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## **GROUNDING POSTMODERNISM: ROGERS BRUBAKER VERSUS STANISŁAW OSSOWSKI**

*This is a book of essays, not a monograph.*  
Rogers Brubaker on *Nationalism Reframed*

If we take a close look at the burgeoning field of nationalist studies, we will see that there is a gap between, on the one hand, theories of nation and nationalism and, on the other, practice of research.<sup>1</sup> Not that researchers are deliberately atheoretical and theorists purposefully shun empirics. Not at all. Theories are lavishly *illustrated* with empirical data and empirical data are generously *illuminated* with theoretical concepts. It seems as if there was a free, unfettered flow between those two realms. Yet science moves forward neither by flows nor by illustration, not even by illumination.

A growing bulk of theoretical writing that is supported by various examples, and empirical studies that are ornamented with several names supposed to explain everything, do not push science further the least bit. Science simply does not develop when data coming from incommensurable times and places are used arbitrarily to support every claim, nor when theoretical concepts are employed instrumentally, at random, without an attempt to prove their mutual coherence. It is only by *verification* and *falsification* that science develops.

The gap between theory and research is a consequence of methodology that does not take this fact into account.

I would like to argue here that in bridging this gap nationalist studies should, for the sake of its own progress, resort to thorough community monographs that embrace possibly long spans of time and use various methods. Case studies of this kind give such deep insight into both the past as well as the present of a given community that is not likely to be achieved in other ways. This very precision and depth of a monographic method makes it, most im-

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portantly, especially suitable for testing theoretical claims. Indeed, case studies provide us with tools that serve not so much to create universal generalizations, but to *falsify* them. Phenomena discovered in one small community cannot constitute a sufficient ground for any theory, but they can contradict seemingly general rules of social life and undermine prior theoretical perspectives.

The most important and simultaneously most interesting task for social scientists is to take under close scrutiny those theories that are usually taken for granted, theories that in scientific analyses are rather assumed than questioned, rather used than thought of. In this paper I would like to demonstrate in particular how such present dominant theoretical views, subsumed under a broad label of “postmodernism”, can and should be challenged by detailed empirical monographs. To that end, I will juxtapose the most celebrated presentation of postmodern approach as advanced by Rogers Brubaker in *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (first published in 1996)<sup>2</sup> with a corresponding monographic research that covers exactly the same questions from an empirical perspective. In this context, I will employ Stanisław Ossowski’s classic case-study of “Giełczyn”: *Questions of Regional and National Bond in Upper Silesia [Zagadnienia więzi regionalnej i więzi narodowej na Śląsku Opolskim]*<sup>3</sup>.

Though Brubaker does not consider himself a postmodernist and has “little sympathy for those who define their work as postmodern, poststructuralist, post-colonial, or post-anything else”<sup>4</sup>, I decided to count his approach as postmodernist to emphasize the radical departure from modernism and primordialism, perceiving nations in terms of groups to position that perceives nations in Bourdieuan terms as a constantly changing field. This is the only justification to deviate from the rule of not violating self-understanding of social agents.

Since the publication of *Nationalism Reframed* Brubaker has been developing, refining and defending his theoretical perspective in an impressive range of essays (cf. Brubaker & Cooper 2000; Brubaker 2002, 2003; Brubaker et al 2004;

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably this work has been the most influential book on the subject in the last decade. For its reception in East Central Europe see, for example, King (2001) in history, and Kilias (2004) in sociology; for a brief overall assessment one can consult Smith (2000: 76–77, 229–233).

<sup>3</sup> These investigations go in line with Brubaker’s current project tentatively called *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Transylvanian City: Between Politics and Everyday Life* that aims to overcome – in his words – “a tension between my emerging theoretical commitments, which pointed increasingly in a microanalytic direction, and the extreme macro level of my empirical work” (Brubaker 2004: 2, see also Brubaker 2002: 177–186).

<sup>4</sup> Personal communication, January 2005.

