
Book Review

Expansive Nation-Building and Internal Politics: The Case of Hungary

Szabolcs Pogonyi (2017) *Extra-Territorial Ethnic Politics, Discourses and Identity in Hungary*. Palgrave Studies in Citizenship Transitions. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

The question of when, how, and why states engage with their external populations has been a focal point for social scientists over the past few decades. The explosion of scholarly works addressing this question, particularly in the late 1990s, reflects the significance of the phenomenon of governments ‘reaching out’ to co-ethnics abroad, as well as the need to understand and explain the causes and implications of this phenomenon. The study of transnationalism, kinship, and diaspora relations has arguably become a distinct field in its own right—or at least an interdisciplinary subfield within Sociology, Political Science, and Citizenship Studies. Yet despite all of this growth and attention, there have been few studies that investigate the actual impacts of cross-border engagement on inter-state and inter-ethnic relations. There have also been very few studies that analyze precisely how the institutionalization of cross-border relations is perceived and experienced by external communities themselves. These are just two of the important contributions made by Szabolcs Pogonyi’s ground-breaking and fascinating study of Hungary’s extra-territorial citizenship policies. Ambitious in scope and in the use of multiple methodologies, it is a complex, compelling, and masterful account of perhaps the most activist strategy of expansive nation-building in East-Central Europe.

The book begins with a synopsis of extra-territorial citizenship and nationalism in post-communist Hungary. Hungarians beyond the borders became a concern after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, and successive Hungarian governments since the fall of communism have made kin/diaspora relations a priority (to varying degrees). Since 2010, the Fidesz government has institutionalized extra-territorial citizenship and voting. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, Fidesz received an overwhelming 95.5% of the votes cast by non-resident voters and won a total of 133 seats—exactly the number needed for an absolute majority. As of July 2016, over 780 000 Hungarians living outside of Hungary had acquired Hungarian citizenship (pp. 3), and the government’s declared target is 1 million non-resident Hungarian citizens. In an effort to explain these developments, Pogonyi asks three key questions: What are the causes and consequences of the discursive and legal construction of the Hungarian transborder nation? How does the political engagement of Hungary with non-resident Hungarians impact inter-state, inter-ethnic, and intra-ethnic relations? And how do institutional changes and shifting discursive strategies redefine ethnic belonging, and the self-perception of Hungarians outside the country?

In Chapter Two, the author presents the main historical events and political conditions that have led kin-states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to offer non-resident citizenship to co-ethnics abroad. He argues that despite the convergence of transborder engagement policies, kin-state politics serve different context-dependent purposes. In certain cases in CEE, such as Hungary, Romania, and Poland, extra-territorial citizenship was motivated by, and justified with, dissatisfaction with the redrawing of borders and patterns of state succession in 1918, 1945, and 1989. Restitutive citizenship was introduced as part of democratic transition and historical reconciliation in the region (pp. 10-14, 30-33). Pogonyi also highlights the significance of demography, explaining how citizenship policies in CEE after 1990 were used as a tool for ethnic engineering, through the exclusion of non-resident ethnic minorities and the inclusion of non-resident ethnic kin populations (pp. 17-18, 25). The two parallel processes of internal exclusion and external inclusion served exactly the same nationalizing objective: to secure the ethnic domination of the titular nationality. This chapter offers a detailed and helpful survey of the landscape of citizenship and nation-building in post-communist CEE.

Chapter Three examines kin-citizenship in the contemporary European context. Pogonyi provides an overview of existing typologies of citizenship regimes, with an emphasis on the civic-ethnic distinction, and the emerging normative framework of citizenship attribution in Europe. This section addresses the puzzle of how it is that CEE states can implement ethnically selective citizenship policies which are in stark contrast to European principles of non-discrimination. Pogonyi's analysis shows that current European norms and laws designed to promote the de-ethnicization of citizenship, in practice—and paradoxically—open up the possibility of ethnicization of citizenship through over-inclusive and expansionist preferential acquisition laws. The Europeanization of citizenship, intended to facilitate the inclusion of resident aliens (including national minorities and settled migrants), can be easily hijacked by opportunistic nationalist governments seeking to link non-resident kin groups to their putative, imagined 'homelands' (pp. 65). This is another way citizenship policies may be used as a tool for ethnic engineering.

