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Peter Lozoviuk (ed.): *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Discourse of the 20th Century: The Contribution of Intellectuals from the Czech Lands to the Study of Collective Identities*
Brno, 2012: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 242 pp.

This is a collection of ten essays from the 20th century written by authors with a Czech background living in Germany and writing in German. The common denominator of these texts is their ethnological perspective and reflection on the issue of nationalism. The texts focus on the theoretical reflections on ethnic and national minorities and tackle the social phenomena stemming from the existence of these minorities. Although the authors come from different intellectual paradigms, they all argue that the coexistence of different ethnic groups within one area leads to the emergence of specific social processes with pragmatic characteristics worthy of research and reflection.

The book is divided into three main sections. An introductory chapter presents all the authors and gives a good overview of the whole context and circumstances under which their texts were produced. The first three chapters cover the development of thought in research, evolving from an interest in national enclaves towards the comparative study of ethnic and national groups. Walter Kuhn frames the object of interest; he defines what a language island is, how it relates to ethnic groups, and how not to confuse it with the concept of a nation. Emerich K. Francis reflects upon the

concept of a multi-national state, defining its characteristics and its constitutive elements. He also analyses four different examples of multi-national states have existed in history.

The second section of the book is the broadest and provides translations of work by scholars who have attracted significant interest on the international level. The three chapters start with a discussion of the broader concept of nationalism and its analysis and reflection then analyse the criteria behind the formation of national groups are formed, and they end by narrowing down the concept and focusing on nationalism in Eastern Europe and in communist regimes. Hans Kohn argues that nationalisms in different countries are tightly interconnected and have developed under mutual influence. He stresses the importance of national sovereignty as a key condition for nationalism. Kohn comes up with an idea very much like Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities', having discussed the emotional connection between people from different backgrounds and parts of the country long before Anderson elaborated this concept [Anderson 2006]. Kohn talks about nationalism in terms of uniting the lives of millions of people who do not know each other in person and connecting them emotionally to a territory that cannot be travelled through. He stresses the emotional and mental character of nationalism. Eugen continues with a discussion of the myths about nationalism. He questions the necessity of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic characteristics in order for nationalism to emerge: 'It is not the ethnic groups in common sense that are carriers and objects of nationalism. It seems to depend more on whether a certain group is self-sustaining in the consequence of a division of labour; and primarily whether there is a division of labour which presupposes the differences between members of the group.' (p. 140) His analysis goes beyond the generally dis-

cussed characteristics of nationalism such as language or ethnicity. This part closes with a text by Karl W. Deutsch focusing on nationalism in Eastern Europe during the communist era. He uses Western Europe as a reference in his analysis, as it was the first region confronted with social activism, technologies, vertical social mobility, and political riots. Deutsch argues that the connecting line between Western and Eastern Europe is the search for answers and solutions to poverty and a lack of education on the one hand and the rise of national states, alienation, distrust between people, and threat of wars on the other.

The third section of the book consists of three reflections on the relationship between the Czech lands and Germany, the inhabitants of these countries, and their literary, national and physical characteristics. The texts capture the turn in the way of thinking about Czech-German coexistence; the authors reflect on the conflict that emerged in the work of Germans with a Czech background. Karl Valentin Müller provides a review of research and methods used to prove the similarity and interconnectedness between Germans and Czechs. He presents the approaches of biological and cultural anthropology and statistical data and research on family names. Georg R. Schroubek reflects on the ongoing stereotypes about Germans and Czechs that have been present throughout the history of the two nations and makes a historical excursion into the study of relationships between Germany and the Czech lands. Ferdinand Seibt reflects on the changes leading to the polarisation of relationships and to the alienation of these two national groupings.

The compilation succeeds in presenting a variety of authors and topics on nationalism and ethnicity. Although the contributions do not aim to analyse nationalism and ethnicity through the prism of subjective emotions and perceptions, it is possible to find moments when the exile

perspective is notable. The authors often provide subjective arguments based on their personal experiences. They step away from the primordial approach to nationalism represented, for instance, by Clifford Geertz or Edward Shils. By contrast, they tend to argue in the constructivist way and their perspective resembles that of Ernest Gellner, Charles Tilly, or Donald Horowitz. Although they do not classify themselves explicitly as a part of a particular school of thought, there are traces of social constructivism. To some extent also the perspective of ethno-symbolism is visible; Kohn even references Anthony D. Smith. Almost all the contributors contest the myths about nationalism and ethnicity and about the elements defining a nation.