Brubaker 2004). Though his views have been constantly modified, Brubaker of the twentieth-first century would still play on the same team as Brubaker of the twentieth-century – i.e. against ‘groupist’, ‘essentialist’ vision of nations and nationalism. What is new, however, is that in recent years it has become increasingly clear that he would also play against simplistic “clichéd constructivism”. In this context, it is very indicative that, on the one hand, his recent critique of ‘fluid’, ‘postmodern’ concepts of identity that do not allow for the possibility of crystallization of groups, if only momentarily (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 1,10–17,29–30), and on the other, his correct, though quite surprising, appreciation of primordialist views from the cognitive point of view (Brubaker et al 2004: 49–52). Still, these modifications would not influence the core of his approach, as formulated in *Nationalism Reframed*. In his essays, Brubaker deals first and foremost with twentieth-century Europe and in particular with interwar East Central Europe that was the *locus classicus* of complex relations between nationalizing states and national minorities he sets out to describe. The same problems in the same time and space are tackled in Stanisław Ossowski’s monographic study published exactly half a century earlier. Characteristic of the East Central European complexity of national (ethnical, religious) relations reached in that region an extreme: It belonged consecutively to several state-organisms – Polish, Czech, Habsburg, Prussian, German, and again Polish – and experienced in the latter two extremely harsh nationalizing policies, and in the last century it witnessed one national plebiscite, two world-wars and three Polish uprisings. Ossowski’s monograph of Giełczyn seems thus ideal to test Brubaker’s approach aiming to frame complex relations of that tumultuous era.

Whilst Brubaker’s approach is top-down, as if deductive, for he is foremostly interested in macro-analyses and comes to facts from his theoretical perspective via secondary sources, Ossowski’s approach is bottom-up, inductive, for he formulates tentative conclusions on the basis of his empirical monograph<sup>5</sup>. Contrasting those two studies gives us a unique chance of examining not only the premises and theoretical claims of Brubaker’s, but also of a whole branch of more refined postmodern analyses that draw on Brubaker’s insights.

The novelty of Brubaker’s book rests on two analytical moves: first, a negative one, which undermines prior understandings of nationalism; and second, a positive one, which defines Brubaker’s own original theoretical optics.

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<sup>5</sup> I do not advocate here the improbable view that we can contrast the theory (Brubaker) with pure and simple facts (Ossowski). Clearly, every description, even the simplest one, entails a kind of theory. What I want to do is to contrast general, experience-far considerations with experience-near monographic analyses that has to give justice to social reality in one particular place and time.

1. In the first – **revolutionary** – move, Brubaker goes as far as **to reject the concept of “nation”** as such. In his view, “nation” should be perceived as a *form, category and event*.<sup>6</sup>

2. In the second – **modest** – move he dismisses, on the one hand, Great Questions “what is a nation?”, “what are its origins?”, “what is its strength?” and, on the other, he specifies in detail his theoretical position.

In general, Brubaker’s moves are informed by **new institutionalism** that diverges from old institutionalism “by moving beyond a concern with the institutional contexts of and constraints on interested action to emphasize the institutional constitution of the interests and actors” (Brubaker 1997: 24)<sup>7</sup>. The author does not propound any general theory, however. What he gives us instead, is a refreshing set of sensitizing concepts: “nationalizing state”, “national minorities” and “external national homelands” that together help **frame national relations** anew.

These two assumptions – negative as well as positive – can and should be tested against empirical evidence. The term “test”, however, should be in this context understood in a broad sense. Theoretical perspectives cannot be tested just so. There are serious limits to such an empirical scrutiny. To begin with, although we can easily test suppositions concerning the nature of nations, we cannot ostensibly demonstrate that the term nation should or should not be rejected. Whether we will use a given concept or pose certain questions in our analysis is a methodological decision that can be judged on methodological, not empirical, grounds only. What we can only do is provide some theoretical counterarguments and show what kind of consequences the use of given concepts brings us to and how they work in the interpretation of empirical data. Here, of course, concrete examples of monographic researches are very useful. By the same token, we cannot test the triadic conceptual framework and declare whether it is true or not, we can however state whether it is more or less functional in describing social reality, whether the agents distinguished there are the only ones we should take into account. This, again, can be shown in concrete empirical examples – such as those provided by Ossowski.

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<sup>6</sup> Such a revolutionary stance can obviously be traced back to Max Weber. In 2000, Brubaker and Cooper argued in a similar vein against the notion of “identity”.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that in Brubaker’s recent publications new institutionalism lost its prominence, it is partly due to his self-conscious “correcting for the elite bias of much constructivist research” (including his own) (Brubaker et al 2004: 35, 52).

