CĂLIN GOINA

Brubaker, Rogers: *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

The latest book of Rogers Brubaker consists in a collection of previously published articles scattered over more than six years (the oldest appeared in print in 1998, while the latest in 2004). Although there is an inevitable degree of fragmentation in the eight chapters-articles, the work as a whole proves to be surprisingly internally consistent. The eight articles introduce the reader to a (mind) work in progress, to an intellectual journey in search of a more refined conceptual tool-kit for understanding nationhood, ethnicity and race.

These studies (as the author underlines in the book's Introduction) mark a departure from his previous works on macro-sociological comparative analysis such as immigration and the politics of citizenship in Europe and North America[1], citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany[2] or the 'the national question' in the successor states of the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires.[3] Moving 'beyond comparativism' and macro-scale processes, Brubaker denounced already in 1994[4] the reification of nations and ethnic groups, and the conceptual confusion between the categories of practice and the categories of analysis in the scholarly literature on ethnicity and nationalism. According to him, the researcher should "decouple the study of nationhood and nationness from the study of nations as substantial entities[5]" and focus his or her analytical efforts in comprehending the 'work' done by

1   Brubaker, Rogers (ed.): *Immigration and the Politics of Citizenship in Europe and North America*. Lanham, Md.: The German Marshall Fund of the United States and University Press of America, 1989.
2   Brubaker, Rogers: *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992.
3   Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
4   Brubaker, Rogers: Rethinking Nationhood: nation as an institutionalized form, practical category, contingent event. *Contention*, vol. 4, Nr. 1, 1994. 3–14.
5   Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed…* 16.

nation not as a thing out-there, but "as practical category, as classificatory scheme, as cognitive frame[6]." Consequently, Brubaker's methodological agenda switched toward a more ethnographical and ethnometodological approaches, pursuing a ten years project studying the salience of ethnicity and nationhood in the everyday life of the inhabitants of the ethnically mix city of Cluj, Romania[7]. While the results of the Cluj project, much expected for by the scholars of the field, are still 'in preparation' we are offered the present article collection, which I see as the collateral products of the process of intellectual alchemy, to paraphrase Goffman, of taking a mundane part of reality and transforming it into an illuminating piece of writing.

The pages of "Ethnicity without Groups" are entirely consistent with the agenda set up in "Nationalism Reframed": they pursue a step further the critique of reification ("groupism") and mark a sustained effort of conceptual clarification grounded on the distinction between categories of practice and analysis. As such, the book can be seen as a nuanced (and often path-breaking) *critique of the prevailing analytical vocabulary* covering several key themes, such as ethnicity, nationalism, ethnic violence, identity and migration. Successive chapters develop new conceptual distinctions while analytically deconstructing several major mantras of contemporary social sciences such as identity, the ethnic group, or the civic vs. ethnic nationalism dyad.

In Introduction Brubaker avows two major targets of his corrosive critical assessment: these are "groupism" (as a tendency to think social world as consisting from bounded entities) and "social constructivism" (as a theoretical perspective turned fruitless by overuse and fatigue). In their stead, the book sketches an alternative built upon the new "cognitive turn" in psychology and cultural anthropology. It is precisely this cognitive perspective, which, in my reading, marks the major break-through in Brubaker's stance toward ethnicity and nationhood. Although its influence can be detected in most of the chapters, I will address here the first, the third, and the eighth (in this order) as the key texts in which the new approach is being introduced, elaborated, and succinctly applied on an empirical case. I do not claim here that other themes such as the deconstruction of the conceptually flawed term "identity," or of the false opposition between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalisms do not deserve our attention. Yet, due to space constraints

6   Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* ... 16
7   Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalist Policies and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (With Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox and Liana Grancea). In preparation.

I chose to focus on what I perceive to be the crux of the argument put forward by the author.

The first chapter, "Ethnicity without Groups," continues the line of thinking sketched in "Nationalism Reframed. It consist in a re-analysis of reification of groups, not as a "bad intellectual habit," but as a social process essential as a category of practice pursued (successfully or not) by political entrepreneurs such as George Washington or Djokar Dudayev. Instead of starting from the notion of an American or Chechen nation fighting for independence (for example) we ought to inquire how and under what conditions did the reification process occur, and what made possible the mobilization of so many people under the flag of the 'nation.' In order to avoid analyzing reality in terms of bounded groups, Brubaker suggests eight basic starting points:

We should rethink ethnicity, nation and race as in cognitive terms, as "practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events." (p. 11) This does not mean that ethnicity will be less real and less effective, in the same way in which no one would deny the existence of racism, just because he or she does not believe in the existence of race. Further on, we should focus on groups/groupness as events, as episodes of intense collective solidarity (or the lack of it). As such, the analytical distinction between groups and categories becomes imperative: we should see categories as a potential basis for group-formation as a variable, where the group is defined as a bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity and collective action. The distinction will allow the empirical study of the politics of group-making, as successes or failures. At this point, we should be careful not to talk about groups when we are actually talking about organizations. Many times the empirical studies claiming to cover the resistance of Palestinians or Kosovars' fight for independence focus in fact on the work of organizations like PLO, Hamas, or the Kosovo Liberation Army. Last but not least, we should be attentive to the processes of framing and coding violence, for 'acts of framing and narrative encoding do not simply interpret the violence, they constitute it as ethnic." (p. 16) Consequently, Brubaker stresses, ethnicity, nationality and race are but ways of "perceiving, interpreting and representing the social world." Seeing them as such would allow us to bypass the overused statement that they are social constructs, and should allow us to move on in the analysis of how are they constructed.

