

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox & Liana Grancea:  
Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2006, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Follow links Class Use and other Permissions. For more information, send email to: [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)



## INTRODUCTION

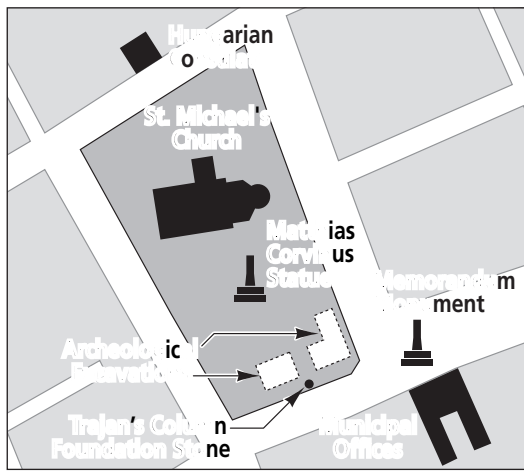
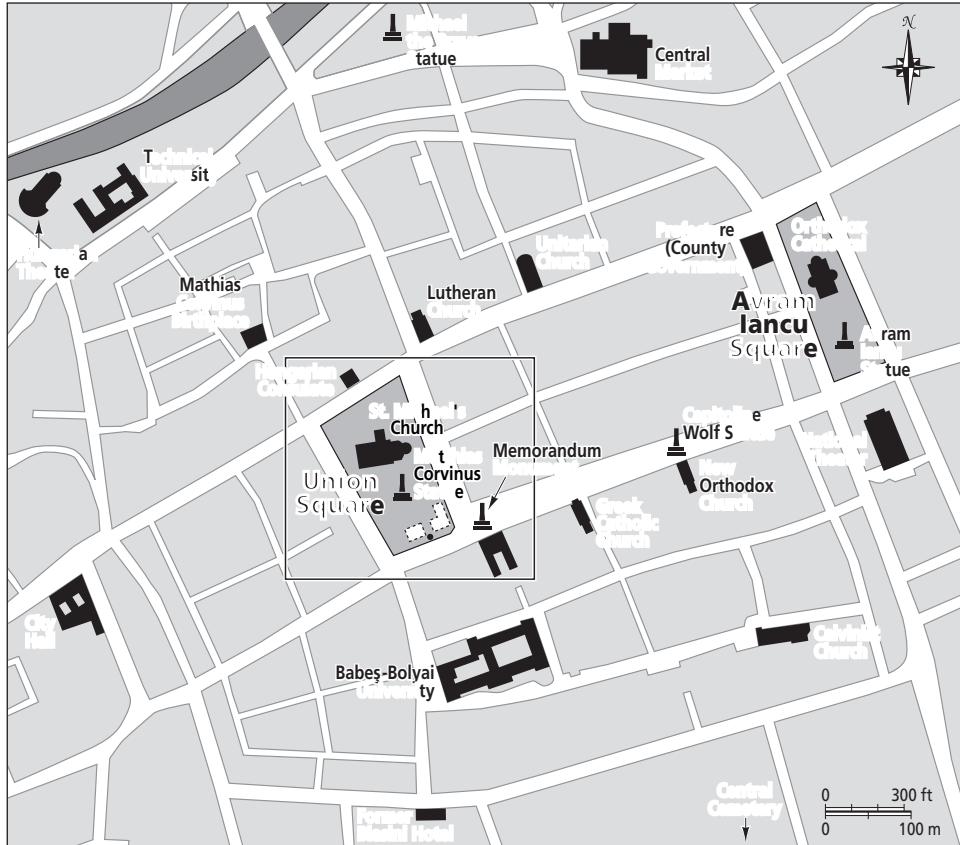
SHORTLY AFTER ten o'clock one morning in July 1997, a small truck pulled up in front of the Hungarian Consulate in the Transylvanian town of Cluj, Romania's fifth-largest city and Transylvania's unofficial capital. Between the third-story windows of the Consulate flew a red, white, and green Hungarian flag.

Two days earlier, the Consulate had reopened for business after a nine-year hiatus. It had been shut down by the Romanian government in 1988 in response to growing public criticism, in gradually liberalizing late-communist Hungary, of the Ceaușescu dictatorship and its treatment of the country's ethnoculturally Hungarian minority—one of the largest minorities in Eastern Europe, some 1.6 million people according to the census that was conducted in 1992, accounting for about 7 percent of the population of Romania and 20 percent of the population of Transylvania.<sup>1</sup> Diplomatic relations had remained strained after the fall of Ceaușescu in December 1989, largely because of continuing frictions concerning the status of the Hungarian minority. But relations improved markedly in 1996: a liberal, pro-Western coalition government replaced a more nationalist government in Bucharest, while the socialist-liberal government that had come to power in Hungary in 1994 was more eager to cultivate good relations with Romania than the more nationalist governments that preceded (and followed) it. The reopening of the Consulate was one fruit of that rapprochement.

In Cluj, however, outspoken nationalist Gheorghe Funar, well known for his inflammatory rhetoric, confrontational style, and anti-Hungarian animus, had just been elected to a second term as mayor. Funar objected vociferously to the reopening of the Consulate, situated in a prime location on the north side of the town's main square (map 1). For the mayor, it was already a problem that the architecture of the square evoked the town's Habsburg and Hungarian past.<sup>2</sup> The square is dominated by the

<sup>1</sup> Kürti, *The Remote Borderland*, 129–30; Iordachi, "The Anatomy of a Historical Conflict," chapter III.b.4. Romania's 2002 census recorded substantially fewer ethnic Hungarians, about 1.43 million; on the decline, see this volume, chapter 4 (pp. 158–59) and the epilogue.

<sup>2</sup> Cluj was a predominantly Hungarian-speaking city from the seventeenth through the mid-twentieth century. Transylvania had long been part of the historic Kingdom of Hungary, and it was an integral part of the nationalizing Hungarian state that enjoyed nearly complete independence in domestic matters during the last half-century of Habsburg rule, from 1867 to 1918. We discuss these historical contexts in chapters 2 and 3.