## **REVOLUTION VS. NATION**

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That nations are not eternal and robust entities existing ‘out there’ independently of human actions, has been always a fact of life for social scientists<sup>8</sup>. It has also been a fact of life for more enlightened national ideologues and nationals (cf. Dmowski 2002, Walicki 1999). An especially good witness to this is the Giełczyn monograph. Ossowski cites many characteristic accounts of representatives of Polish minority that did not feel as being members of any wider national community. “We can be Poles” – said an ethnically Polish woman frustrated with constant political changes – “we can be Germans, we can be Russians, we can be Prussians, but let us work, let it be peace, let us have something to eat.” (Ossowski 1984: 103) “What will there be now?” – asked another woman. – “Will we now be under Russians or under Poles, or under somebody else?” (p. 110). Giełczyn inhabitants perceived acutely that there were degrees of Polishness: You could be more or less Polish, you could be a smaller or greater Pole. For example, one of the most respected peasants in the village distinguished between: first, great Poles [pol. *wielkie Poloki*], who were nationally conscious and were never afraid to show their national belonging in public; and second, good Poles, who used to participate in the activities of Polish organizations, but due to persecution on the part of Germans did not show that they were Polish; and finally those Poles who converted into Germans (p. 85). Ossowski’s research generally corroborated these common-sensical observations. The author found namely that there were a variety of attitudes to nationhood that spanned between nationally conscious Poles, on the one hand, and locals speaking Polish and going to Catholic church who did not feel any national belonging, on the other. The first group constituted the so-called “core of Polishness”, around which concentrated circles of less and less ‘Polish’ inhabitants.

Nations are not homogenous entities, established somewhere in antiquity and carried in an unchanged form till today. That is clear. Should we, however, accept Brubaker’s revolutionary assumption that the category of “nation”

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<sup>8</sup> Compare, for example, Emile Durkheim’s (1888) view expressed in an opening lecture at the University of Bordeaux in 1887: “Une nation ne serait donc pas un produit naturel, comme un organisme ou comme une plante qui naît, croît et se développe en vertu d'une nécessité interne; mais elle ressemblerait plutôt à ces machines que font les hommes et dont toutes les parties sont assemblées d'après un plan préconçu” (p. 23). See also an in-depth analysis of Durkheim’s ‘theory’ of nation in Llobera (1995). Otto Bauer and Max Weber shared similar views and agreed in accordance that ‘history no longer represents the struggle of nations; instead the nation itself appears as the reflection of historical struggles’ (Stargardt 1995: 99–101). For details see the illuminating article *Origins of the Constructivist Theory of Nation* by Stargardt (1995).

should be dismissed? Let us see how the term “nation” works in Ossowski’s monograph. Does it reify reality? Does it make Ossowski violate methodological prudence?

First, for Ossowski it is clear that the concept of “nation” is in itself not sufficient to describe complex relations in the community in question. This is why he builds a dichotomous **typology** hoping that it would help cover the scope of national phenomena more accurately. In the example of Poles, he introduces the distinction between *ideological homeland* and *private homeland*, and, respectively, between nationally-conscious Poles who identify with ideological homeland/nation/state and ethnic Poles that identify with their region, local dialect and religion. “Therefore – he concludes – we can speak of Polishness in two different senses: Polishness in an *ethnical* sense and Polishness in an *ideological* sense”<sup>9</sup> (Ossowski 1984: 93; italics mine). Such a distinction does not reify national phenomena or at least it did not hamper Ossowski’s understanding in this regard. Being “ideologically” Polish meant having a cognitive self-identification as a Pole and an emotional attachment to Poland. It did not preclude what specifically an individual would know or feel about nation; nor how they would act under different circumstances. “Ethnical” Polishness, in turn, was not a tantamount to converting to “ideological” nationhood at some point in the future. On the other hand, ideological nationness should not be mistaken for a purely voluntary national identification/classification (= nationhood) without any social consequences, for it is always connected with various, sometimes very significant memories, images, emotions, etc. categorized by agents in national terms.

