Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town, Rogers Brubaker, Princeton University Press, 2006, 0691128340, 9780691128344, 439 pages. Situated on the geographic margins of two nations, yet imagined as central to each, Transylvania has long been a site of nationalist struggles. Since the fall of communism, these struggles have been particularly intense in Cluj, Transylvania's cultural and political center. Yet heated nationalist rhetoric has evoked only muted popular response. The citizens of Cluj--the Romanian-speaking majority and the Hungarian-speaking minority--have been largely indifferent to the nationalist claims made in their names. Based on seven years of field research, this book examines not only the sharply polarized fields of nationalist politics--in Cluj, Transylvania, and the wider region--but also the more fluid terrain on which ethnicity and nationhood are experienced, enacted, and understood in everyday life. In doing so the book addresses fundamental questions about ethnicity: where it is, when it matters, and how it works. Bridging conventional divisions of academic labor, Rogers Brubaker and his collaborators employ perspectives seldom found together: historical and ethnographic, institutional and interactional, political and experiential. Further developing the argument of Brubaker's groundbreaking Ethnicity without Groups, the book demonstrates that it is ultimately in and through everyday experience--as much as in political contestation or cultural articulation--that ethnicity and nationhood are produced and reproduced as basic categories of social and political life..

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Hungarian cultural traditions in Transylvania, George Frederick Cushing, University of London. School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, Jan 1, 1984, History, 15 pages.


The Managed Hand Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work, Miliann Kang, 2010, Political Science, 309 pages. "This book is a must read for women's studies and sociology classes on labor, migration and gender as it provides its readers a rich and theoretically engaging discussion on ....

The Hungarian minority's situation in Ceausescu's Romania, Rudolf JoA3 and Ludanyi trace and open up to scrutiny the oppressive minority politics of the Ceausescu era that ultimately contributed to the dictator's downfall in 1989.

Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe, Pieter M. Judson, Marsha L. Rozenblit, Jan 1, 2005, History, 293 pages. The hundred years between the revolutions of 1848 and the population transfers of the mid-twentieth century saw the nationalization of culturally complex societies in East ....


Locating Filipino Americans Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space, Rick Bonus, 2000, Social Science, 217 pages. The Filipino American population in the U.S. is expected to reach more than two million by the next century. Yet many Filipino Americans contend that years of formal and covert ....

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"Provides a reality check for those who continue to operate under the myths of the past, while offering valuable insights into the mundane inner workings of everyday ethnicity in the old borderlands of the Russian, Turkish, and Austro-Hungarian empires....The most important contribution of the book is its ability to demystify nationhood in East Central Europe."--Robert A. Saunders, Transitions

"This fascinating, richly detailed, and highly informative study of Cluj in the mixed Hungarian-Romanian Transylvanian part of Romania is based on fieldwork conducted between 1995 and 2001...This is a must read for anyone interested in ethnic or national identity in eastern Europe or, indeed, in any area contested by groups using ethnic or nationalist symbols to announce their presence and promote their interests."--D. Ashley, Choice

"This substantial volume, with its vivid portrayal of the shifting dimensions of ethnicity in Romanian-Transylvanian city of Cluj-Napoca... is a welcome addition both to theory challenging romantic, essentialist identity models as well as to our knowledge of the inner workings of central European life.... Given its strong arguments and impressive array of data about the resourceful, performative, everyday qualities of ethnicity, this book deserves a wide readership."--David A. Kideckel, Slavic Review

"Brubaker et al. have written a splendid and highly recommendable book, adding substantial new insights to innumerable other works on ethnicity. Their method of combining observations with theory and discussing the significance of ethnicity in a wide range of situations in everyday life proves illuminating, not only to and understanding of ethnicity in Cluj, but also in providing insight and a framework for approaching numerous other cases as well."--Jorgen Kuhl, Political Studies Review

"Rogers Brubaker and his collaborators have succeeded in writing a readable, informative, and provocative book. . . . Valuable in a number of ways: first in its direct, readable, and clear style, which is remarkable given so many co-authors; second in its artful way of using technical terms and
concepts from socio-linguistics to make sense of complex interpersonal interactions; and third in its organization, which makes the book useful for both introductory and advanced courses in history, sociology, and anthropology."--Thomas C. Wolfe, Austrian History Yearbook

"National Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town has the potential to prompt a fundamental shift in how we both conceptualize and study ethnicity. In the light of its contributions, researchers interested in ethnicity would do well to examine the interstices of social life as well as its formal institutions, and to ask questions that privilege local meanings, rather than reifying narratives that are themselves tools of ethnic mobilization."--Jessica Allina-Pisano, Perspectives on Politics

"Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity was an excellent read. . . . I have added this book to my students' reading list, and heartily recommend it to anyone who has an interest in any of the themes Brubaker and his colleagues set out to address."--Teresa Staniewicz, American Journal of Sociology