Map 1. Cluj Town Center

massive bulk and stately spire of the austere late Gothic Church of Saint Michael, and by the adjacent equestrian statue of the Renaissance-era king of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus. Both church and statue can be seen as “Hungarian”: almost all parishioners of the church are Hungarian, and the statue is an early twentieth-century monument to Hungarian nationalism.<sup>3</sup> When the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed at the end of World War I, the town (along with the rest of Transylvania) had become part of Romania, but Hungarians remained a local majority until the 1950s, and the central square could still be seen as having retained a “Hungarian” atmosphere.

In an effort to neutralize these Hungarian associations, and to assert the Romanian character of the square, Funar had undertaken a variety of initiatives since coming to office in 1992.<sup>4</sup> He had reinstalled a 1930s-era plaque on the base of the statue, presenting a Romanian nationalist view of Matthias Corvinus. He had sponsored archaeological excavations in the square, designed to reveal Roman ruins and thereby to assert Romanian priority in Cluj (by virtue of the putative direct link between ancient Romans and modern Romanians). He had threatened to move the equestrian statue, or to remove it (“for restoration”). He had erected three towering flagpoles, flying Romanian flags, on either side of the equestrian monument, and strung pennants with Romanian national colors—red, yellow, and blue—between them. Later he would replace the white benches in the square with new ones painted in the Romanian colors. In the context of these ongoing efforts to “nationalize” the symbolically charged square, the prospect of a Hungarian Consulate functioning, and a Hungarian flag flying, was taken as a provocation by Funar. He issued a series of statements denouncing the Consulate, and warned that he would refuse to permit its opening. When it opened nonetheless, he boycotted the opening ceremony, attended by the foreign ministers of Hungary and Romania.

This was the setting on the July morning when the truck pulled up in front of the Consulate. Several men got out of the truck, and placed an extendable ladder against the side of the building. As passers-by looked on, one man climbed the ladder and removed the offending flag from its place next to the third-story window.

In severely divided societies, symbolic provocations such as this have served as flashpoints for ethnic or nationalist violence.<sup>5</sup> In other contexts,

<sup>3</sup> Religion and ethnicity are closely correlated in Transylvania: Orthodox and Greek Catholics are overwhelmingly Romanian, Calvinists overwhelmingly Hungarian, and Roman Catholics in their large majority Hungarian. On the ethnonational symbolism of the statue and its vicissitudes under differing regimes, see chapter 3, pp. 96–97, 100, 108.

<sup>4</sup> These and other nationalizing initiatives are discussed in chapter 4, pp. 136–46; they are also documented in the color plates and halftones.

<sup>5</sup> On the role of well-defined “rituals of provocation” in Hindu-Muslim violence in South Asia, see Gaborieau, “From Al-Beruni to Jinnah.”

too, such provocations have generated outrage and spontaneous or organized protests. Yet the theft of the flag did not provoke so much as a demonstration or the signing of petitions in Cluj. The event featured prominently in the next day's Hungarian newspaper; but the town's Hungarian residents, comprising about a fifth of the population, were not particularly exercised about it. Though some expressed outrage, others would snort derisively, make faces, and roll their eyes, as if to say, "What did you expect?" or "There he goes again." The episode was not represented as a desecration of a sacred national symbol; it was just another one of Funar's provocations, to which Hungarians had become accustomed over the preceding five years. It was discussed in the idiom of farce, not that of sacred drama. The perpetrators were arrested (the police being controlled not by the municipality, but by the county, whose officials depend, in turn, on the central government); and though Funar characterized them as patriots and proposed to make them honorary citizens of Cluj, the flag was duly restored to its place, where it has remained undisturbed ever since.<sup>6</sup>

This small incident points to a larger set of concerns. The theft of the flag was not an isolated incident; as indicated above, it was part of a broader politics of symbolic nationalization pursued by Mayor Funar. And Funar himself was not simply a local eccentric, but a leading figure in statewide nationalist politics.<sup>7</sup> Nor was Funar's the only nationalist show in town. Cluj was (and remains) the headquarters of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania (DAHR), at once an umbrella organization claiming to represent the Hungarian minority and a statewide political party, committed to a far-reaching form of territorial and cultural autonomy for Hungarians. From the other side of Romania's western border, Hungary has made claims to protect the rights of "its" coethnics in Romania and elsewhere, and it has been represented in Romanian nationalist rhetoric as continuing to harbor irredentist aspirations. Local ethnopolitical struggles have been intertwined with statewide and interstate nationalist conflicts.

A number of elements for an explosive and potentially violent ethnonational conflict seemed to be united in Cluj after the fall of Ceaușescu: a radically nationalist and vitriolically anti-Hungarian mayor between 1992 and 2004; a well-organized, well-financed, and strongly nationalist

<sup>6</sup> See plate 1. Our account is based on the reporting in *Szabadság*, July 26 through August 6, 1997, and on the July 31 and August 1, 1997, daily press reports compiled by the DAHR from statewide and local Romanian and Hungarian language papers (archived at <http://www.hhrf.org/rmdsz/sajtofigyelo/>).

<sup>7</sup> Funar was chairman of the extreme nationalist Party of Romanian National Unity from 1992 to 1997 and has been general secretary of the equally nationalist Greater Romania Party since 1998.

