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Rogers Brubaker, Ethnicity without groups

In his article „Ethnicity without groups“, doctor Rogers Brubaker discusses the notions of groups, groupness, ethnicity, ethnic group, ethnic conflict, nation and national conflict. The author emphasises the diversity which, somehow, represents the advantage of at times opposite theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of groupness and ethnic group.

The concept of the notion of groups has not been thoroughly researched. It is often perceived as unproblematic, and frequently taken for granted and without the real necessity to be researched or explained. Many constructivists consider groups as constructed, contingent and fluctuating, while the post-modernists emphasise the fragmentary, the ephemeral and the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries. The automatism with which one often associates the notion of groups with ethnic groups, even in the more case-specific literature, is perceived as a particularly important phenomenon. Similarly ethnic conflict is associated with ethnic groups; hence, ethnic conflict is seen as a conflict between different ethnic groups and similarly, a nationally framed conflict as a conflict between nations. For the sake of illustration, the author refers to the events, i.e. to the violence in ex-Yugoslavia, or in other words, to the dilemma about the manifestation of the ethnic conflict or ethnic war that had had much more to do with thuggery, warlordship, opportunistic looting and black-market.

The case study on ethnicity in the Transylvania Town analyses the working of ethnicity without employing the language of bounded groups.

The author emphasises the need to base the analysis of the terms related to the notion of ethnic groups on practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemes, commonsense knowledge, organisational routines and resources, etc.

We would like to point out the two things that might be particularly important for our work. Taking into account the results of our analytical toolkit, it is very often the case that certain fact can only be explained with empirical data. We have often encountered the impossibility to compare or to explain the current theoretical discourse in our research, and hence, in the analysis of certain features of the development of national identity and historical development

of consciousness. Therefore, in case of the Bosniac identity, the original value of the empirical data is preserved, even though they do not fit the theoretical pattern.

We should like to refer back to the perception of groups as complex and systematised unities that have their clear-cut boundaries. It is pointed out that identity is formed through the awareness of being different from “the other or the different one” which creates boundaries between “us and them”, i.e. one group and the other. However, up to this moment we have perceived different fractions within the Bosniac national community. These fractions do not have the same significance. Depending on the wider socio-political circumstances, they become stronger and have a certain impact. Therefore, even a superficial research shows that there is a group of nationally aware Bosniacs who consider language and culture to be a basis for their national identity and there is another group who puts religion in the forefront. However, as Brubaker states it, the group leaders, in this case the national leaders, are mistakenly equalled with the real interests of a given group, i.e. a national community.