"A remarkable work of scholarship and of fieldwork, Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town should be read by every social scientist interested in nationalism, or ethnicity, or community life, or Eastern Europe. It does a terrific job of showing how large-scale social changes and projects of identity play out in a local context. Along the way it raises important questions for both social theory and public affairs. It should shape discussion for years to come."--Craig Calhoun, Social Science Research Council

"For over a decade, Rogers Brubaker has been calling into question the entire edifice underpinning the study of ethnicity by challenging the idea that ethnicity is about real groups founded on 'Ethnic identities.' This superb book on Hungarians and Romanians in a Transylvanian town amply demonstrates the fruitfulness of his conception. Not only will this be the definitive statement on contemporary ethno-national relations in this very complex region in Europe: it will become a classic for the analysis of such relations in many other parts of the world."--Katherine Verdery, Graduate Center, City University of New York

"Here in this uncommonly sensitive study, Rogers Brubaker employs perspectives and analytical idioms rarely coupled in the study of ethnicity and nationhood as applied to a distinct geographical area. We are taken to Cluj, a city in western Romania scarcely known to the West but one whose profile fairly shimmers on the page with tensions accruing from a combined and culturally rich Hungarian-Romanian past. The author probes the symbolic and ritualistic aspects of daily life in the surrounding area, leading to groundbreaking views on ethnicity."--Istvn Dek, Columbia University

"This wonderful book will be welcomed by students and scholars of ethnicity, because there are so few, if any, other studies that look closely at how decisions about one's ethnicity and nationality are actually made. The first half provides an excellent review of Cluj's and Transylvania's history, and the detailed examination of life in Cluj that makes up the second half represents a unique contribution to our understanding of how ethnicity really functions in a contested space."--Daniel Chirot, University of Washington, author of Modern Tyrants

"A fine book that will be widely read and influential. Not only does it serve as an empirical companion piece to the more theoretical essays in Rogers Brubaker's Ethnicity without Groups, it also breaks new methodological ground while presenting a clear and subtle analysis of complex, little researched, but important social patterns associated with that trademark of modern times, the nation or ethnic group."--Jeremy King, Mount Holyoke College, author of Budweisers into Czechs and Germans

Transylvania remains the site of particularly aggressive nationalist rhetoric, reflecting long-standing divisions between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians in the region. Cluj, as the most important city in Transylvania, has long been a political battleground for nationalist politicians. Personified by the nationalist mayor of Cluj, Gheorghe Funar, who attempted to Romanianize Cluj with paint, flags, and signs, ethnic tensions have erupted into protests and violence in the region as Hungarian and Romanian nationalists redefine their goals in the post-socialist world. On a political level, nationalist rhetoric is strong and pervasive. The question remains, however: to what extent do these political
tensions exist in everyday life in Transylvania? Are ethnic Romanian and Hungarian political parties representative of the view of average Romanians and Hungarians? Rogers Brubaker and his colleagues Margit Feischmidt, John Fox, and Liana Grancaea take on an exceptional challenge in this monograph: they examine both how ethnicity and nationhood are constructed by politics and uncover how these concepts are created, expressed, and understood in the day-to-day life of regular Transylvanians. Using a combination of historical research and in-depth interviews with Cluj residents (Clujenii), they conclude that there is a significant difference between political expressions of ethnicity and life "on the ground."

This remarkable book makes good on its claims to reexamine scholarly notions of nationalism and begin to answer some basic questions about ethnicity: "where it is, when it matters, and how it works" (p. 7). Even more significant than the test case of Transylvania are their attempts to overturn the idea of groups as the primary actors in constructing ethnicity. Central to their understanding is Eric Hobsbawm's admonition to examine nationalism from below, as well as from above (p. 13). Pointing out the "groupist" reading of nationalism that tends to equate the positions of certain organizations claiming to speak for a nation with the nation itself, they reject the notion that each group is clearly delineated and distinct from the other. They use terms like "Romanian" to reflect ethnic self-identification, not to ascribe a set of characteristics to Romanians. They also contrast "nationality" and "nationalism," which refer to political claims, with "ethnicity," which refers to everyday practices and understandings of identity (p. 15).

The book begins with a general survey of Transylvanian history and focuses more specifically on post-socialist national identity in Transylvania with each successive chapter. Part 1 deals with the view "from above": starting with the "national question" in East-Central Europe, Brubaker and colleagues then focus on Transylvania and Cluj in turn, with the last chapter in this section devoted specifically to life in Cluj after Ceausescu. The limits of what can be accomplished in less than 150 pages are clear: this is not, and is not intended to be, a comprehensive treatment of ethnic issues in Transylvania or even in Cluj. It provides a general overview useful to the non-specialist, outlining the sources of ethnic conflict from a political standpoint. While this treatment is not exhaustive enough to satisfy an expert on East European or Romanian history, it suffices for the intended purposes. The nuances of the historical situation are lost, particularly in the realm of religion, but are mitigated by the depth and complexity of the second half of the book.