Second, the term “nation” did not prevent Ossowski pursuing processual, interactive analyses. He focused, for instance, on complex relations between ideological Poles constituting the core of Polishness in Giełczyn and locals indifferent to national ideals as well as Polish immigrants from the East who saw themselves as the greatest patriots in contradistinction to the half-Germanized autochthons. The complexities of the reality are reflected in such often heard commonsensical opinions: “We have not fought 600 years for our Polishness to be now called Germans. [...] Germans used to call us Poles, Poles call us Germans, but they themselves almost are not Poles, because they speak Ukrainian or Russian” (p. 122). On the one hand, we see uncertainty as to one’s national identification of the village inhabitants. On the other, however, we perceive

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<sup>9</sup> It would be very tempting to draw a comparison between “ideological homeland” and the concept of “imagined community”, for it seems that they both share very deep affinities. This subject needs further analysis that would certainly show that just as national traditions are *rediscovered*, so are scientific concepts.

that some villagers already engaged themselves in the struggle to be identified as Polish, by, for example, emphasizing their own sacrifices for Poland and undermining the right of Polish immigrants to define what counts for genuine Polishness.

Third, in his analyses, Ossowski draws heavily on commonsensical observations and concepts. It is not a methodological fault, given that they accurately describe reality. There is nothing wrong when we agree, as Ossowski does, with informants reporting that culturally very close individuals often found themselves on literally two opposite sides of a barricade – some defended Germany, others fought for the free Poland; and, to make things more complex, those who supported Germany sometimes spoke Polish better than their opponents, who, in turn, often had strangely German surnames. The analysis seems sound and convincing. This would suggest that commonsense knowledge and notions should be in social sciences scrutinized rather than rejected in advance.

I believe that Ossowski's study proves in the final instance that the concept of "nation" can still be successfully applied in scientific investigations. It does not lead us inescapably to an inadequate perception of social reality, nor does it lead to methodological fallacies.

### **MODESTY VS. GREAT QUESTIONS**

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As I noticed above, Brubaker combines intellectual radicalism with modesty. The sign of the latter is, on the one hand, presenting and applying his own original triadic framework, and on the other hand, resigning from posing Great Questions besetting nationalist studies since the very beginning (*eternal Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*).

There is no doubt that in his triadic framework Brubaker managed to single out the most decisive agents of twentieth-century national struggles. If we look at national relations, we will immediately see in accordance with the author's claims that key-actors are states (external homeland and nationalizing state) and national minorities. Indeed, in investigating a situation of a national minority, it would be hardly possible to leave its host- and homeland-state out of the focus. Closer examination demonstrates clearly that a framework of this type is not only functional, but also indispensable in any analysis of East Central European societies of the last century. It shows further that in some respects it is still wanting.

First, though Brubaker admits that national phenomena can be traced back to ethnicity, culture or religion, he concedes that in analysis of *contemporary* nations and nationalism it is possible to dispose of such considerations and fo-

cus only on the political. Indeed, in the book's index we do not find any reference to culture, whereas religion appears only in the context of Jews and anti-Semitism. Instead of dealing with the phenomena mentioned, he holds, we should focus on the every-day workings of political institutions.

Second, it is very hard to employ Brubaker's framework consistently. Even in his own investigations, the author goes, now and again, beyond it. Take for example his treatment of the Polish attitude towards Jews: „Jews were excluded from that nationality by prevailing Polish understandings of nationhood and practices of nationalization” (p. 94). “Poles generally did not encourage Jewish assimilation” (p. 94). “Poland's virulently anti-Semitic government” (p. 96). “Polish anti-Semites [exerted] direct violence unchecked by the state” (p. 96). “Polish anti-Semitism [...] had deep cultural roots” (p. 95). We see here how so despised essentialist language slips into Brubaker's argumentation and replaces a rhetoric of ‘positions’, ‘stances’, ‘relations’, ‘practices’ and ‘events’ with a rhetoric of groups, culture and durable attitudes. He speaks generally of Poles who evince anti-Semitism that seems something more than a temporary disposition, and Jews who only respond to Polish actions as if deprived of their own agency.

