Gabriela Popa, PhD researcher
Department of History and Civilization
European University Institute

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Article Review

Rogers Brubaker 2004: Ethnicity without Groups. In: Rogers Brubaker, Ethnicity without groups. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 7-28.

This piece of Brubaker's research brings a useful completion to the previous chapter on "Rethinking nationalism" proposed to our review in February. Having read "Ethnicity without groups" we can more clearly identify what is meant by "groupism", constructivism or reification. Moreover, the last part of the article brings an empirical case, aimed at reflecting the practical application of Brubaker's theoretical proposals.

So, Brubaker's starting point is that despite the convincing attempts in the recent scholarship of overcoming or challenging the "taken for grantedness" of "groups" as appropriate categories of research, the "groupism" proves still to be a referential category, not only in the academic (constructivists for example), but also in the public spheres (e.g. media reports, public policies). There still can be observed the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations, and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed (8). The danger of such an undertaking, as explained by Brubaker, consists in the fact that the commonsense categories tend to be essentialized and naturalized (9). Consequently, Brubaker optimistically insisting that we should not uncritically adopt categories of ethnopolitical practice as our categories of social analysis, suggests that this can be achieved, among others, by rethinking the ethnicity itself (e.g ethnicity as cognition), by approaching "groupness" as an event or as a happening, by distinguishing groups and categories and substituting "groups" with, for example, "organizations".

As a possible implementation of these suggestions at the theoretical and methodological levels, Brubaker examines his application of the "cognitive turn" in the study of ethnicity. For that Brubaker builds on the already existing anthropological perspectives which argue that ethnicity is not a matter of shared traits or cultural commonalities but rather of practices of classification and categorization, including both self-classification and the classification of (and by) others (see the definition by Fredrik Barth cited in Brubaker 2004). Thus, he insist that the cognitive perspectives provide resources for conceptualizing ethnicity, race, and nation as *perspectives on the world* rather than *entities in the world.*

I am certainly not in the position of assessing how much Brubaker's plead to overcome "groupism" impacted or will impact the public sphere of media reports and public policies

(probably the use of terms such as "ethnic groups" in the public sphere is not determined solely by the belief of their actual existence - things then will be too simple). However, I think that the importance of Brubaker's contribution is to point to the weaknesses of the current research on ethnicity (and for that of nationalisms and races) and to attempt to provide possible alternatives. Indeed, the alternatives are not always clearly defined or explained, but worth to be thought of. For instance, the proposal which Brubaker is making of concentrating primarily on organizations or institutions rather than groups can be a useful methodological tool for comparative studies such as ours.

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Brubaker, Rogers, Maria Loveman and Peter Stamatov 2004: Ethnicity as Cognition. In: Theory and Society, Vol. 33, No. 1, (Febr., 2004), 31-64.