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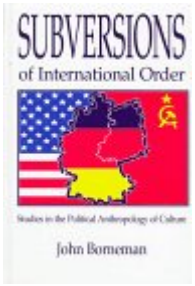

John Borneman. *Subversions of International Order: Studies in the Political Anthropology of Culture.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. viii + 341 pp. $25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7914-3584-7; $26.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-3583-0.

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John Borneman's name became associated with ethnography in Germany when, during the euphoria and chaos of the early reunification period, he published two books based on 1986-1989 dissertation fieldwork in East and West Berlin,[1] and translated a third on gay identity in the GDR.[2] *Subversions of International Order*, a collection of essays written between 1986-1995, delineates Borneman's theoretical development over the decade since this first fieldwork. What binds these essays together, the author reflects in a well-written Introduction, is a drive to engage ethnography in themes relevant to the post-Cold War era–migration, war, global-local processes, gender, nationalism, citizenship–and to offer the *thick description*[3] of ethnographic portrayal as a substitute for, or subversion of, the essentializing images of Second and Third World countries still popular in "other disciplines" and the media.

The book contains an Introduction and nine essays, divided into four parts: "Making Culture and International Order," "National Identities In A Disintegrating Political Order," "Resistance And Opposition To Authority," and "Territorial Sovereignty And Its Violation." Parts Two and Three draw from Borneman's fieldwork in Germany, while Parts One and Four cover a broader geographical range, taking the reader all the way from a discussion of American conceptions of nation as reflected in light-horse breed classificatory systems to one of rape and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. Each essay benefits from the author's well-crafted use of narrative and unique theoretical framework.

Often, Borneman is able to bind theory and fieldwork together, weaving insightful depictions of "the transcontinental chaos at the end of the twentieth century" (p. 1). We see this in his discussion of the Cold War's pervasive (but still largely overlooked) influence over post-World War II culture and politics across the globe.[4] In Chapter Eight, "Education after the Cold War: Remembrance, Repetition, and Right-Wing Violence," he asks a question that has been quite popular since reunification: "Does the rise of anti-foreigner violence and right-wing radicalism represent a compulsion for repetition?"[5] Borneman believes this is not the case. Rather, just as Germany's division was the consequence of Cold War hostilities, and "not a penalty for losing Auschwitz" (p. 222), so, too, is growing racist and nationalist thinking a reflection of east Germany's post-Cold War insecurity and lost-orientation–not a return to the Nazi era. And, while "education after Auschwitz" was largely successful, "education after the Cold War" is desperately needed.

The link drawn between the nation-state and sexuality is perhaps the most provoking element of the book. In Chapter Nine, "Emigres as Bullets/Immigration as Penetration: Perceptions of the Marielitos," Borneman analyses American responses to the 1980 Cuban boat lift.

Within four months of travel restriction removal, 125,000 Cuban immigrants flooded U.S. shores–including up to 20,000 released convicts, and 15-20,000 gay men. Grappling with an ambiguous classificatory system, the press avoided the topic of homosexuality altogether, but often referred suspiciously to the masculine and criminal makeup of the immigrant population. U.S. refugee regulations were tightened. Who would be among the lucky few to gain entrance? The answer was political prisoners and relatives of Cuban-Americans. Countering the symbolism of "three major American demons–'communists,' 'criminals,' and 'homosexuals' " (p. 260), the image of "family" offered the possibility of assimilation. On the other hand, immigration laws could deny homosexuals entrance, or place them on permanent parole. "A seemingly political threat," the author reflects, "is actually perceived as if it were a sexual one."

In Chapter Ten, "Toward a Theory of Ethnic Cleansing: Territorial Sovereignty, Heterosexuality, and Europe," Borneman reacts against the thesis that ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by Serb and Croat nationals is a reenactment of age-old hatred. "Why exactly did the perpetrators focus on humiliation and rape as methods of ethnic cleansing ...?" (p. 274). One answer, he believes, lies in modern conceptions of the European nation-state. The post-Cold War ethnic conflicts drew energy from the Western ideal of a culturally homogeneous people holding sovereign reign over a bounded geographical area–Germany's experiment with National Socialism being an extreme example of this. A second influence comes from dominant Western conceptions of heterosexuality. Drawing from Mediterranean case studies, such as Michael Herzfeld's *The Poetics of Manhood* (1985) and Stanley Brandes' *Metaphors of Masculinity* (1980),[6] Borneman suggests that symbolisms of male potency–found by Herzfeld and Brandes to saturate jokes and political discussions–were also generated from the domestic sphere in the former Yugoslavia. Together, conceptions of "heterosexuality," and of "territorial sovereignty" then created a metaphor which was enacted in the ethnic cleansing process.

To make one criticism of this body of essays, I would argue that Borneman's heavily theoretical approach can, at times, overbear the ethnographic context. In Chapter Two, for instance, he uses a study of horse classificatory systems as a means of linking localized practices with global political orders. In Europe, horse competitions are based on performance, whereas in America place great importance on breed purity–proving, in the end, that the American system reflects a national ideology: there is a horse breed for every price range, for every type of citizen. The reader is given no direct access to the daily-life of horse breeders, and no interviews are quoted. At the end of the article, I found myself thinking that a study of the European dog breeding tradition would probably also conclude that there was an animal for every pocket and preference. What then, should we make of this linkage?

In Chapter Four, "Time-Space Compression and the Continental Divide in German Subjectivity," I enjoyed the potent metaphor of the ex-GDR symbolized as an erotic dancer–performing a striptease for Western Germany, until all of its secrets had been been uncovered and its naked body could be reborn under the regulations of the market economy and the FRG. But Borneman seems to delve too far into the aesthetic of this image with his conclusion, "West Germany is the male life-giver and East Germany a female body that refuses to submit to death and burial. By refusing to accept its role in this process, East Germany becomes a hermaphroditic parasite, a part male-part female, part dead-part alive thing–a species in-between that feeds on the living" (p. 118). If anthropology truly wishes to subvert simplified cultural portrayals and promote its own, it must continuously ask the question, "what readership am I promoting, and how will it react to my discourse?"

Subversions of International Order is an important and enjoyable work, nonetheless. It is methodologically and theoretically provoking, and I recommend it to anyone interested in an anthropological perspective of political issues in a post-Cold War era.

Notes:

[1]. John Borneman, *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; and John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation.* N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[2]. J. Lemke, *Gay Voices From East Germany.* Edited, trans. and with introduction by John Borneman. Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1991.

[3]. The phrase comes, of course, from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books, 1973.

[4]. For a discussion of the Cold War's influence on the post-1989 period, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

[5]. I most recently heard this question reflected upon by the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* editor, Josef Joffy. In a humorously neo-liberal speech entitled, "Three Reich's and You're Out," (Michigan State U., 1998) Joffy explained that such a thing as Auschwitz would not occur in today's consumer society. Rather than turning to large-scale violence, frustrated Germans would use their unemployment checks for vacations in southern France; and the unemployed wouldn't spend their free-time at hate organizations, but in front of the television.

[6]. Michael Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985; and Stanley Brandes, _Metaphors of Masculinity: Sex and Status in Andalusian Folklore. Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1980.

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