Third, the main bulk of Brubaker's essays is devoted to two elements of the nexus, that is states: external homeland and nationalizing state (introduction and two chapters), while the question of national minority is in principle left out of sight (3 pages)<sup>10</sup>. We see thus how two former elements work in interpreting social reality, but we can only take in faith that the third would also be as useful. Of course, Brubaker manages in short passages to elucidate it revealingly by encouraging us “not [to] think of national minorities as fixed entities or unitary groups but rather in terms of the *field of differentiated and competitive positions or stances* adopted by different organizations, parties, movements, or individual political entrepreneurs, each seeking to ‘represent’ the minority to its own putative members, to the host state, or the outside world, each seeking to monopolize the legitimate representation of the group” (1997: 61). Unfortunately, he does not provide any empirical examples that would support his vision of national minority. He does not apply it to concrete cases. Os-

<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, this omission is being overcome in recent essays of Brubaker and his associates (Brubaker 2002: 177–185; Fox 2003; Feischmidt 2004). Still, to judge whether their common enterprise makes for earlier deficiencies, we have to wait until the publication of their book '*Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Transylvanian City: Between Politics and Everyday Life*' in 2005. On the basis of available publications we can already infer, however, that Brubaker, though without openly disregarding his earlier one-sided theoretical approach, would be inclined to contend that institutionalism has to be challenged/complemented with micro-sociological perspectives.

sowski's monograph, however, could easily play the role of such an application, for it deals with one specific national minority and only in this context does he refer to states and political institutions. In the light of his research we can see deficiencies in Brubaker's analyses that boil down to the basic fact that he dismisses the great questions.

First, they do not explain why in certain extreme cases, when national institutions seize to exist, national minorities do not dissolve immediately. This is the case that Ossowski (1984: 116–120) focuses on. For many years, and certainly from 1933, in Giełczyn there were no *ideologically* Polish institutions, let alone political parties or political entrepreneurs (they had either emigrated to Poland or at some point been killed by the Nazis). But even in the worst years of the second world war, when many members of the Giełczyn Polish minority were taken to death camps or killed for showing their Polishness in public (or in private), some of the Polish families resisted the nationalizing pressure. They declined to remove inscriptions written in Polish such as: "God, bless my work" (p. 95). They did not flag their houses with Hitlerian banners. They also did not put any inscriptions on the graves of their relatives, so that they would not stain their memory with obligatory German language. Finally, in spite of the Nazi terror they still spoke Polish at home. How could we, then, explain that under such conditions there were people who still considered themselves Polish and wanted to be perceived as such? What drove, for example, one of the oldest villagers, a respected smith, not to respond, nor to accept any orders, and even spit when somebody entered his smithy with a greeting "Heil Hitler"? Such behavior seems irrational and ungrounded. Of course, Brubaker could explain it with lingering effects of past 'polonizing' institutions, but in doing so would he not violate his assumption that in describing contemporary nationalism we should not resort to the past? And more importantly, would he not downplay the agency of Giełczyn inhabitants who decided to be Poles against all hardships? This very aspect is underscored by Ossowski, who claimed that under such extreme circumstances Polishness was a luxury only few *would like* to afford. In his view, Polishness was a matter of dignity rather than institutional design.

Though Brubaker dismisses the first Great Question of nationalist studies concerning the nature of nation, he still, even if implicitly, has to give some answers. And it seems that the answers given are partial and not fully satisfactory. Brubaker rightly advocates the role of institutions, but he unjustifiably leaves individual agents seeking for recognition out of sight.

Second, Brubaker's approach does not explain why under certain conditions institutions become more or less attractive for individuals. Why certain people conform with the institutional rules, while other oppose them? What make in-

stitutions more appealing, heaving more popular resonance? According to Ossowski's analyses the simplest answer to this question sounds: pre-existing ties and past identifications; in specific: religion, ethnicity and language.

Their role does by no mean the end once state and national institutions are established. For many of the village-inhabitants there was no clear distinction between their nationality and religion: Defending religion, they defended, in the final instance, their language and Polishness; to defend Polishness in turn meant attending mass, singing and praying in Polish, and going on pilgrimages to Czestochowa, having religious inscriptions in one's house or on one's grave in Polish. The Giełczyn *Polish Association* and Polish school strengthened national identification as consequently as numerous Catholic organizations. There was constant reinforcement between national and religious institutions.

Nationality was also tightly bound with ethnicity and culture that is, in the first place, kinship relations and language. Peasants that constituted the core of Polishness were usually relatives (even their houses were close to one another); their family relations extended far beyond the village and tied the community with patriotic families from near-by Silesian villages as well as more distant regions of Poland. Disavowal of one's family bonds, acting contrary to one's fathers prescriptions, as well as speaking German and pretending not to understand a local *wasserpolnisch* dialect meant that an individual broke with one's community.