Hungarian political party; nationalist Romanian- and Hungarian-language print and broadcast media; and bitter political conflicts over statues, plaques, flags, and other national emblems and insignia. To this could be added a series of equally inauspicious historical and contextual factors: the pulverization of civil society and heavy-handed official nationalism bequeathed by the Ceaușescu regime; the dismal economic situation of postcommunist Romania, and the dislocations and disillusionment occasioned by the “transition”; the long-standing nationalist struggle in and over Transylvania, leading to four changes in sovereignty since the mid-nineteenth century, the most recent of which—in 1940 and 1944—remain within living memory of the older generation; the violent dissolution and prolonged agony of Yugoslavia (with which both Romania and Hungary share a border); and, closer at hand, the episode of bloody street fighting between Hungarians and Romanians in March 1990 in Târgu-Mureș, just 100 kilometers to the east of Cluj.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Clujeni responded on the whole with equanimity and detachment, indeed with considerable indifference, to the nationalist rhetoric that has saturated public discourse. Despite initial alarm about Mayor Funar’s hypernationalist rhetoric and harshly anti-Hungarian pronouncements, local Hungarians came to treat the mayor’s symbolic provocations with scorn, derision, and in some cases even amusement, rather than alarm, and to speak of the mayor himself as “crazy” or “sick” rather than dangerous. And Romanians did not seem to be taking seriously his alarmist pronouncements—his characterization of the DAHR as a “terrorist organization,” for example, or his assertion that Transylvanian Hungarians were secretly collecting weapons, forming paramilitary detachments, and planning an attack on Romanians.<sup>9</sup> With few and transitory exceptions, Clujeni were not afraid; they were not concerned that what happened in Yugoslavia—or in Târgu-Mureș—might happen in Cluj.<sup>10</sup> The absence of such fear is telling, especially since the previous regime was notorious for fostering fear, suspicion, and mistrust.

Equally striking was the weakness of popular nationalist mobilization and the absence of serious ethnic tension in everyday life. A handful of substantial demonstrations marked the first year and a half of Funar’s tenure, but thereafter collective action was infrequent and

<sup>8</sup> We discuss this episode of violent conflict in chapter 4, pp. 127–36.

<sup>9</sup> See chapter 4, pp. 136–38, 144–46.

<sup>10</sup> Fear is crucial to the social mechanisms and cultural meanings through which violence originates and spreads. See for example Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 175–84, emphasizing political psychology; Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” transposing the analysis of the “security dilemma” from the domain of inter-state relations to that of intergroup relations; Lake and Rothchild, “Containing Fear,” highlighting strategic interaction; and T. Hansen, “Recuperating Masculinity,” in a more culturalist vein. For a review, see Brubaker and Laitin, “Ethnic and Nationalist Violence,” 441–43.

weak.<sup>11</sup> An outside observer, reading the local newspapers, Hungarian or Romanian, might well get the impression that there were serious tensions between “the Hungarians” and “the Romanians.” And a researcher coming to town for a brief visit to study ethnopolitical contention, and meeting with representatives of the mayor’s office, the DAHR, local NGOs, and journalists, might have had that impression confirmed. Yet had that researcher stayed longer and settled into the rhythms of everyday life, she would have been hard-pressed to find evidence of that tension among ordinary Clujeni. She would have found plenty of people in the streets, at least in the crowded town center, but they would have been shopping, or cramming the buses and trams on their way to work, or sunning themselves on the benches in the main squares, heedless of the Romanian national colors on which, courtesy of the mayor, they were sitting. She might well have heard people complaining, but Romanians and Hungarians would most likely have been complaining about the same things—high prices, worthless pensions, and self-serving politicians—in the same, non-ethnicized way. She would not have seen people marching on City Hall, or assembling for demonstrations or protest meetings.

This, then, is one set of observations from which we start. For twelve years, Cluj was a turbulent site of nationalist politics, Hungarian as well as Romanian. Yet it was far from a “seething cauldron,” on the verge of boiling over, or a “tinderbox” that a single careless spark could ignite—to mention just two images invoked by pundits writing about ethnic and nationalist conflict.<sup>12</sup> People were not afraid, despite attempts to frighten them; they did not take to the streets, despite attempts to mobilize them. Heated nationalist rhetoric evoked only muted popular response.

The tepid response of ordinary Clujeni to fervent ethnonational rhetoric does not mean that ethnicity and nationhood have little meaning outside the political realm. Social life is powerfully, though unevenly, structured along ethnic lines; and ethnic and national categories are part of the taken-for-granted framework of social and political experience. Ethnicity and nationhood (or “nationness”) “happen” every day in Cluj, even if many such happenings are invisible or uninteresting to students of collective action or ethnic violence. They are embodied and expressed not only in political claims and nationalist rhetoric but in everyday encounters, practical categories, commonsense knowledge, cultural idioms, cog-

<sup>11</sup> We discuss the protests, which focused on perceived threats posed by Funar’s nationalizing initiatives to the town’s central “Hungarian” symbol, the equestrian statue of Matthias Corvinus on the main square, in chapter 4, pp. 142–44.

<sup>12</sup> On the image of the seething cauldron, see Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism”; Bowen, “The Myth of Global Ethnic Conflict.”

nitive schemas, mental maps, interactional cues, discursive frames, organizational routines, social networks, and institutional forms. We examine such everyday embodiments and expressions as a way of addressing basic questions about ethnicity: where it is, when it matters, and how it works.<sup>13</sup>

We are prompted to raise these elementary—and seemingly naïve—questions by our dissatisfaction with prevailing analytical vocabularies and theoretical stances in the study of ethnicity and nationalism. Theorizing in this domain has been dominated for a quarter-century by constructivist approaches. The idea of social or cultural construction has been an exceptionally fertile metaphor; it has inspired a large and important body of work. Yet constructivism has grown complacent, even clichéd, with success. Once a bracing challenge to the conventional wisdom, it has become the conventional wisdom; once an insurgent idiom, it has become the epitome of academic respectability.

With respectability has come routinization. Familiar constructivist formulae have become well-worn gestures that one reads (and writes) virtually automatically. Discussions of ethnic and national identity, for example, come predictably packaged with standard sets of qualifiers, indicating that such identities are multiple, unstable, contingent, contested, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on. The problem is not that this (or the notion of social construction in general) is wrong. It is rather too obviously right, too readily taken for granted, to generate the friction, force, and freshness needed to push arguments further and generate new insights. *That* ethnicity and nationhood are constructed is a commonplace; *how* they are constructed is seldom specified in detail.<sup>14</sup>

Constructivism coexists uneasily in the literature—and often even in individual works—with a decidedly nonconstructivist “groupism.” By this we mean the tendency to take internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups—here ethnic groups and nations—as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis. Grounded in what Pierre Bourdieu called “our primary inclination to think the social world in a substantialist manner,”<sup>15</sup> this tendency to reify groups has proved surprisingly robust.

