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Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.

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illustrations, tables, graphs, index.**

Rogers Brubaker and his associates undertake an ambitious and challenging task in their monograph on *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Their “task” is to examine the everyday workings of ethnicity and nationhood within the context of elite-level ethno-political conflict in Cluj, Romania, but concentrating primarily on the perceptions and actions of the average inhabitants of the city and not its leaders. They undertake this task by first providing a historical context to their analysis in chapters 1-4 (Part One) and then “shifting the angle of vision” in chapters 5-12 (Part Two) to a “view from below, turning our attention from nationalist politics to everyday ethnicity” (p. 14).

The authors analyze the inter-ethnic (nationality) conflicts of the city mainly from the perspective of Sociology and Anthropology. They use as their focus the present 80% Romanian majority and its relations with the 20% Hungarian minority. This gives the analysis a very present oriented perspective in spite of Part One, which sets the stage historically. As an analysis of the here and now the book is a great tour the force overall, thorough, scholarly, rich in insights and supplemented by a rich body of information provided in detailed footnoting, tables, maps and pictorial evidence, all of which are effectively cross-referenced throughout the monograph. Part Two is built on top of this and provides an extensive storehouse of interviews extending in time from 1995 to 2003. It is not just an excellent sociological study, but also a well-written book that makes its points clearly, and is overall a good read.

Conceding all these positive features of *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity*, the book still has an Achilles heel in its selective historical references and its avoidance of the contributions of Political Science. The extensive bibliography (pp. 387-427), fails to list the truly outstanding contributions of Rudolf Joo, Robert King, István Kertész, László Tabajdi, Bennet Kovrig, Stephen Borsody, Karoly Kocsis, Thomas Spira, and Stephen Fisher-Galati, and lists only George Schöpflin’s 1974 study on “Romanian Nationalism.” This

bibliographic gap becomes even more serious in the light of its seeming dependence on the flawed *The Remote Borderland* of Laszlo Kürti.

The latter (p. 1, footnote 1) seems to provide the Brubaker monograph with the designation of Transylvania as a “borderland”. This analogy is unfortunate as it presents the region as on the geopolitical fringe of the Romanian and Hungarian sense of historical self-definition, when in actuality Transylvania was a core region, the center for the modern ethnogenesis of both these peoples. It provided continuity for the awareness of the historical Hungarian kingdom following the disaster at Mohács (1526) and it became the birthplace of a sense of Romanian identity in the 18th century Uniate Catholic writings formulating the Roman roots of the Vlach peoples of Transylvania and the trans-Carpathian regions. Calling it an ethnic “borderland” is an unfortunate choice of terminology, because for the medieval Hungarian kingdom the crest of the Carpathians was the borderland, while for present-day Romania the lowlands and foothills of the Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș play this role. This region was not multiethnic because it was peripheral, but because it occupied a crucial geopolitical space that was being contested not just by Ottomans and Habsburgs, but also Hungarians and Romanians, as well as the conflicting religious allegiances that came with the break between Byzantium and Rome, and the splintering of Western Christianity following the Reformation.

Aside from this unfortunate selection of terminology, the historical analysis deserves praise for its even-handed treatment of the various perspectives that have dominated the debate between the various contenders for control of its turf. The historical delimitation is also admirably organized according to an ever narrowing focus. It begins by providing a general survey of the region’s historical evolution relative to a sense of national consciousness. This is followed by a chapter that narrows the focus to Transylvania. This in turn is followed by a chapter that focuses just on the city of Klausenburg/Kolozsvár/Cluj. And finally, the last chapter of Part One focuses just on the post-Ceaușescu, post-communist evolution of inter-ethnic, inter-nationality relations.

There are two points that deserve more comment on this background. One is a problem of repeating a misconception, the other is an issue of omission. The misconception relates to repeating the myth that Hitler obliged Romania to cede Northern and Eastern Transylvania to Hungary. The return of these areas to Hungary was a consequence of an arbitral decision rendered by the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop and the Italian Foreign Minister Ciano

meeting in Vienna (1940). It was definitely a decision rendered to keep two lesser allies of the Axis from destabilizing the region. Although not a perfect solution, it did divide Transylvania paying closer attention to the ethnic/nationality considerations than had the Treaty of Trianon. (On this point see particularly C.A. Macartney's *October Fifteenth*.)

The more serious problem relates to omitting the key role of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 for the fate of Transylvanian Hungarians, particularly the Hungarians of Cluj. It will be remembered that until this point in time the majority population of Cluj was still Hungarian. The uprising in Budapest was used as the pretext to push Romanianization of the city into high gear! While the book mentions this in passing (p.109), it omits it completely from the Conclusion (p.361) when it lists "the momentous and transformative" events that "fundamentally recast nationalist politics in Cluj". While it mentions the merger of the Hungarian and Romanian universities (1959), a "much-hyped soccer match between Romania and Hungary", and even the struggles over the 2002 census, it fails to point out that 1956 provided the political opportunity and pretext to decapitate the Hungarian elite and to make all the later demographic and homogenization policies possible. Unfortunately the depoliticization of the analysis in this particular instance has led to a major distortion re causation.