In Giełczyn, culture, ethnicity and religion were necessary, but not a sufficient condition of acquiring Polish national identity. If one broke ties with the local community, they became German, and the avenue to Polishness was closed before them. These phenomena did not cease to be relevant once national identity was established. Polish patriots from the village saw it clearly for they self-consciously cultivated their Catholic religion, language as well as cherished extended family relations.

From what has been said, it follows that rejecting Great Questions about the origins of the nation is also overhasty. It is because of the fact that national origins more resemble roots than fundamenta. Rather than being an invisible, underground layer upon which national strata can be built, they are sources that constantly provide various elements vital for national identity, be it religious, ethnic or cultural. In short, we cannot forget the past of the nation, for we will not understand its present.

Third, Brubaker insists that "it makes little sense to ask how strong nationalism is, or whether it is receding or advancing. [...] 'Nationalism' is not a force to be measured" (1997: 10). No one would deny that it is very hard to measure the strength of nationalism and compare in this regard, for example, hot

and cold nationalisms (Billig 1995). It does not, however, mean that in certain cases it is impossible. Stanislaw Ossowski pointed out that – at least in some cases – differences between strength of national policies are tangible. It would be impossible to build some kind of an objective scale of strength of nationalism in a given group, but on the other hand, it is possible to tell that a certain state or minority exhibits stronger or weaker nationalism or national policy. In this vein, it is justified to compare the force of nationalizing nationalism of the Polish and German state and Polish and German national minorities. Whereas the German *Volksbund* was very active in Poland and had been preparing revenge and military action ever since the establishment of the Polish state, the *Poles' Association* in Giełczyn could only think of singing the Polish anthem, but could not prevent the closure of the Polish school and finally its own delegalization (Ossowski 1984: 88). When speaking their native language Poles could be sentenced to death and their nationalizing state ceased to exist, it was clear that German nationalism was not just different, but also stronger and in fact disastrous.

Again, it seems that the rejection of the next Great Question of nationalist studies is not well-grounded. Rather than claim dogmatically that nationalisms cannot be measured, we should think when and under what conditions they can, and what makes them so hard to grasp in quantitative research. Why, for example, would we be inclined to say that Byelorussian national identity is weaker than a Polish one, or the Third Reich presented more nationalistic policies than contemporary Germany. Such investigations would certainly pave the way for more advanced analysis that would not under the guise of scientificity reject every attempt of quantification.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

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It is easy to ridicule the Great Questions of nationalist studies. We have heard them so often. Yet, for all postmodern radicalism and modesty, it seems that they are still indispensable. In this way or another they are bound to recur, even if we decide not to pose them at all. In this way or another we would answer them, even if we pretend that we do not. Problems are not solved neither by forgetting, nor by dismissing, but by *facing* them. This counts especially for nationalist studies, for they run even more serious risk of forsaking their subject-matter. As Brubaker's case shows, scholars are more and more tempted to resign from investigating the Great Questions and this means whole spheres of social reality escape them. In this vein, it becomes more and more fashionable to fathom every phenomena possible – national movements, states, insti-

tutions, nationalism and national ideology – but finally, by some fatal coincidence, we are left with a strange impression that the nation itself has not been taken into account.

Though, as we know, there is not anything more practical than a good theory, we see that Brubaker can learn much more from Ossowski's study than Ossowski from Brubaker's considerations. It seems improbable that Ossowski would have changed any of his arguments after reading *Nationalism Reframed*. Perhaps he would have paid more sustained attention to the role of political institutions, perhaps he would have resorted to Brubaker's political triad which would have introduced more clarity to his monograph, perhaps he could have profited from a more 'dynamic' vocabulary. But these benefits are rather small in comparison with the important lessons Brubaker could have drawn from Ossowski's monograph, which at times would make him change his views decisively.

Returning to thorough monographic research would help us not only test theories and bridge the gap between theory and research, but also to show that they can help us pose and answer, if tentatively, questions about the nature, origins and strength of nations. At least it is a more promising way than incanting names of the scholar saints – Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm etc. – that in recent treatises on nation and nationalism has become something of a magical mantra.

After all, the purpose of academic work is, first, to build theories that are not only 'illuminating', 'path-breaking', 'provocative' and 'compelling', but also testable, and, second, to test them.

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