<sup>13</sup> On “nationness,” see Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins*. The term itself was introduced by B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3. This and the next few paragraphs draw on formulations in Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

<sup>14</sup> Others, too, have voiced dissatisfaction with the current state of constructivist theorizing on ethnicity and have sought to make constructivist research more rigorous and cumulative. See for example Fearon and Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity”; Lustick, “Agent-based Modeling and Constructivist Identity Theory”; Gil-White, “Are Ethnic Groups Biological ‘Species’ to the Human Brain?”; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition”; Chandra, ed., *Ethnicity, Politics and Economics*.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 228.



Despite a quarter-century of constructivist theorizing—or perhaps precisely because constructivism has lost its intellectual edge—ethnic groups continue to be understood as entities and cast as actors. Everyday talk, policy analysis, media reports, and even much ostensibly constructivist academic writing routinely frame accounts of ethnic, racial, and national conflict as the struggles “of” ethnic groups, races, and nations. Somehow, when we talk about ethnicity, and even more when we talk about ethnic conflict, we almost automatically find ourselves talking about ethnic groups.<sup>16</sup>

This unhappy marriage of clichéd constructivism and engrained groupism has encumbered the study of ethnicity and nationalism with an analytical vocabulary that is too often flat and undifferentiated. To give the constructivist project renewed analytical purchase, we have sought to develop an analytical vocabulary for talking about ethnicity without (necessarily) talking about ethnic groups; we seek to show how ethnicity works—in politics and in everyday life—without automatically taking ethnic groups as our unit of analysis.

Constructivist accounts of ethnicity have flourished in the United States in particular in recent years; the fluidity of the American ethnic landscape has no doubt contributed to their popularity.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the “differentialist” turn in American social and political thought and the institutionalization of multiculturalist policies and practices have provided support for groupist ways of thinking, talking, and framing claims. In the American context, such groupism is an obvious target for constructivist criticism. It is easy enough, for example, to highlight the enormous cultural, social, and economic heterogeneity of each of the “groups” taken to constitute the canonical “ethnoracial pentagon”—African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and whites.<sup>18</sup> It is only a short step further to argue that, with the partial exception of African Americans, these are not groups at all but categories, backed by political entrepreneurs and entrenched in governmental and other organizational routines of social counting and accounting.

The case we address—drawn from a region with more stable, deeply rooted, and intensely politicized ethnic and national identifications, and from a town that has experienced continuous and often embittered elite-level ethnopolitical conflict since the fall of communism—would seem

<sup>16</sup> As Domínguez, *People as Subject, People as Object*, 38–39 points out, this is true even of much scholarship by researchers who are aware of the socially constructed nature of ethnicity.

<sup>17</sup> On the permeability of ethnic boundaries in the United States, see for example Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity”; Heisler, “Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in the Modern West” (on “ethnic nominalism”); Waters, *Ethnic Options*.

<sup>18</sup> On the “ethnoracial pentagon,” see Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 8f., 23ff., a subtle and influential critique of rigid forms of ethnoracial pluralism and a plea for a more cosmopolitan understanding of diversity.

to be more resistant to constructivist analysis. Talk about the fluidity, contingency, and perpetual negotiation and renegotiation of identities can appear frivolous or naïve in this context, and the critique of groupism might seem misplaced. If ethnic and national boundaries are harder, more durable, and more constraining in Eastern Europe than in the United States, it might be asked, then why *shouldn't* one take ethnic and national groups as units of analysis?<sup>19</sup>

Cluj is thus a challenging—and at first glance unlikely—setting for an effort to develop a more cogently constructivist and nongroupist account of ethnicity and nationalism. Yet here, too, it is problematic to render ethnopolitical conflict—and, a fortiori, everyday ethnicity—in groupist terms. A groupist reading conflates groups with the organizations that claim to speak and act in their name; obscures the generally low, though fluctuating, degree of “groupness” in this setting; accepts, at least tacitly, the claims of nationalist politicians to speak for the groups they claim to represent; and neglects the everyday contexts in which ethnic and national categories take on meaning and the processes through which ethnicity actually “works” in everyday life.

More generally, to cast ethnopolitical conflict in groupist terms is to take *vernacular* understandings—the substantialist notions of ethnicity and nationhood that are central to nationalist politics and to commonsense “folk sociology” in Cluj and elsewhere—as *analytic* categories. It is to work with a “preconstructed” commonsense object of analysis instead of constructing that object through a break with commonsense understandings.<sup>20</sup> It is to accept the implicit social ontology that underlies ethnopolitical and nationalist rhetoric: the treatment of internally homogeneous and externally bounded ethnic groups and nations as basic building blocks of social reality.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> There has of course been a good deal of constructivist work on ethnicity and nationalism in Eastern Europe. But constructivism lacks the taken-for-granted status in Eastern Europe—and among Eastern Europeanists—that it has in the United States. And casual, clichéd constructivism has come in for criticism, much of it justified. For sophisticated statements of skepticism about the appropriateness of characteristically American constructivist language for the analysis of ethnicity and nationalism in Eastern Europe, see for example Sardamov, “Facing South Slav Ethnocentrism”; Luczewski, “What Remains for Nationalism Studies?”

<sup>20</sup> On the “trap of the preconstructed object,” see Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 231; more generally, on object construction in the social sciences through a break with commonsense notions and vernacular categories, see 220–22, 227–29, 235–38, 247. On “folk sociology,” see Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making*, 115ff., 190. Breaking with commonsense notions in the construction of one’s object of analysis and analytic categories, of course, does not mean neglecting vernacular representations and participants’ understandings. Vernacular representations of ethnicity are part of what we seek to explain; but they are not what we explain things *with*. They belong to our data, not to our analytical tools.

<sup>21</sup> To the extent that such essentialist understandings of ethnicity and nationhood are widely held, readily activated, and experientially salient in a given setting, of course, they can take on a psychological and social power that constructivist observers neglect at their peril. But the pervasive relevance, experiential centrality, and essentializing construal of ethnic and national categories cannot be assumed; it must be demonstrated.

