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Book Review: We Belong to Them

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Review of: *We belong to them. Narratives of Belonging, Homeland and Nationhood in Territorial and Non-territorial Minority Settings*, by Tünde Puskás. Brussels, Bern, and Berlin: Peter Lang, 2009, 309 pp.

'We belong to them. Narratives of Belonging, Homeland and Nationhood in Territorial and Non-territorial Minority Settings' focuses on ethnic and national collective identifications, aiming to reveal how public narratives are reconstructed in the process of constructing self-narratives.

'When do we belong?' (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011); 'Where do I belong?' (Anthias, 2006). These are empirical questions that have previously been asked in different forms in minority and diaspora studies. Tünde Puskás reformulates these questions by enquiring whether individuals from two different minority settings (territorial and non-territorial) identify themselves with the same public narratives and whether they put forth the same aspirations of belonging to the "putative nation" —to a common external land. To answer this question the author compares expressions of the sense of belonging of people with a Hungarian background living in Slovakia and Sweden, respectively.

Acknowledging the danger of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002), another important question that Puskás asks is how nationalism operates in everyday life in territorial and non-territorial minority settings. Subtly criticizing Brubaker's distinction between "immigrant ethnicity" and "territorial nationality" (p. 53), the author challenges the approach by which the situation of minorities in the two settings is regarded as incomparable. For instance, bringing to

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light the case of people with a Hungarian background from Vojvodina (Serbia) or Transylvania (Romania) who emigrated to Sweden, Puskás seeks to explore the intersections between narratives about national and ethnic belonging, and to show what these categories stand for in their distinct contexts. Therefore, the reader will discover an intersectional approach to ethnic and national belonging which refers to different dimensions of social life—mainly institutional, relational and symbolic.

The author defines the book as the result of an interdisciplinary endeavour which mainly combines theories of ethnicity and nationalism, but also employs concepts from social psychology, history and political science. Puskás's interdisciplinary academic trajectory (from philology, to international relations and European studies, to nationalism studies, to ethnicity) is reflected by both the book's theoretical framework and by the author's keenness to combine methodological approaches. The study starts with an analysis of documents, and combines the comparative method with a qualitative study based on interviews, focus group discussions and some ethnography (for instance, the description of the Hungarian rooms where informants wanted the interviews to take place).

The first empirical chapter sets out the way in which national discourses are articulated and disseminated by the Hungarian political elite in the three different settings (Hungary, Slovakia, Sweden). The author starts by describing how this rhetoric is reflected at the level of self-identification discourses formulated by Hungarians in Hungary and Hungarians from territorial and non-territorial minority settings. Puskás introduces the distinction between the public narratives about Hungarians in the West and that of Hungarians beyond borders. According to her findings, the place of Hungarians in the West (Sweden) in the national rhetoric as 'ambassadors of Hungarianness abroad' (p. 90) contrasts with the discourse about the Hungarians beyond borders (Slovakia, Transylvania, Vojvodina) who are depicted as unfortunate and poor, and in relation to whom the state must take a paternalistic stance.

Trying to depict the ways in which ideologies of nationalism can become incorporated into individuals' everyday thinking and into everyday nation-talks, Puskás continues by comparing how people in the two minority settings (Slovakia and Sweden) employ "nationness narratives" when talking about their sense of belonging. One of the recurring dichotomies to which the researcher relates when categorizing the informants' embeddedness in the different sets of public narratives is "the state-

framed discourse" (which states that citizenship equals nationality) versus "the counter state discourse" (which assumes that Hungarian nationhood is distinct from the existing Hungarian national state). Moreover, the second chapter is particularly rich in data about both individual practices (e.g. watching Hungarian television programmes) and top-down political initiatives (such as the referendum related to the Hungarian Identity Document (ID)). However, the empirical material is scarcely analysed beyond the discursive dimension of the politics of belonging. Perhaps, reflecting more on the discrepancies perceived by Hungarians living in minority settings between the official discourse of kin-state politics and the "everyday nationalism" discourses (p. 101) employed by Hungarian residents would have provided more insight on the impact of those politics of belonging. Nonetheless, one of the conceptually useful aspects that the reader can find in this chapter is an implicit explanation of the notions of "trans-sovereign nationalism" and "long-distance nationalism" (understood as the nationalism of migrants or diasporas) (p. 51). To this end, narratives of dual citizenship and about the Hungarian ID invoked by individuals living Slovakia and Sweden are compared.

The third chapter focuses on how a wide range of narratives influence people's self-identification. These include, among many others: "narratives of rejection" (formulated by Hungarians in Slovakia rejecting Slovakness or Hungarians in Sweden rejecting being identified as people from Transylvania or Vojvodina), public narratives about Swedishness, narratives about "real Hungarianness", narratives of belongingness, public narratives of Swedish-Hungarianness, public narratives about Hungarians in Slovakia as multicultural Hungarians. This empirical material aptly illustrates how people negotiate between ascribed identification and self-identification, and how they experience categorizing practices and boundary-making processes. However, it is not always easy for the reader to understand the mechanisms through which certain public narratives become self-narratives, although the importance of the interaction between the two is stressed. Such an approach results, on the one hand, in presenting people's discourses as simply being incorporated into public discourses; on the other hand, it results in focusing merely on the reflexive voices, which indicate only the fact that some individuals are well aware of their embeddedness into structural discourses. Nonetheless, the chapter presents relevant empirical evidence on aspects that have been discussed in the sociological and anthropological literature about belonging and minorities, such as the interplay

between people positioning themselves and being positioned, recognition, rejection, or multiple belonging.