The area that became known as Transylvania was at the margins of the Roman Empire. Romanians later would claim a continuous Romanian presence in the region, the result of the interbreeding of Romans with native Dacians. Later part of medieval Hungary, it was at the borders of Christendom and the intersection of Catholic, Christian Orthodox, and later Protestant forms of Christianity. Ethnicity was also mixed, including Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans. The legacy of Maria-Theresa and Joseph II's reforms was to stir up ethnic competition in the region--first angering Hungarians who felt they were losing control to the German bureaucracy, and later to Romanians who began to feel oppressed by the Hungarian policy of assimilation in the area. The revolutions of 1848 crystallized ethnic divisions and established a clear animosity between developing Hungarian and Romanian nationalisms. The participation of Romanians in the Habsburg efforts to put down the Hungarian uprising demonstrates the deep frustration felt by some Romanians toward assimilatory policies and the dominance of Hungarians in the political realm. Their attempts to disenfranchise Romanians backfired--rather than weakening Romanian identity, they only served to strengthen it. Nevertheless, after the 1867 Ausgleich Transylvania was clearly governed by Hungarians.

The site of many competing claims and a complex history, it is not surprising that Transylvania was desired by Romanians and Hungarians alike as an important symbol of national identity. The towns were overwhelmingly inhabited by Hungarians, Germans, Szeklers, and Jews, while the countryside was predominantly Romanian. In 1918, Transylvania fell to the greatly expanded Romanian state, leaving a large and influential Hungarian minority within Romania's borders. Numerically strong in Transylvania, at the same time Romanians were culturally and economically weak, with an incomplete social structure composed primarily of peasants and workers. The intellectual elite was Hungarian and Hungarian-Jewish. In 1940, the Second Vienna Award transferred large parts of Transylvania to Hungarian control, resulting in massacres and deportations of Romanians and Jews,
but in 1944 Transylvania was returned to Romanian control, under Soviet occupation. Officially an autonomous region until the late 1960s, Transylvania and Cluj became increasingly Romanianized, though Hungarians still formed a significant minority. All-Hungarian schools gradually became mixed, but Hungarian-language education continued to be available at all levels. All of the many changes Transylvania and its premier city experienced had ethnic overtones with consequences reaching into the post-socialist era.

Non-ethnic national solidarity characterized the protests against Ceausescu's regime and the fall of communism, as Brubaker and his colleagues demonstrate. Quickly after Ceausescu's demise, however, ethnic tensions began to flare in the region with the establishment of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania (DAHR). DAHR's rather extreme line declared Hungarians in Transylvania an "organic part of the Hungarian nation," advocating autonomy for Hungarian-majority regions and demanding relations with Hungary proper (p. 124). Similarly vocal Romanian nationalist parties developed in the area in response--Funar was a powerful representative. The clashing viewpoints of these political parties were enacted through the un-mixing of Hungarian-Romanian schools. The re-segregation of these schools took vastly different forms and had different consequences in Cluj and Targu-Mures, two of the most important Transylvanian cities. While the de-integration of the Hungarian schools caused hurt Romanian feelings in Cluj, it erupted in violence in Targu-Mures. Looking to the history of each city, the authors point to the incomplete Romanianization of Targu-Mures as a significant reason for greater tension there: the town was less Romanian and the influx of Romanians into the area was more recent than in Cluj. While Targu-Mures was only around half Romanian, Cluj was nearly three-fourths Romanian. The authors also cite an aggressively nationalist press in Targu-Mures that sought to stir up tensions, whereas the Cluj press remained more neutral in the conflict. These differences are not to say that Cluj did not suffer from ethnic tensions on a political level. Funar's tenure as mayor saw the outward Romanianization of Cluj in ways offensive to Hungarians and some Romanians alike. The color photographs included in this volume illustrate the point very clearly: flags adorn the streets, park benches and flagpoles were all decorated in "Romanian" colors. Excavations of the main square for evidence of Roman settlement and signs reminding citizens and visitors alike that the official language of Romania is, in fact, Romanian all pointed to a nationalist agenda. Yet the very different reactions of Romanians and Hungarians in Cluj and Targu-Mures demonstrate the complexity of ethnic interaction and its consequences for daily life. The situation from a political viewpoint demonstrates tension and long-standing strains between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania, but the reality on the ground is often quite different than the politics would suggest.