Social science scholarship has long been closely entwined with nationalist politics. All social science research, to be sure, is closely bound up with the objects of its analysis, and can contribute to producing, reproducing, or transforming what it studies; but the interpenetration of the social sciences and nationalist discourse has been particularly intimate. In an overt manner, history, political science, geography, folklore, linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, law, economics, and other disciplines have been enlisted to legitimate national claims (and discredit competing claims). But there are also more subtle forms of complicity. As anthropologist Richard Handler has observed, scholars writing about nationalism tend to slip unwittingly into an analytical language that embodies characteristically nationalist assumptions about the boundedness, homogeneity, and historical continuity of “the nation.”<sup>22</sup>

We have tried to avoid this hazard through a strategy of analytical disaggregation. This does not mean focusing on individuals instead of groups. Our critique of groupism and commitment to disaggregation entail neither an ontological nor a methodological individualism.<sup>23</sup> The choice is not between a universalist, individualist analytical idiom and an identitarian, groupist one; this is a false opposition.<sup>24</sup> The alternative to a substantialist understanding of ethnic groups and nations as bounded entities, collective individuals, and self-conscious actors is not an asocial idiom of individual choice, but rather a relational, processual, and dynamic understanding of ethnicity and “nation.”<sup>25</sup>

In analyzing nationalist politics, past and present, in Cluj and the wider region, we focus on the interplay of national claims and counter-

<sup>22</sup> As a result, Handler concludes, much scholarship on nationalism “is to some extent a rationalization of ‘native’ ideology” (*Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, 8); see also the more extended discussion in idem, “On Dialogue and Destructive Analysis.” A similar observation could be made about scholarship on ethnicity.

<sup>23</sup> A substantial literature in political science and other fields has developed rational choice, game-theoretic, and other individualist approaches to ethnicity and nationalism. See for example Hardin, *One for All*; Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity*; Congleton, “Ethnic Clubs, Ethnic Conflict, and the Rise of Ethnic Nationalism”; McElreath, Boyd, and Richerson, “Shared Norms Can Lead to the Evolution of Ethnic Markers”; and for an approach combining formal modeling of individual choices with historical and political analysis, see Laitin, “National Revivals and Violence” and “Marginality: A Microperspective.”

<sup>24</sup> For an exchange on this point, see Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”; Calhoun, “Belonging in the Cosmopolitan Imaginary”; Brubaker, “Neither Individualism nor ‘Groupism’”; and Calhoun, “The Variability of Belonging.” Although the language of bounded groups and that of individual choice might seem antithetical, they are in fact closely related, for groupism is itself a kind of individualism, in a double sense, treating groups as collective individuals, and as collections of individuals (Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 33; Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, 32, 39–47; Calhoun, *Nationalism*, 42ff.).

<sup>25</sup> The priority of relations over substances—whether individuals or groups—was a major theme of the methodological and epistemological position developed by Pierre Bourdieu, drawing on the work of the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer. See for example Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 15–16. An accessible statement by Cassirer is found in “The Influence of Language.”

claims, on the shifting discursive and political fields within which such claims and counterclaims are embedded, and on the dynamics of nationalizing projects and processes, without reifying “the nation”—Romanian or Hungarian—or treating “the Romanians” or “the Hungarians” as the protagonists of national struggles. Similarly, in analyzing everyday ethnicity, we focus on cues, identifications, languages, institutions, networks, and interactions, without assuming that everyday experience is pervasively organized by strong ethnic “identities.”<sup>26</sup>

Central to our analysis of both nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity is the distinction between categories and groups. This is of course not a new distinction; but it is too often forgotten. If by “group” we mean a mutually interacting, mutually recognizing collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerted action, or even if we adopt a less exigent understanding of group, it should be clear that a category is not a group; it is at best a potential basis for group-formation or “groupness.”<sup>27</sup> By distinguishing consistently between categories and groups, we can problematize—rather than presume—the relation between them. We can ask about the degree of groupness associated with a particular category in a particular setting, and about the political, social, cultural, and psychological processes through which categories get invested with varying degrees of groupness.

Taking categories rather than groups as a point of departure has consequences for the sorts of questions one asks. Starting with groups, one is led to ask what groups want, demand, or aspire toward; how they think of themselves and others; and how they act in relation to other groups. One is led almost automatically by the substantialist language to attribute identity, agency, interests, and will to groups. Starting with categories, by contrast, invites us to focus on processes and relations rather than substances. It invites us to specify how people and organizations do things with ethnic and national categories, and how such categories, in turn, channel social interaction and organize commonsense knowledge and judgments.<sup>28</sup> It invites us to analyze the organizational and discursive careers of categories—the processes through which they become

<sup>26</sup> For a critical analysis of the overburdened and ambiguous notion of identity, see Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity.’”

<sup>27</sup> This and the next paragraph draw on formulations in Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, chapter 1. On categories and groups, see Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, 1:41, 401; Handelmann, “The Organization of Ethnicity”; McKay and Lewins, “Ethnicity and the Ethnic Group”; Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 53ff. A similar point was made in different terms by Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 307 (the passage is unfortunately obscured in the English translation; cf. *Economy and Society*, 389). On “groupness,” see Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 62ff. Further pertinent literature is cited in Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, chapters 1–3.