The fourth chapter focuses on language dilemmas in territorial and non-territorial minority settings, and draws upon the question of aspirations of belonging through language usage. Although the use of the Hungarian language is mostly discussed as one of the important ways of "doing ethnicity", the material presented here also informs the readers about "positioning". By choosing to use the Hungarian language or the Swedish/Slovak language, individuals take a stand with regard to both the majority and members of their minority collective. On the one hand, using the Swedish/Slovak language is an attitude that promises to individuals with a minority background recognition by some members of the majority. On the other hand, not engaging with the Hungarian language is perceived (mainly by those highly involved in "doing ethnicity" actions) as a threat to Hungarianness and might cost a sort of symbolic expulsion (mostly in Slovakia). With regard to the notion of belonging, what would have enriched Puskás' comparison between the use of the Hungarian language in Sweden and its use in Slovakia is a more indepth analysis of the expectations that members of the minority are supposed to meet in their interaction with other minority members as well as with non-minority people. The discussion could be fruitfully linked to the idea that belonging is not just "cosy", but can also be exclusionary and oppressive (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011).

The last chapter is dedicated to a categorization of homeland narratives into regional, national and transborder narratives. This categorization is relevant for researchers who incorporate notions of belonging into their work because it offers an alternative to thinking about scales of belonging. One of the main arguments made here is that individuals with a Hungarian background in both territorial and non-territorial minority settings, narrate their sense of home by referring to their place of residence without necessarily talking about a national homeland. This idea brings the reader back to a critique of methodological nationalism. Puskás tries to avoid it by disagreeing with the tendency to understand people's attachments to specific territories in national terms. Rather, the book explicitly suggests that scholars of migration should shift from their assumption of the determinacy of national boundaries to a more transnational perspective.

One of the aspects of this book which deserves special attention is case selection. Puskás has definitively taken up the challenge of comparing narratives of

belongingness that emerge distinctively from the two different contexts (the territorial and non-territorial settings: 'Hungarians beyond the borders' and 'Hungarian diaspora'). Nevertheless, what the reader should examine critically is the epistemology of this comparison. It depicts Hungarians from Slovakia in relation to Hungarians from Sweden without explicitly considering the heterogeneity of individuals from the latter category. The category "Hungarians in Sweden" comprises concomitantly Hungarians from Hungary, Hungarians from Transylvania, and Hungarians from Vojvodina. However, before becoming migrants in Sweden, these individuals were socialized in distinct environments, where different public narratives regarding Hungarianness were nurtured. And, to some extent, one can easily describe Hungarians from Slovakia in the same terms as those from Vojvodina and Transylvania, as the historical dynamics to which their communities were subjected are similar, as were their experiences related to belonging.

An innovative aspect is the focus on the "well integratedness" of members of the Hungarian minority in the two settings. Such an approach fills one of the existing gaps in minority research which emphasizes too often aspects of discrimination and exclusion. The view according to which minority members tend to have difficulties in integrating is defied by Puskás, who brings to light narratives about belonging of people with minority backgrounds who enjoy recognition from the majority due to the "respectable" socio-economic status they have acquired. However, this is an aspect which has scarcely been capitalized upon in the book, with none of the concluding remarks describing how being "well integrated" influences people's narratives of belonging. Instead, the reader can find an interesting comparison between narratives produced by the first generation of immigrants to Sweden and those developed by their offspring—children and grandchildren.

To conclude, this book seems to draw on the postmodern emphasis on reflexivity and narratives that shed light on individual agency over social structure in the creation and proliferation of discourses on ethnic and national belonging. This approach is relevant primarily because it prioritizes people's voices with regard to the politics of belonging, which is usually tackled from an institutionalist or stakeholders' perspective. 'We belong to them' is a work which can be truly insightful for researchers in migration and diaspora studies, transnationalism and particularly for those working on what Thomas Faist conceives as boundary-making mechanisms (2012). Moreover, the book is a creditable effort to find and implement new ways of

empirically comprehending the sense of belonging of minority groups. Although belonging is conceived here as a narrative mode, the author combines perspectives on identity which also reveal belonging as a mode of "performativity" or as a "dialogical practice" (Yuval-Davis, 2010). Eventually, what the reader will be able to discover is a great diversity of narratives which illustrates the internal plurality that characterizes minorities. At the same time, this plurality of narratives informs the readership about the difficulty of capturing belonging by using analytical categorizations, and acknowledges that people relate not just to one but to several circles of attachment and to intersections of distinctive elements (like country of residence, space, occupation, language, gender).

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