It is in the third chapter that Brubaker continues the analysis sketched in the first one, and elaborates on the ways in which one could think of "Ethnicity as Cognition." The article, written together with his (former) students Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, offers a compelling intellectual argument in favor of adapting and embracing the cognitive perspective to the study of nation, ethnicity and race. The proposition put forward by the article is that ethnicity is not a "thing in the world, but a perspective on the world." (p. 65) This thesis is grounded on a survey of several historical, political, institutional, ethnographic and micro-interactional works that share the cognitive perspective. It is further developed by the analysis of several concepts specific to cognitive studies such as the stereotypes, the social categorization and the schemas. The three authors conclude that, from the perspective of the student of ethnicity, the concept of schema promises tot be particularly useful. I will survey their presentation of the concept as I find it as one of the most promising contributions of the volume.

Schemas are "mental structures in which knowledge is represented, (...) culturally shared mental constructs" (p. 75) through which people perceive and interpret the world. Thus we should think of them as unconscious, universalized, automatic structures of already acquired knowledge, making possible that each new event, person or thing be processed mentally "as an instance of an already familiar category or schema." (p. 75) As such schemas are necessarily incomplete, consisting in an invariant core and parts ("slots") which need to be "filled in," because otherwise they would be set on one single interpretation and would not allow for the perception and categorization of anything new. It is the incompleteness of schemas that makes them so attractive, as they are set into motion, activated by contextual triggers or cues. Thus, gestures, utterances, and situations are classified according to specific stimuli and to the distribution of schemas across persons. Despite the fact that most of the research on schemas has been made in experimental settings, the authors support strongly its use in the study of ethnicity. They distinguish between categories and schemas, noticing that while categories are used to ethnically classify people, only schemas enable is to categorize occurrences, standardized sequences of events, and other instances allowing the researcher to approach the issues of the ways in which ethnicity works.

This question brings me to the eight and the last chapter, as it is the only one that includes a consistent part of empirical analysis, if not an example on how to do in practice what the author advocates in theory. Written together with Margit Feischmidt, the article offers a comparative analysis of the 1998 cel-

ebrations of the revolutions of 1848 in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. I see
the article as a critique of the constructivist literature, from the perspective of
a study of the public reception of a constructed/invented tradition.

The study analyses the official and officious practices and discourse occa-
sioned by the sesquicentennial anniversary of the 1848 revolutions in the three
countries, as well as their public audience. It places the commemorations at
the intersection of a double frame of reference. On the one hand, they are to be
seen along a continuum defined by *the manner and the mood* of the representa-
tion of the past, either heroic, pathos-laden, or carnivalesque, entertain-
ment-oriented. On the other hand, it places them within an interval defined
by *the narrative frames* with the help of which history is being remembered.
They can be either *particularizing frames*, re-structuring the past in the light of lo-
cal meanings, in a perspective relevant for a culturally specific type of audience,
or universalizing *frames*, placing the remembered events in a wider context, rel-
evant not only for local commemorators, but for others as well.

The main finding of the article reveals the stubbornness of the past fac-
ing the re-construction of the present. All the three countries (in different de-
grees) experienced attempts to publicly mark the anniversary of the 1984 rev-
olutions. These commemorations interpreted the revolutions either as in-
stances of a wider, European and liberal movement, or as a nation-centered,
indigenist and particularizing instances of the freedom struggles of one puta-
tive nation or ethnic group against the other. For example, while Hungarians
from Hungary proper did participate in large numbers to a universalizing
framed, entertainment focused celebration, those living in Romania or
Slovakia did it in a particularizing, ethno-centered frame and pathos-laden
ethos. The Romanians paid little attention to the government sponsored an-
niversary framed in an universalizing narrative of a liberal democratic
Wallachian revolution, but resonated regionally (although not in large num-
bers) to the nationalist (and anti-Hungarian) celebrations of the rather
bloody Transylvanian peasant war of 1848. The Slovakian celebrations went
unnoticed and found little or no resonance within the Slovak audience.

These differences are to be accounted by the contextually specific posi-
tions of the political entrepreneurs who organized and framed the commem-
orations. These were either government officials stressing the European di-
mension of each country's past in view of the much-awaited enlargement of
the European Union, or nationalist politicians trying to reinforce and ex-
pand their constituencies. Yet, the difference in response to the various
frames of the anniversary, as well as to the anniversary itself it accounted by

the two authors by a reference to the "available pasts," at which national and regional audiences did resonate or not.

Thus, I see the study as a possible manner of doing ethnic studies avoiding groupism and moving beyond social constructivism. Ethnic and non-ethnic discourses and frames are being comparatively studied, in order to assess empirically the level of groupness they trigger, through their resonance among various publics. Unfortunately, the authors did not intend to put in practice the micro-level of cognitive analysis advocated in the chapters I reviewed so far. It seems that we all have to wait for Rogers Brubaker's next book for a substantial study to demonstrate the way in which his latest theoretical suggestions can be put in practice.