<sup>28</sup> “Doing things with categories” includes limiting access to scarce resources or particular domains of activity by excluding categorically distinguished outsiders (Weber, *Economy and*

institutionalized and entrenched in administrative routines and embedded in culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories, and narratives.<sup>29</sup> It invites us to study the politics of categories: from above, the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality”;<sup>30</sup> and from below, the “micropolitics” of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade, or transform the categories that are imposed on them. It invites us to ask how, why, and in what contexts ethnic categories are used—or not used—to make sense of problems and predicaments, to articulate affinities and affiliations, to identify commonalities and connections, to frame stories and self-understandings.<sup>31</sup>

Although we distance ourselves from the notion that “the Hungarians” and “the Romanians” constitute distinct, bounded groups in Cluj (or elsewhere), we do sometimes refer in a generalizing manner to “Hungarians” and “Romanians.” These designations have for us a purely aggregative meaning. They refer not to solidary or bounded groups but to sets of category members, specifically to those persons who, if asked their ethnicity or ethnic nationality, would identify themselves as Hungarian or Romanian.<sup>32</sup> That they would identify themselves in this way, in response to this question, does not imply anything about the salience of this ethnonational self-identification in relation to the myriad other self- and other-ascribed identifications that may be relevant in particular contexts.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, it is useful to refer to “Hungarians” and “Romanians” in this aggregative sense, not only as a means of avoiding cumbersome circumlocution, but also because members of these categories differ from one another, on average, in various ways that are relevant for

---

*Society*, 43ff.; Barth, “Introduction”). It also includes more mundane actions such as using ethnic categories to identify or classify oneself or others or to make sense of the social world (see for example Moerman, “Accomplishing Ethnicity”; Levine, “Reconstructing Ethnicity”; Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition”).

<sup>29</sup> On the organizational entrenchment of “categorical inequality,” see Tilly, *Durable Inequality*. On myths, memories, and symbols, see Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*; A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Washington, “Principles of Racial Taxonomy.”

<sup>31</sup> Categories figure centrally throughout this book; the most sustained discussion can be found in chapter 7.

<sup>32</sup> Similarly, when we characterize certain nationalist claims as “Hungarian” or “Romanian” claims, we do not mean that these are claims of “the Hungarians” or “the Romanians,” considered as a bounded group; we mean, rather, that these are claims advanced *in the name of* “the Hungarians” or “the Romanians.” On speaking “in the name of the nation,” see Brubaker, “In the Name of the Nation.”

<sup>33</sup> We explore the question of salience in Part Two, treating different facets of the question in chapters 6–10. For a review of work that highlights the variable salience of ethnicity, see Okamura, “Situational Ethnicity.”

our study. Crucially, ethnicity is generally much more salient for Hungarians than for Romanians; and Hungarians and Romanians tend to hold differing views on a number of contentious ethnopolitical issues. These and other ways in which the *categories* “Hungarian” and “Romanian” matter, however, tell us nothing in and of themselves about the degree of *groupness* associated with those categories.

Nationhood and nationalism, wrote Eric Hobsbawm, are “dual phenomena”: they are “constructed essentially from above,” yet they “cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people.” The disjuncture between heated nationalist rhetoric and muted popular response in postcommunist Cluj makes Hobsbawm’s observation all the more pertinent. Yet studies of nationalism have seldom integrated the two perspectives. One reason for this is suggested by Hobsbawm himself:

[The] view from below, i.e., the nation as seen not by governments and the spokesmen and activists of nationalist (or non-nationalist) movements, but by the ordinary persons who are the objects of their action and propaganda, is exceedingly difficult to discover. . . . First, official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters. Second . . . we cannot assume that for most people national identification—when it exists—excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. . . . Thirdly, national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods.

It is this area, Hobsbawm concludes, “in which thinking and research are most urgently needed today.”<sup>34</sup>

We take up Hobsbawm’s challenge in this book, analyzing nationhood and nationalism from below as well as from above. Our study is organized around this dual perspective. In Part One, we analyze nationalist politics “from above,” situating the postcommunist resurgence of politicized ethnicity in Cluj in a nested series of historical contexts. We examine in succession East Central Europe, where the “national question” came to dominate political life from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century; Transylvania, located since the mid-nineteenth century between rival national claims and competing nationalist projects; and Cluj itself, the symbolic center of Transylvania, central to the

<sup>34</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 10–11.

national imaginations and nationalist claims of Hungarians and Romanians alike. We then delineate the pattern of nationalist contention in Cluj since the fall of Ceaușescu, focusing on the demands for a separate Hungarian school system, the symbolic struggles over the nationalization of public space, and the politics of counting and categorizing.

In Part Two, we shift our angle of vision and adopt the view from below, turning our attention from nationalist politics to everyday ethnicity. By counterposing “nationalist politics” and “everyday ethnicity,” we do not intend to signal a sharp distinction between nationalism and ethnicity. Ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious motifs are central to nationalist politics, as are national motifs to the quotidian experience of ethnicity. We understand ethnicity and nationalism as comprising a single broad family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation. “Ethnicity” is the more inclusive term, embracing much (but not all) of what we mean by nationhood and nationalism, and much else besides (as suggested by the terms “ethnoracial,” “ethnoreligious,” “ethnoregional,” “ethnolinguistic,” and “ethnocultural”). The specificity of nationalism (and of “nation” as a form of imagined community) is that, unlike many forms of politicized ethnicity, it involves claims of some sort to autonomy or independence. And unlike those forms of ethnicity that are generated by migration, “nation” is ordinarily imagined as grounded in a particular territory.<sup>35</sup>

Nationhood and nationality are not, however, necessarily understood as congruent with state and citizenship. This point needs to be underscored, since “nation” and “state,” “nationality” and “citizenship” are often used interchangeably in the United States and some Western European contexts. In Central and Eastern Europe, in contrast, “nation” is often imagined in ways that cut across the boundaries of state and citizenship. Thus to consider oneself Hungarian in Transylvania is to understand oneself as belonging to a Hungarian ethnocultural nation (defined by speaking Hungarian as one’s native language) that encompasses persons with several different citizenships, living not only in Hungary but in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Romanian ethnocultural nation can also be understood to include Romanian-speaking citizens of Moldova, Ukraine, and other neighboring states.<sup>36</sup> Calling this kind of

<sup>35</sup> On the relation between ethnicity and nationalism, see A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*; Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*; Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*; Calhoun, “Nationalism and Ethnicity.”