After discussing external citizenship in the context of regional and European dynamics, the book zooms in on the case of Hungary and its transborder nation-building projects. Chapter Four presents an excellent summary of the diaspora engagement scholarship and traces the evolution of diaspora politics in Hungary. It gives an overview of pre-2010 citizenship debates and political discourses, followed by an extensive analysis of the 2010 and 2014 elections and the Orbán government's external citizenship regime. Pogonyi asserts that the government's attention to external Hungarians is driven not by geopolitical or economic interests, but purely by strategic reasons integral to Hungarian party politics. He explains how transborder politics have become one of the main fault lines between Left and Right in Hungary since 1990. Fidesz has used kin-state activism to strengthen its nationalist image, to discredit its Left-wing and Liberal opposition, and to preempt nationalist outbidding by the far-Right Jobbik party. Both Left and Right-wing parties have used transborder politics as a means of entrenching partisan cleavages—and these cleavages have been exported to the transborder communities, with consequences for external kin.

Pogonyi then assesses the impact of the Fidesz government's nation-building on inter-state and inter-ethnic relations. Three significant implications follow. First, while kin-state activism may create diplomatic tensions between the kin-state and resident states¹ of kin-minorities, it does not necessarily lead to inter-state or inter-ethnic conflict. So far, Hungary's external citizenship regime has not been a major challenge for good neighborly relations. Despite the often-harsh rhetoric and claims that helping external kin is a major symbolic and moral objective, the Fidesz government does not go so far in its activism as to harm Hungary's geopolitical relations. As a nationalizing state actor, it will not risk its rational interests for the sake of helping transborder kin.

Second, external citizenship, especially non-resident voting rights, is adversely affecting the political orientation and mobilization potential of external Hungarians. It is weakening the agency of transborder minorities and disincentivizing minority claims-making on their resident state governments (pp. 110-111). As enfranchised members of the political community, kin-minorities may over time become more dependent on the kin-state and more marginalized in their resident states. Thus kin-citizenship projects, rather than encouraging minority mobilization to secure rights and recognition in their countries of residence, actually compromise the claims-making potential and the leverage of transborder political actors.

Third, and relatedly, easier access to Hungarian (and with it EU) citizenship may increase the migration of Hungarians from other states into the Hungarian kin-state. The depopulation of transborder communities further weakens the potential for minority agency in resident states. It also potentially accelerates the 'ethnic unmixing' of multi-ethnic regions (Brubaker, 1988). Although we have no empirical evidence of whether and to what extent non-resident citizenship forces out-migration, Pogonyi says we can reasonably assume that it does not facilitate the survival and development of transborder minorities. This is in stark contrast to Fidesz's claims that offering citizenship to external Hungarians helps to stop assimilation and out-migration by strengthening the Hungarian identity abroad.

After focusing on Hungarian state-led initiatives and their consequences, the book turns to a bottom-up analysis of Hungarian communities abroad and how extra-territorial citizenship is interpreted, practiced, and consumed in these communities. Chapter Five investigates whether and how formal inclusion in the Hungarian 'transnation' affects the identification and everyday nationhood of external

¹ In much of the extant literature, the terms 'host state' and 'homeland' are used to describe the state in which co-ethnics currently live, outside of the kin-state. This can be misleading and unclear. 'Host state' implies that kin minorities are *guests* on someone else's land—that they have only been there for a short time and will be leaving shortly. In the region of ECE, this simply is not the case. People may have been living on a given territory as a titular majority for generations, but through forced boundary changes and the breakup of empires, this territory became part of another state. Consequently, communities moved from majority to minority status. Such is the pattern of reversals in domination and subordination in the region. To suggest that these communities are 'guests' is both a misnomer and offensive. On the other hand, 'host state' may be an appropriate description, in that it indicates the kin/diaspora community's desire for eventual return to the homeland (i.e. the kin-state). The current state of residence is only a temporary stopover point in the historical journey homeward. Much depends on the case(s) one is studying, and the perspective from which one is writing. However, the term 'homeland' is sometimes used synonymously with kin-state, and other times it is used to refer to the state in which co-ethnics live. Notions of homeland are complex and require analytical clarification. 'Resident state' is a more accurate and neutral term to denote the state in which co-ethnics currently live.

Hungarians. The first part of this investigation involved a series of interviews conducted with newly naturalized Hungarian citizens in four settings: Romania, Serbia, the United States, and Israel. These four contexts offer a unique comparative perspective on the modalities of self-perception in different Hungarian external communities, and allow for an exploration of variation in transnational histories, personal narratives, and political participation. Moreover, two of these cases comprise transborder kin minorities and the other two comprise members of the Hungarian overseas diaspora, offering a comparison contrasting the different types of external communities. The second part of the investigation involved an online survey, which was used to generalize and test the findings of the interviews.²