Part 2, entitled "Everyday Ethnicity," represents the real scholarly agenda of the book and provides an outline of how to investigate expressions of ethnicity without resorting to the reification of groups and their political agendas. The authors conducted a series of interviews and informal conversations with Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania as well as observing linguistic habits and other behaviors in social situations. The methodology for these interviews and interactions is outlined briefly in part 2 and is further elaborated in appendix B. The crucial innovation is this: interviewers did not directly ask their informants about ethnicity. They focused instead on everyday concerns: getting by, getting ahead, neighbors, school, and work. In the course of these discussions, ethnicity became part of the conversation and was then analyzed by the researchers in this context. Working from the premise that ethnicity is easy to find if one is looking for it, they sought to eliminate the most obvious bias in reporting their results. With a working definition that posits "ethnicity is a perspective on the world, not a thing in the world" they trace the events and situations that bring ethnicity to the fore without forcing nationalism into events that were not ethnically marked (p. 169). The results of their investigation appeal to a refreshing common sense; most people, Romanians and Hungarians alike, are far less concerned with ethnic politics than their political affiliations would suggest. That is not to say that ethnicity has not played a significant role in Transylvania, but ethnicity is demonstrated more in situational than objective terms.

Chapter 5 contains in-depth portraits of a handful of Romanian and Hungarian couples, families, and individuals that span the spectrum of political and cultural affiliation. Chapter 6 emphasizes the main results of the interviews: ordinary concerns are only rarely interpreted through an ethnic lens, and the main priorities and concerns of Clujeni are economic, generational, and gender-driven. The most
significant chapter of part 2 is clearly chapter 7, which outlines the categories and instances in which ethnicity does matter to Clujeni, both for the specific results and the theoretical assumptions underlying them. Brubaker employs the notions of nominal versus experiential ethnicity to underscore the significant differences in the construction of ethnic identity for minority and majority populations. The categories "Romanian" and "Hungarian" are used in asymmetrical ways, with "Romanian" being the unmarked, "default" category--this is complicated further with the use of "Romanian" as an indication of citizenship, not just ethnicity. In contrast, "Hungarian" is almost always used as an indication of ethnicity. In the same vein, speaking Romanian is usually ethnically unmarked, but speaking Hungarian is usually marked. Use of Hungarian, a Hungarian accent in Romanian, and common Hungarian names are all used to identify individuals as ethnically Hungarian. Ethnicity is noticed when performed in these marked categories and is often ignored in situations in which it is not. The schema outlined in part 2 helps define instances in which ethnicity becomes an issue in the everyday lives of Transylvanians, particularly Clujeni. Interpreting events through ethnicity is not the default mode for either Hungarian or Romanian residents of Cluj.

In chapters 8 through 12 the authors outline some of the specific instances in which ethnicity is in fact marked in Cluj. These chapters address language use, institutional affiliation, ethnic mixing, migrations, and politics with an eye to determining the extent and significance of ethnicity in interactions among individuals. Because Hungarian is not universally or even widely known among Cluj Romanians, the default language of communication in ethnically mixed groups is Romanian. Using Hungarian in public (even among Hungarians) is sometimes looked at askance, as is using Hungarian in the presence of Romanians when Romanians do not understand. Despite the stated intentions of most Hungarians, they sometimes "slip" into Hungarian in mixed groups, a fact which causes some consternation among Romanians. While most Hungarians attend Hungarian-language schools (around 85 percent), about one-fourth of Cluj Hungarians marry Romanians. The choice of religion, schools, and languages for children of mixed marriages are ethnically marked, but most everyday interactions are not. Hungarians can choose to be involved in a predominantly Hungarian ethnic milieu, but they are unable to avoid interaction with Romanians and the Romanian language entirely, whereas Romanians are able to minimize their exposure to Hungarian quite easily. Not surprisingly, Hungarians are more interested in ethno-political issues and are more likely to view other issues in ethnic terms, yet even the most nationalist among the individuals interviewed did not view everyday interactions in primarily ethnic terms (p. 338). Both Hungarians and Romanians, while supporting their respective nationalist parties, are highly critical of their politicians. Neither Romanians nor Hungarians take Funar very seriously, and DAHR is roundly criticized by Hungarians for being too preoccupied with symbolic issues at the expense of day-to-day concerns. It would therefore be too simplistic to equate party membership with adherence to the party line. The few ways in which ethnicity is relevant on a day-to-day basis points to feelings of exclusion rather than broad political programs for action.

Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity reorients the discussion of nationalism to a bottom-up approach. The theoretical underpinnings of this study outline a new way of researching and discussing nationalism without resorting to assumptions about ethnic groups and political affiliations. Although their results would be difficult to duplicate in historical studies, the method seems widely applicable to social scientists who deal with contemporary ethnic issues with long historical precedent. Scholars of a variety of disciples will benefit from the theoretical discussions of ethnicity, and social scientists can benefit directly from the book's methodology. The scope and level of analysis that Brubaker and his co-authors provide is a breathtaking adjustment of scholarly understanding of ethnicity and nationalism.

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