<sup>36</sup> This understanding of a transborder Romanian ethnocultural nation is contested by some political leaders in Moldova, who assert that the Moldovan nation—and even the Moldovan language—differ from Romanian. This is a reminder that nationhood is an imagined community and a political claim, not an ethnodemographic fact. On the politics of identity in post-Soviet Moldova, see King, *The Moldovans*; Iordachi, “Dual Citizenship and Policies Toward Kin Minorities.”



self-understanding “ethnic” risks obscuring the sense of belonging to a state-transcending “nation,” and the distinctive political claims that often follow from that sense; yet calling it “national” risks misunderstanding, given the very different meaning of this term in the North American context. Our usage has generally been to speak of nationhood and nationalism when discussing political claims, and of ethnicity when discussing everyday practices and self-understandings, though we do not adhere rigidly to this distinction.

We are concerned in Part Two with the multifarious ways in which ethnicity and nationhood matter, when they *do* matter, in the everyday lives of ordinary people. The caveat is important; for the cares and concerns of ordinary people, as Hobsbawm reminds us, are “not necessarily national and still less nationalist.”<sup>37</sup> We do not *assume* the salience or significance of ethnicity and nationhood; we seek rather to *discover* and *specify* when, where, and how they become salient or significant. Ethnicity is not a thing, not a substance; it is an interpretive prism, a way of making sense of the social world.<sup>38</sup> And it is always only one among many such interpretive frames.<sup>39</sup> Everyday ethnicity cannot therefore be studied as a self-subsistent domain. Ethnicized ways of experiencing and interpreting the social world can only be studied alongside a range of alternative, non-ethnicized ways of seeing and being. To study ethnicity alone is to impose ethnicity as an analytical frame of reference where it might not be warranted; it is to risk adopting an overethnicized view of social experience. “If one goes out to look for ethnicity,” wrote anthropologist Thomas Eriksen, “one will ‘find’ it and thereby contribute to constructing it.” To study ethnicity without inadvertently contributing to its reproduction, it is necessary to situate ethnicity in the context of “that which is not ethnic.”<sup>40</sup>

Our research strategy, accordingly, was an indirect one. In informal group discussions, interviews, and extended participant observation—the main sources of our data—we avoided asking directly about ethnicity, or signaling a special interest in ethnicity.<sup>41</sup> We sought instead to observe ethnicity, as far as possible, in the ebb and flow of ordinary social life. We talked with Clujeni about their everyday problems and

<sup>37</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition.”

<sup>39</sup> This is often forgotten: discussions of ethnic categorization are often concerned with the complexities of *how* people are classified in racial or ethnic terms, while ignoring the question of *how much* or *whether* they are so classified.

<sup>40</sup> Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 161 and, more generally, chapter 8; cf. Banks, *Ethnicity*, 186, 189. From the perspective of conversation analysis, Schegloff (“Whose Text, Whose Context?”) has argued eloquently against interpretations of data that impose the categories that are of interest to the *analyst* without evidence that those categories matter to the *participants*.

<sup>41</sup> See appendix B, “A Note on Data.”



preoccupations—raising children, paying bills, celebrating family milestones, planning for an uncertain future. We listened to their stories and anecdotes, to their complaints and frustrations, to the ways they talked with—and about—friends, neighbors, co-workers, fellow Clujeni, people from different regions of Romania, and citizens of other countries. We noted the categories they used to describe and explain the social world, to express pride or indignation, to formulate excuses or justifications, or to make sense of good or ill fortune. We tried to reconstruct the commonsense knowledge of the social world—the folk sociology—that informed everyday explanations for who gets ahead, who falls behind, and why. We observed how people talked about politics and politicians—when they talked about them at all. We attended not only to what they said, but to how they said it; not only to matter, but to manner: serious, ironic, playful, detached, moralizing, and so on. We observed routine encounters in public, and took part in ordinary social interaction among family and friends. We noted what languages were spoken in what settings, what cues triggered the use of a particular language, and how conversation sometimes shifted from one language to another. Our aim was to observe when, how, and in what settings ethnicity “happened” in the course of ordinary daily routines.

Of course everyday life is not sealed off from the wider world; it does not transpire in a political, economic, or cultural vacuum. The discourse of fractious nationalist politics—at local, statewide, and international levels—filters into everyday life, and is sometimes absorbed, in fragmentary fashion, into everyday ways of thinking and talking. And the experience of ethnicity is pervasively structured by the foundational political inequality that is intrinsic to the nation-state.

Our interest is not in everyday life as such, construed as an imaginary realm of pure sociability. We are interested rather in the relation—sometimes palpable and immediate, more often indirect and attenuated—between contentious nationalist politics, as transmitted and amplified by the media, and the experience of ethnicity and nationness in everyday life. To what extent, in what circumstances, and in what manner are ordinary people responsive to, or even aware of, the rhetoric of ethno-political entrepreneurs? When and how are ordinary social activities—in homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, stores, cafes, hospitals, offices, and public places—experienced and articulated in ethnic terms? By attending in fine-grained detail to the contexts and contours, the timing and trajectories, the meanings and modalities of ethnicity and ethnicization in everyday life, we hope to illuminate the disjuncture between intense and intractable nationalist politics and the ways in which ethnicity and nationness are embodied and expressed in everyday life. We also hope to gain analytical leverage, and provide empirical grounding, for

addressing broader theoretical questions about what ethnicity is and how it works.

We analyze nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in this book through a Romanian-Hungarian lens. Like any perspective, this one is selective. In particular, we do not give sustained attention to Germans, Jews, or Roma, all of whom have figured in important ways in ethnopolitical struggles, and in the everyday experience of ethnocultural heterogeneity, in Transylvania.

Germans have played a central part in the history of Transylvania, as they have in the history of East Central and Eastern Europe as a whole.<sup>42</sup> For centuries, towns throughout much of Eastern Europe were dominated by German (or German-speaking) burghers. Many towns (including Budapest and Prague) were still predominantly German-speaking in the middle of the nineteenth century; some Transylvanian towns remained so into the first decades of the twentieth. Isolated from the main areas of German settlement in Transylvania, however, Cluj lost its German character much earlier; it had become predominantly Hungarian-speaking by the seventeenth century. Germans comprised just 3 percent of the population by the early twentieth century, and a mere 0.3 percent by the 1990s.

