

American health policy experience by looking “abroad.” The Obama presidency will likely produce more rich material for the case study mill. But the body of two country case studies is now probably experiencing the law of diminishing intellectual returns. If we want to understand the United States in a comparative setting, we now need to expand into more ambitious comparisons with a wider range of countries.

**Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.** By Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 504p. \$24.95.  
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— Jessica Allina-Pisano, *University of Ottawa*

At first glance, the principal contribution of this book might seem to be the window it offers into a relatively less known corner of Europe. However, those who study the politics of identity in any part of the world will benefit from the theoretical and empirical contributions of this meticulously researched study. The authors, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges intellectual traditions in sociology, history, and anthropology, mean to “change the terms of a conversation” about ethnicity (p. 357). Extending arguments made in Rogers Brubaker’s earlier work, this book offers an alternative to those approaches that implicitly reify nationalist and nation-making projects by taking ethnic groups as their objects of analysis. Instead, the authors ask, how do individuals experience ethnicity in their everyday lives? Their solution to the dilemma of “groupism” is not methodological individualism but application of relational analysis at the micro level. The book is divided into two parts: The first analyzes nationalism and elite politics “from above,” and the second constitutes the core empirical contribution, in which the authors reflect upon the lived experience of everyday ethnicity in a local setting.

An important theoretical contribution of the book is its discussion of the ways in which the salience of ethnic categories in a given context may be asymmetrical: For a variety of socially produced reasons, ethnicity itself may have fundamentally different meanings, and varying degrees of importance as a category, for ethnic minority and majority populations. In this particular case, the authors find that ethnicity is a more pertinent category for Transylvanians who identify as Hungarian than for those who see themselves as Romanian, chiefly because of the greater frequency with which minority Hungarians experience or encounter ethnicity in their everyday lives.

The narrative unfolds in the city of Cluj (Kolozsvár in Hungarian) during the tenure of Gheorghe Funar, the Romanian nationalist mayor who became famous for his activism in symbolically nationalizing public spaces. In a city that is nearly one-fifth Hungarian, his activities included a campaign of urban redecoration in which city

benches, flagpoles, playgrounds, trams, and even garbage cans were painted in blue, yellow, and red—the colors of the Romanian flag. The political context of the authors’ research thus raises a question about the difference that elites make. Is this an account of everyday ethnicity in a particular Transylvanian town, or is it an account of everyday ethnicity in a particular Transylvanian town under a particular mayor? This question crystallizes in public and private discourse regarding Funar. The authors show that many Clujeni expressed “considerable indifference” (p. 5) toward actions such as those of the mayor, and argue that class, not ethnicity, was sometimes the predominant meaningful category of social differentiation (p. 181). However, it seems possible that in an environment of heightened tension, some Clujeni might have taken special care to avoid discussing ethnicity in certain contexts. It could be that everyday ethnicity is intimately connected to elite politics, but not in the way that we think. We may be accustomed to thinking of mobilization as the logical consequence of nationalist rhetoric. However, an alternative interpretation of evidence in this book could suggest a different conclusion: that nationalist rhetoric can have the opposite effect, leading people either to exclude ethnic topics from conversation in order to avoid compounding tension or to use class signifiers to represent ethnic identity.

Some readers may at first be disappointed to find that this book contains relatively little explicit discussion of politics in everyday life; there are few pages devoted to the ways in which power relations structure the practices that form the core of lived ethnicity. While there is one chapter devoted to politics, the balance of the book explains the reproduction of ethnic identity primarily in terms of economic and demographic change, and in terms of social relations in which underlying power relations are left more or less unexplored. Thus, in contrast to accounts that emphasize nationalist mobilization as proximate causes in the development of ethnic landscapes, this book points to demographic and economic change as central explanations for nationalizing tendencies (pp. 368–71). In the case of Transylvania, incentives for Hungarian outmigration emanated from opportunities and cultural ties in Hungary, rather than from political “push” factors in Romania.

The lack of emphasis on power relations as a major explanatory factor for people’s choices, however, should not lead political scientists to consider the book less useful for the study of politics than research that does place political contestation at the center of analysis. Instead, the authors’ conscious focus on nonpoliticized dimensions of ethnic reproduction arguably strengthens their case by allowing readers to absorb details about everyday ethnicity as it sometimes is lived—without fraught engagement with political categories. Researchers interested in methodology may especially appreciate the restraint that this approach shows: Even with the sort of exhaustive research conducted by the authors, it is difficult to imagine how we

might identify with any certainty the precise contours of power relations, real and perceived, in extensive networks of social relations.