History, however, is not the main concern of the Brubaker study, it is the analysis of contemporary inter-ethnic relations in Cluj. Furthermore, Brubaker and associates are more concerned with methodology that challenges the "constructivist" portrayals of the city and its problems. The analysis avoids "engrained groupism", "bounded groups", or "ethnic groups as entities or actors", i.e. as corporate beings with wills of their own. Instead, "Clujeni" (Romanian or Hungarian) should be understood on the basis of their individual formulation of interests, concerns, commitments, or loyalties. All of Part Two is devoted to outlining this "profile" in terms of "every day ethnicity". In other words, the authors seek to answer how Clujeni relate to getting ahead in the economy, how this relates to language use, their schools, churches, and work places, their affiliation with each other within or across ethnic lines and their interpretation of solutions to their problems via migration or resort to politics.

The latter, however, is given short shrift because the focus is the individual Clujeni rather than the community commitments of either Romanians or Hungarians. Thus, little discussion focuses on the factors and consequences of the use of power and power relationships in the city. Only the asymmetrical relationship between the majority and the minority hint at this. There is no discussion of the political culture, "the leadership selection process" and the

ethnic/nationality profile of the agencies of law enforcement, the courts, the bureaucrats and the military's ethnic profile, particularly in its officer corps/command structure. (These factors could have been ascertained by questions that would have dealt with the person's military service or any run-in with the law or encounter with bureaucratic obfuscation or corruption!)

Instead the focus becomes mainly symbolic politics. The posturing of Mayor Gheorghe Funar, the DAHR's (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania) role as a focal point of minority allegiance or lack thereof, and the illusive quest for "autonomy" and the introduction of the "Status law". These can be distilled from the comments of individual Clujeni, but aside from venting their spleen and getting at the general frustration of Clujeni, we do not get at the nitty-gritty of the Romanian-Hungarian political imbalance on issues like the limits of property restitution to minority as opposed to majority schools, churches or individuals, of the exact meaning of multi-culturalism at the Babeş-Bolyai University in terms of staffing, number of classes, use of bilingual or multiethnic announcements, memos or signs and programs, or the lack of Hungarian recruitment into the law enforcement agencies of the state.

The above determines the setting of "every day ethnicity" and is not solely a reflection of the nationalist politics of "ethnic national elites". In fact, by placing Gheorghe Funar's incitements and race-baiting on the same level as the minority's demands for education in their own language, the authors equate apples with oranges. Is the "rhetoric of endangerment" nationalist in the same sense as Funar's confrontational and exclusivist "rhetoric of hate mongering"? I think not! Yet no distinction is made between what is a "nationalist" phenomenon and what is a "national" phenomenon. This, in the final analysis abdicates a very important part of the task that the authors on Transylvania should consider: What does the future hold? Are there other options?

Here again, clarity could be attained via a definition of "nationalization", by specifying its identity. Thus, "nationalization" by the Hungarian Staatsvolk in 1867-1918 was "Magyarization", while "nationalization" by the Romanian Staatsvolk in 1918-1940, 1956- to the present is "Romanianization". Calling a spade a spade, is more likely to clarify what is actually happening. In talking about nationalization rather than Romanianization, Magyarization, or Americanization, we may be describing a process in a more generalized and neutral way, whereas it lacks the clarity to link it to a specific process of imposed "trading of national identity". By using the term "nationalization" we are making the process of

assimilation seem to be less imposed then when we link it to a particular nationalizing Staatsvolk!

Perhaps, subconsciously the American perspective has influenced Rogers Brubaker in selecting this terminology. It may also be more removed – or more objective – from a Sociologist’s perspective. However, it inadvertently accepts assimilationist policies and processes as the only option, because it is the status quo that is described in the interviews. In other words, it avoids considering other solutions or considers only the “default” solution of assimilation. What leads to this “solution”? Is the American bias of the assimilationist state of a multi-ethnic society responsible? Is this really comparable with the Transylvanian or the Cluj case? In other words, is incremental ethnic cleansing the preferred or the only possible solution?

The Epilogue to the book points in the direction of trying to end on a positive “happy ending” note. Even though the “Hungarian presence in Transylvania” (p.373) appears more precarious, Romanian nationalism has weakened. Yet nationalization continues as some theorists “celebrate the demise of the nation-state”. What it fails to take into account is that the collective historical memory of both Hungarians and Romanians continues into the future (a few questions about the mobilization at Csíksomlyó, annually, or the revival of Csángó consciousness might have been in order!)

In spite of some of these concerns I recommend this book highly for specialists of the East Central European region and specialists on nationalism and ethnicity. It should also be on the recommended lists for both graduate and undergraduate seminars on nationalism and the region. Everyone can learn from it. In conclusion, I would only note that the authors could have dedicated their book “To our friends in Cluj and Kolozsvár!”

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