Jews, too, have figured centrally in the history of Transylvania, and in that of the wider region. Unlike Germans, they were a substantial and increasingly vibrant presence in Cluj in the modern era, their numbers increasing tenfold between 1880 and 1941, their share of the population tripling from 5 percent to 15 percent in the same period. Jews contributed significantly to the town's economic dynamism and cultural flourishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But the Jews of Cluj and its environs, some 18,000 in all, were herded into a ghetto established in a Cluj brickyard in May 1944, and within weeks almost all of them—like the great majority of Jews throughout Hungarian-ruled northern Transylvania—were deported to Auschwitz. Although a much-reduced Jewish community was reconstituted in Cluj after the war, many survivors emigrated to Israel or elsewhere; by the 1990s only a few hundred Jews remained in Cluj.<sup>43</sup>

Since Germans and Jews are no longer a significant presence in Cluj (or in Transylvania), they figure only in our historical analyses of nationalist politics in Part One—and there only at the margin, for nationalist

<sup>42</sup> There is a large literature on the legal, political, economic, and cultural complexities of Transylvanian Saxon history; for an overview, see Schenk, *Deutsche in Siebenbürgen*.

<sup>43</sup> On the history of the Jews of Cluj, focusing on the ghettoization and deportation, but providing ample background material as well, see Lówy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig*. For a broader study of Jews in Transylvania, see Carmilly-Weinberger, *Istoria evreilor din Transilvania*.

politics in Transylvania (and a fortiori in Cluj) have centered on a Romanian-Hungarian axis since the middle of the nineteenth century.

Unlike Germans and Jews, Roma do comprise a substantial minority in contemporary Romania, and a small but visible presence in Cluj. More than half a million Romanian citizens identified their nationality as Roma in the 2002 census, while Roma activists claim a constituency of 2.5 million or more.<sup>44</sup> Given the blurred boundaries of the category, especially for those whose dress or lifestyle is not visibly identifiable as Roma, it is illusory to think that there exists an objectively correct number.<sup>45</sup> Many scholars propose a figure of about 1.5 million, roughly the number of Hungarians in Romania, though the concentration of almost all Hungarians in Transylvania makes them a much larger minority in that region. In Cluj, self-identifying Roma comprise only 1 percent of the population. Yet they are a familiar presence in and around the central market, selling flowers, used clothes, and tinware. More important, they are (again unlike Germans or Jews today) an important object of public discourse and media representation, and a central point of reference—a fundamental “other”—for both Romanians and Hungarians in everyday life.<sup>46</sup>

Since 1989, Roma ethnopolitical claims—some of which represent Roma as a trans-state nonterritorial nation—have been richly articulated throughout Eastern Europe, on local, statewide, and suprastate levels.<sup>47</sup> This falls outside the scope of our analysis; and in any event Cluj, with its small Roma population, has not been a major focus of Roma ethnopolitical activity. Nor do we explore the complex terrain of self-understanding

<sup>44</sup> On Roma in Romania, see Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History*; O’Grady and Tarnovschi, “Roma of Romania”; Zamfir and Zamfir, eds., *Țiganii între ignorare și îngrijorare*; Zamfir and Preda, eds. *Romii în România*. Some activists prefer the spelling “Rroma,” which more clearly marks the distinction from “Romanian”; some nationally minded Romanians prefer “Rroma” for the same reason. However, “Roma” remains the more common spelling, and we use that spelling here. On the politics of counting Roma in connection with the 2002 census, see chapter 4, pp. 152n107, 154n117, 156.

<sup>45</sup> Many of those who identify in some contexts as Roma identify in others as Romanian or Hungarian; and most of those who identify as Roma in Transylvania speak Romanian, Hungarian, or both languages (in some cases in addition to some version of the Romani language). We discuss these classificatory ambiguities in connection with the census (chapter 4, p. 156n29). On the complex and contested issues involved in the counting and classifying of Roma in Eastern Europe, see Ladányi and Szelényi, *Patterns of Exclusion*, chapter 4. In addition to variation in self-identification, they note striking discrepancies between “expert” classification (for example, by local teachers or social workers), interviewer classification, and self-identification: in Romania only 30 percent of those classified as Roma by interviewers themselves so identified.

<sup>46</sup> On the ways in which Roma are represented as racialized and essentialized “others” in postsocialist Eastern Europe, see Kligman, “On the Social Construction of ‘Otherness.’”

<sup>47</sup> See for example Mirga and Gheorghe, “The Roma in the Twenty-First Century”; Vermeersch, “Ethnic Identity and Movement Politics.”

and everyday experience for Roma in Cluj; our Romanian-Hungarian focus means that Roma figure in our discussion as they are represented by others, not as they understand or represent themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Our Romanian-Hungarian *optique*, it is important to note, is not fully symmetrical; Part Two gives more weight to the Hungarian than to the Romanian experience of ethnicity. This is not because the book is written from a “Hungarian” point of view, any more than it is from a “Romanian” one. It reflects, rather, a basic asymmetry in the everyday experience of ethnicity, grounded in the ways in which ethnocultural difference is marked—and unmarked—in the nation-state. The normative cultural homogeneity that everywhere accompanies the rise of the nation-state marks as minorities those that do not share the dominant culture; at the same time, it “unmarks” and de-ethnicizes the dominant culture itself. The dominant culture—in the first instance the dominant language—comes to be experienced as the taken-for-granted culture in and of the state; its particularity is thereby masked. The minority culture, correlatively, comes to be perceived from without and experienced from within as marked; its particularity is thereby accentuated. As a result, ethnicity is experientially more salient for Hungarians than for Romanians; and the Hungarian experience of ethnicity therefore figures more centrally in our analysis.

<sup>48</sup> In everyday life, Roma are universally referred to—and generally refer to themselves—as Gypsies (*Țigani*, *cigányok*, in Romanian and Hungarian, respectively); the term “Roma” (or “Rroma”) is limited to academic, political, NGO, and some official government discourse. When we discuss Roma as they are talked about by ordinary Romanians and Hungarians, we follow everyday practice in referring to “Gypsies” rather than “Roma.”