This restraint notwithstanding, unconscious action—ethnicity that happens without thinking—plays an important role in the authors' account (pp. 272–74, 282). In Chapter 9, they describe the mechanisms through which Hungarian worlds in Cluj are reproduced, with or without the population's conscious commitment to do so. The authors argue that Clujeni participate in Hungarian institutions because that is where their social networks lead them: They send their children to certain schools or attend certain churches because their day-to-day lives are embedded in relationships with other Hungarians, not because they make deliberate choices to participate in and support the development and reproduction of Hungarian institutions as such. I find the authors persuasive in their assertion of the centrality of practical considerations in such questions. But what is the evidence that the ethnic dimensions of these choices are unconscious? Without reifying vernacular understandings of ethnic groups as analytical categories (p. 9), how would we go about ascertaining whether there is an element of ethnic deliberation present?

The conceptual innovation of this book is not without its own challenges. Some have called attention to the analytical tension implicit in language that avoids reifying the existence of groups while making reference to aggregate ethnic categories, such as Hungarians or Romanians. And others, while appreciating the conceptual innovation accomplished here, may wonder how the authors' understanding of ethnicity may be practically operationalized in other types of empirical analyses.

*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 the tools of ethnic mobilization.

**Preying on the State: The Transformation of Bulgaria after 1989.** By Venelin I. Ganey. Ithaca, NY:

Cornell University Press, 2007. 222p. \$39.95.  
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The postcommunist experience has once again brought the study of the state to the forefront of the discipline. Nearly 20 years ago, the changes under way in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were seen as a largely unprecedented “dual transition” that involved both the shift from a planned to a market economy and the replacement of authoritarian with democratic institutions. Over roughly the past decade, many scholars of the region have

determined that this earlier characterization was too optimistic. The struggle to raise revenue, a failure to provide basic public goods, and the rise of organized crime have all pointed to a third transition under way: the transformation of the state itself.

Notwithstanding widespread agreement that we should be paying closer attention to the state, we are only beginning to understand the nature of state breakdown and subsequent restructuring in postcommunist countries. Venelin Ganey's *Preying on the State* is an important and timely contribution to this ongoing investigation. Arguing that the current state of knowledge prioritizes the generation of hypotheses over other forms of inquiry, Ganey uses the early history of postcommunist Bulgaria to “offer generalizations that might be further refined through testing” (p. 25). Judged by this standard—whether it provokes new thinking about an important topic—the book is an unquestioned success.

Ganey's particular contribution is to recast old debates in new terms, showing how theoretical approaches used elsewhere can shed new light on the state. This “recalibration of existing research agendas” (p. 9) will seem especially natural to those who have followed the literature on the postcommunist transition. For others, some of the arguments may seem novel or esoteric, though the author does a nice job of placing them into context. This tension between speaking to scholars of the region and to the broader discipline is a leitmotif of the book, one that for my taste is sometimes resolved too readily in favor of the former.

Following initial reflections, the book proceeds in approximate chronological fashion, beginning with the chaotic period that followed the deposition of longtime Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov. In contrast to many of its neighbors, Bulgaria returned a largely unreconstructed socialist party to power in the first free elections following the collapse of communism. Other authors have stressed the importance of these founding elections for former communist parties and the political elite; Ganey emphasizes instead the effect on the state. (Similar ground is covered in two other recently published books, Conor O'Dwyer's [2006] *Runaway State-Building* and Anna Grzymala-Busse's [2007] *Rebuilding Leviathan*.) Blessed with the opportunity to withdraw from the state at its leisure, the Bulgarian Socialist Party took along much of the administrative machinery as it left, appropriating information and other assets necessary for effective state intervention in the economy. Throughout this period, ex-Communists converted their political influence into economic power, a phenomenon documented in nearly every country in the region. Shifting attention from where resources went to whence they were withdrawn, Ganey focuses on the consequences of these conversions for the state, cataloging the various types of capital (reputational as well as physical) that were lost as a result.

In principle, the collapse of the state might have stopped with this initial withdrawal. In Bulgaria, it did not, as