are "conversational material" rather than reality (p. 249). This observation is another useful hint for historians reading nationalist sources that overemphasize national fears. Language switching happens unconsciously, and "there [i]s no intent to exclude; the intent [i]s to *include*" (p. 256). Linguistic choice is about "style, rhythm, wit, charm, playfulness, nuance, and spontaneity" and not the conscious demarcation of boundaries between the communities (p. 255).

In contrast to the spontaneity of language, formal institutions, such as schools, churches, workplaces, associations, and the media, crucially shape people's experience of ethnicity. Within these institutions, even though their primary goal is to "produce and reproduce Hungarians," the Hungarian-ness of their members becomes the "default" category and is therefore less salient (p. 266). The comprehensive Hungarian school system produces a distinctive Hungarian national, but not necessarily nationalistic, world. This tendency reflects the nonideological character of choices made by people, which the authors consider to be the "power" of Hungarians "to 'naturalize' a social world, to 'unmark' ethnicity, to render it invisible" (p. 273). The concept of a "world" that the authors propose is appealing because it allows for "crossings" between the porous Hungarian and Romanian communities. Choice of membership is guided by practical considerations of inclusion rather that nationalistic intentions of exclusion, and individuals remain more interested in social interaction rather than ideological commitment.

Mixings between Hungarians and Romanians occur in marriages and contacts with friends, neighbors, and colleagues, but "although *nominally* interethnic, such interactions are not *experientially* interethnic" (p. 301). There are only selected scenarios in which ethnicity "happens" in mixed settings, and the authors explain how disagreement could become ethicized, because in moments of tension ethnicity provides "the readily available explanatory framework" of handling difference (p. 304). However, the authors do not pursue further analysis of how everyday ethnicity could transform into interethnic conflict and prefer to emphasize how ethnic tension is successfully diffused in everyday situations.

This interpretation reminds of Tone Bringa's research on a Bosnian village in the 1980s, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way* (1995), which demonstrated how similarly normal interethnic relations quickly evaporated during the Bosnian war.[5] Even though mixed couples in Cluj manage to mediate conflict before it occurs, the choice of schools or religious affiliations, for example, could be full of tension. The authors emphasize that some topics are recognized as dangerous and self-consciously avoided in Cluj, suggesting one strategy to avoid conflict. But they admit that silences mark and reinforce ethnicity, and more rigorous analysis is needed to explain why outright confrontation between the two communities did not occur in Cluj. The book emphasizes the widespread belief that it is politicians who exploit and cultivate Romanian-Hungarian tensions. But what makes Gheorghe Funar different from Slobodan Milosevic, Cluj from Targu-Mures, and Transylvania from Bosnia or Kosovo? This methodological preference, of course, reflects the authors' preoccupation with the casual, nonconfrontational aspects of ethnicity. Trying "to change the terms of a conversation," the collaborators have chosen to remind us that social interaction is "by no means ethnicity alone," offering a corrective to overethnicized interpretations of social relations (pp. 358, 238). This optimistic view of ethnicity is engaging and will become a must-read in studies of nationalism.

Notes

[1]. The interaction between Brubaker and scholars of Eastern European nationalism began in the 1990s, with his *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), in which he famously introduced the concept of "nationness" as a "contingent event."

[2]. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17. The HABSBURG discussion of Brubaker's book took place in April and May, 2005 and can be found in the HABSBURG logs for those months.

[3]. Brubaker has been criticized, notably by Pieter

Judson in the 2005 HABSBURG discussion of *Ethnicity without Groups*, that in his historical summaries he overrelies on the classics of Eastern European nationalism but ignores the innovative research that has appeared in recent years (for Judson's statement see http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=habsburg&month=0504&week=c&msg=C4Hwm1xhKLeUIjyL0Z12Jg&user=&pw=). If one is to judge from the (extensive) footnotes and bibliography in his latest book, Brubaker has done a lot of catching up.

[4]. For an interpretation of the function of national rhetoric, see Theodora Dragostinova, "Speaking National: Nationalizing the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900-1939," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 1 (2008): 154-181.

[5]. Similarly, Anastasia Karakasidou shows how the importance of ethnicity changes over time and could become a source of conflict in her *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia 1870-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).