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Rogers Brubaker. *Grounds for Difference.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 240 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-74396-0.

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There is no doubt that Rogers Brubaker is one of the world's leading scholars of ethnicity, nationalism and citizenship. Over the past twenty years he has written numerous pathbreaking books and articles including *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992), *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (1996), *Ethnicity without Groups* (2004), and *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (2006). These studies combine rigorous conceptual critique and subtle theoretical analyses with original, in-depth, empirical research. More specifically, Brubaker has developed an innovative analytical approach that could be termed "cognitive constructivism." This novel approach draws on Pierre Bourdieu, neo-institutionalism, cognitive psychology, Emanuel Schegloff, and Max Weber among others and attempts to go beyond the conventional constructivist accounts. Unlike most constructivists, who are generally dismissive of psychological, biological, and other scientific interpretations of cultural difference, Brubaker finds new developments in science interesting, relevant, and challenging. Hence, cognitive constructivism engages in an ongoing dialogue with the new advancements in a variety of disciplines, in order to develop a more sustained and epistemologically better-grounded constructivist alternative. This was already pronounced in his *Ethnicity without Groups,* but it comes to the fore in this new book.

Grounds for Difference zooms in on the three recent developments that have changed the parameters of debate on cultural difference: the return of inequality, the revitalization of religious discourses, and the rise of biological interpretations of difference. While the cultural turn was influential in highlighting the nonmaterial dimensions of inequality, the 2008 recession has largely undermined such interpretations by refocusing attention on the structural contexts of deep inequalities. However, as Brubaker emphasizes it is still not clear how categories of difference produce and reproduce inequalities. By contrasting gender, ethnicity, and citizenship Brubaker argues that "citizenship contributes to inequality by directly and categorically excluding noncitizens," while gender and ethnic inequality are more diffuse and distributed as they emerge through "more complex, subtle, and intertwined pathways" involving not only the gatekeepers, but also different social mechanisms "in the shaping of selves, subjectivities, and ways of making sense of the world" (p. 27). Moreover, gender and ethnicity also differ in a sense that social separation is crucial for the ethnic inequality (e.g., residential segregation

in the United States), while in contrast gender inequality presupposes social interdependence (e.g.,. as in the household division of labor).

Brubaker also explores the impact of the new developments in biology on the popular and institutional understandings of human difference. With the rise of biomedicine, forensic science, and genealogical research, there has been a shift from the typological towards populationist interpretations of difference in biology. Hence, instead of the traditional perceptions of "races" as genetically fixed categories, new understandings emphasize that any two randomly chosen human beings are likely to share 99.9 percent of their genome. While Brubaker sees these developments as potentially helpful in delegitimizing the rigid concepts of bounded and internally homogenous groups, the new genetic science can also foster different forms of essentialism. For example biomedical research utilizes bureaucratic categories of difference and undertakes drug trials along essentialist ethno-racial lines. In this context, medical researchers have managed to patent a drug supposedly tailored for a specific ethnoracial group–BiDil is designed specifically for African Americans. In a similar fashion new forensic science and genealogical research contribute to the racialization of social relations. The forensics accomplish this through huge DNA data banks such as the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), which contains 12 million individual profiles and in which African American urban males are heavily overrepresented. This geneticization is equally widespread in the ever popular ancestry tests that also naturalize popular concepts of race and ethnicity by projecting the contemporary categories back into the paleoanthropological age.

Brubaker also explores the impact that recent religious revivals, new language policies, and migration have had on ethnicity and nationalism. While accepting that globalization and the resurgence of the sacred added another layer of complexity to the institutionalization of cultural difference, Brubaker is adamant that the core of the secularization thesis still stands and that nationalism is first and foremost a secular phenomenon. Moreover, he is also skeptical of Shmuel Eisenstadtâs notion of "multiple modernities," arguing that despite the obvious cultural specificities the similar institutional trajectories of ethnicity and nationalism across the world indicate that modernity, in its structural form, is still rather singular than multiple.

Grounds for Difference is a subtle, original, and comprehensive book. All the hallmarks of Brubakerâs earlier work, such as the conceptual clarity, the theoretical rigor–grounded in a well-researched and well-informed analysis–the crisp writing style, and the impeccable sociological reasoning are displayed here. There is a wealth of original ideas developed in this book that requires much careful reading and unpacking. Although most of these essays were written for different occasions and deal with diverse issues they do connect well. There is a common thread that runs through all the chapters, namely Brubakerâs cognitive constructivist approach which treats race, ethnicity, nation, and religion not as ontological realities but as epistemological constructs. As he often reasserts these are not "things in the world, but perspectives on the world."[1] There is no doubt that cognitive constructivism is a major improvement of the conventional constructivist accounts. However, one could go one step further and engage more with the organizational and ideological structures that shape and sustain these "perspectives on the world." To avoid the trap of idealist epistemology one needs to situate these popular cognitions within the concrete coercive-organizational and ideological contexts. The idea that one could patent a drug exclusively for a single ethnic group is not only a reflection of a particular perspective on the world. It is even more a statement on the strength of the specific bureaucratic and ideological apparatuses to make such a perspective organizationally plausible and politically legitimate. Hence, to fully understand the popular acceptance of such ethnocentric and nationalist idioms and practices one also needs to dissect the coercive organizations underpinning such popular perspectives.

Note

[1]. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17.

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