Pogonyi finds that extra-territorial citizenship is widely considered by recipients to be both an instrumental asset and a marker of identity. Hungarian passports are perceived as a 'ticket' to certain opportunities and as 'badges' of national belonging. They are also perceived as a means of ethnic boundary-making, as a status symbol through which recipients can elevate their social standing, and (for Hungarians in Israel and the USA) official proof of Europeanness and a shortcut to education and economic opportunities in the EU. The survey data confirms the interview data: There is a statistically significant correlation between the pragmatic and emotive valuations of non-resident citizenship for transborder Hungarians. The strategic and identitarian uses of non-resident citizenship are overlapping, non-exclusive, and even strengthen one another. In other words, the higher pragmatic value respondents attribute to citizenship, the more likely they are to attach symbolic value to citizenship as well. Interestingly, external Hungarians who voted in the 2014 elections considered it their moral duty to support Prime Minister Orbán personally and to vote for Fidesz as a gesture to honor the party that made citizenship available. The acquisition of non-resident citizenship compelled recipients to feel loyal to the kin-state government that invited them to become members of the nation, and this loyalty translated into a sense of obligation. This is why, despite the principled criticism of non-resident voting (which arose in the interviews), Fidesz received 95.5% of non-resident votes in 2014. The criticism was outweighed by feelings of gratitude (pp. 166-68). This finding could have implications for research about voter behavior and rationality.

Pogonyi's study makes a number of meaningful and stimulating contributions to existing scholarship. It urges us to think critically about external nation-building and expansive citizenship, and the implications of these phenomena. It encourages us to analyze citizenship not only as an institution, legal status, and/or practice (as the current literature does), but as a tool that can be instrumentally used by nationalizing politicians in the kin-state, on the one hand, and by non-resident citizens, on the other. This dual 'instrumentality' of citizenship and the dynamics involved, might have been further elaborated in the book. Another key innovation is the study's bottom-up

² The geographical distribution of survey respondents was rather uneven: very few respondents from the USA and Israel, with an overwhelming majority of respondents from the neighboring states of Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine (see pp. 169-170). It is also noteworthy that although the survey cannot be considered representative of the Hungarian non-resident constituency, the survey data on electoral participation corresponds with non-resident voter turnout in the April 2014 elections. Approximately 45% of non-resident Hungarians who received fast-track naturalization voted in 2014. In the survey, 46% of eligible respondents claimed to have participated in the parliamentary elections (pp. 177).

approach, which challenges and provides an important corrective to the state-centered, top-down approaches dominant in Citizenship Studies to-date. By looking at how citizenship is narrated, perceived, and utilized by different external populations, the book goes beyond institutional, macro-level analyses. This allows for an account of external citizenship through the lens of both kin-state and kin minority actors, providing an inclusive picture of the two 'sides' of transborder relations in the Hungarian case. Most existing analyses are limited to one side of this equation. The book contributes to an emerging literature which investigates citizenship from the bottom up.

The book also contributes to the extant scholarship on the enfranchisement of external populations. Most studies of external voting ignore transborder kin-minorities and focus only on single cases, therefore lacking the in-depth empirical evidence needed for generalizable comparative research. According to the *IDEA Handbook*, the number of individuals eligible to take part in external voting has doubled since 1970. As of May 2009, 190 million individuals in 115 states away from home countries were entitled to vote in the elections of their homelands (pp. 134). The impact of non-resident constituencies and the dilemmas of external enfranchisement are becoming ever more pressing, and we need empirically-grounded evidence to understand these dynamics. Pogonyi's book is a superb starting point.

Another substantial contribution of the study is its focus on the intra-ethnic divisions fostered by the Fidesz government's kin-state activism. As Pogonyi asserts, this activism has not sparked inter-state or inter-ethnic conflict, but it has caused *intra*-ethnic distinctions and cleavages. This may be the biggest consequence of Hungary's transborder engagement. Interviews revealed that non-resident citizenship made some external Hungarians realize the differences in nationhood conceptions between Hungarians abroad and Hungarians in the kin-state. Many respondents expressed hope that after naturalization, Hungarians in Hungary would not identify them as ethnic others. They saw non-resident citizenship as a means of blurring intra-ethnic boundaries. Tensions have arisen not only between resident and non-resident citizens, but also among transborder organizations and political parties. This has created and deepened rifts in the Hungarian transnation along the lines of party politics in Hungary. The study builds upon existing works about Hungary's expansive nation-building, and it advances our understanding of the consequences of institutionalizing citizenship beyond state borders.

This book is must-read for scholars and policy-makers alike. For graduate students, it serves as an example of a theoretically nuanced, empirically rich, and methodologically innovative study. Pogonyi's use of multiple methods and his inductive approach in the conceptualization of the research is to be commended. Finally, this book strongly demonstrates that the logic of transborder nation-building in the Hungarian case is really about *politics* within the kin-state. Expansive citizenship is one of the tools available to nationalist politicians. In light of the fragmentation and polarization that has emerged in Hungary and other parts of the world recently, the book suggests a cautionary note: an attention to political institutions and political culture *within* the kin-state may be the best way to keep states' expansive nation-building projects democratic and peaceful.

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