A weakness of the book seems to be the fact that the texts are dated. But although the majority of the texts were written between the 1940s and the 1980s, the ideas and arguments are timeless. Some of the arguments and perspectives can be found, for example, in Rogers Brubaker's books. The authors were able to identify the role and character of nationalism as early as the 1940s. The only weakness present in some of the passages is a romanticised perspective that emerges mainly in the context of personal experiences and the period when the texts were written. Here and there one finds romantic perspectives on the nation and ethnicity, in which they are ascribed with magical powers: For instance, the nation is referred to as standing in the 'bright light of history', and is associated with feelings of love, passion, and devotion. It is deemed to be something eternal that involves all humankind. This universality, however, in no way diminishes the importance of the nation's ethnic distinctiveness, which is the source of the nation's 'deepest and best powers'. But all in all, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Discourse of the 20th Century* provides good insight into the perspective of past and less-read authors from a very specific back-

ground. And it contains numerous reflections on nationalism and ethnicity which are applicable also in the present day.

Lenka Kissová
Masaryk University, Brno
lenka.kissova@mail.muni.cz

References

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Mihai Varga: *Worker Protests in Post-communist Romania and Ukraine. Striking with Tied Hands*

Manchester and New York 2014:
Manchester University Press, 224 pp.

Complementing conventional elite pacification explanations [Greskovits 1998; Vanhuyse 2006], this rich book tries to answer fundamental questions concerning what specific strategies can succeed in protecting the rights and living standards of workers threatened by the post-communist transition. Rather than assuming union passivity (either historical-cultural or as a result of pacification strategies), Varga argues that 'unsettled times' are conducive to agency that is not confined to the elite level, but also occurs at the level of unions. In this context Ukraine, with its inherited structural constraints (welfare benefits at the plant-level and the legal possibility for management to occupy high union positions), and Romania, with its labour generally excluded from politics, provide more fertile research sites than the Visegrad or Baltic clusters. In addition to general structural constraints, strategic elements within plant-level union actions represent the second focal point of the book (p. 48). Varga's central aim is to show that even in the most difficult contexts there are specific strategies that unions can implement to protect worker interests (p. 44) in a political climate where the state is perceived to have an in-

terest in fostering democratic legitimacy while setting in place the costly construction of capitalist structures (p. 51).

Without fully dismissing the 'crisis of ideas' and/or nationalistic channelling explanations of union weakness (see, most notably, Ost [2005]), Varga nonetheless argues, like Vanhuyse [2006, 2007] before him, that the key factor sapping labour power was elite behaviour, permitted by the frail post-communist institutional set up. Even in the case of Romania, with an above average (by CEE levels) incidence of protests (p. 20), the author argues that elite strategising through early retirements schemes and other targeted benefits preempted massive labour action (with the notable exceptions of the well-known 1999 miners strike). The complexity of reform tasks, further deepened in Romania's case by the challenges of EU integration from the early 2000s, meant that even a social democratic government like the one in 2000–2004, with the legal implementation of 'social contracts' between employers and unions, fundamentally aimed for privatisation at the expense of workers (p. 20; see also Vanhuyse [2007]). However, the crux of Varga's book is that by moving away from the main suspects for labour mobilisation (Vanhuyse [2007], for instance, discusses the lack of strikes by Romania's Jiu Valley miners in the early 1990s), one can identify episodes of considerable opposition to reform and at times successful union action. Varga's analysis of plant-level union strategising does not go against mainstream elite pacification literature, but rather complements it, showing how, on a case-by-case basis, elite action responded (either preempting, eroding, or, when needed, accommodating) to union mobilisation.

It is in this line of thought that the theoretical model revolves around labour interest *representation* (rather than the classic labour *strength*), defined as the process through which workers, acting collectively in a trade union, protect their interests (bal-