Articulating the Right to the City.
Working Class Nationalism in Cluj after the Fall of The Socialism

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Introduction

In July 1994**,** the commencement of archeological research of a Roman site in the Central Square of the city is met with vehement protests and street demonstrations. The newly elected nationalist Romanian Mayor Gheorghe Funar had shown his intent of placing here a new statue that would face the equestrian statue of Mathias King, a symbol of the Hungarian nation that had been dominating the square for a century. The new statue, Lupa Capitolina, symbolized the Latin origin of the Romanian people and their history in this city, the underlying, implicit message being that the Hungarians have arrived here barely in the 15th century, after the formation of the Romanian nation. The city belongs to the Romanians, the Hungarians have no rights in relationship to it, or at least, not as many as the Romanians did. In the context created by the Mayor, the archeological diggings were interpreted by the Hungarian ethnics as an excuse for taking to pieces and moving the Hungarian statue from the medieval square to a less central area. Six years later, a couple of hundred of Romanian demonstrators were preventing the closing down of the archeological site; the supporters of the nationalist party of Mayor Funar were claiming that the "monuments of their ancestors" were being buried, although architects argued that the Roman ruins are not valuable enough in order to be exhibited (Tripon 2005). In 2005, the new Mayor, Emil Boc, who defeated Funar at the 2004 elections, decided, after a public debate, the covering with ground of the area. However, a small part remained uncovered, revealing the silhouette of Roman walls that can barely be identified as an architectonic structure.

Actually, the main electoral support for Mayor Funar[1] during the 1990s came form the former socialist workers (Lazăr, 2003a). Yet, despite the fact that the workers favored the ethnicization of the city centre, they barely walk through it both in their daily

routine, as much as at the time of popular celebrations (Lazăr, 2003b). Why did the workers support the nationalism of the Mayor and his attempts to resignify the centre? The ethnic entrepreneurial politics played a major role in reshaping postsocialist identifications and boundaries, yet I would be a mistake to thing that the self-understanding of the workers could have come only from Mayor Funar's nationalist propaganda. Probably the most influential account on ethnicities in this specific site comes from Roger Brubaker (Brubaker, Cooper 2000; Brubaker 2002; Brubaker et. al. 2006). His thesis is that although there are sharp semantic boundaries between Romanians and Hungarians reinforced by postsocialist politicians, the practices of everyday life prove that these boundaries are more fragmented, fluctuating and fragile.

> "The boundary between Hungarians and Romanians in Transylvania is certainly sharper than that between Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine. Here too, however, group boundaries are considerably more porous and ambiguous than is widely assumed. The language of both politics and everyday life, to be sure, is rigorously categorical, dividing the population into mutually exclusive ethnonational categories, and making no allowance for mixed or ambiguous forms. But this categorical code, important though it is as a *constituent element* of social relations, should not be taken for a *faithful description* of them. Reinforced by identitarian entrepreneurs on both sides, the categorical code obscures as much as it reveals about self-understandings, masking the fluidity and ambiguity that arise from mixed marriages, from bilingualism, from migration, from Hungarian children attending Romanian-language schools, from intergenerational assimilation (in both directions), and - perhaps most important - from sheer indifference to the claims of ethnocultural nationality". (Brubaker, Cooper 2000: 27)

Brubaker observes pertinently that it is difficult to talk about two ethno-groups, Romanians vs. Hungarians, and that in fact there is only a sharp categorical distinction at the level of official and everyday discourses, while there is an important flux of micro interchanges between the putative members of these ethnic groups. His account tries to show that groupness is a variable outcome, and even if there are some high points when ethnicity can become a source of group formation, as in the case of the mobilization for the historical symbols in the Main Square of Cluj, most of the time ethnicity is all but categories enforced by ethnopolitical entrepreneurs and organizational routines. "There is no evidence that Mayor Funar's anti-Hungarian views are widely shared by the town's Romanian residents. When Funar is praised, it is typically as a 'good housekeeper (*bun*

gospodar)'" (Brubaker 2002: 180). However, here Brubaker is inexact. The main characteristic attributed to Mayor Funar even in 2002 is that he is a 'good Romanian', and only than a 'good housekeeper' (Lazar, 2003a). In addition, he fails to take into account that the typical voter of Funar was male, worker, first rural generation who live in one of the main socialist neighborhoods (Lazar, 2003a). Yet this is not only a small empirical slippage, it comes from his analytical specific vantage point.

Even if Brubaker (2002) has a very complex operational vision of what is ethnicity as culture, he nevertheless decouples power and reproduction from culture. As Calhoun (2003) points out that is problematic to think ethnicity as a category backed up politically and organizationally and thus may or may not mobilize different degree of groupness. Such a vision fails to see that cultural reproduction is organized inside cultural communalities. Ethnicity as cultural communality should be imagined not as a homogeneous category with fix or fluid boundaries, but as a field of relations. Certainly, it is important the way membership and boundaries are constituted but it is also important what happens between the boundaries. As Bourdieu (1976, 1990) forcefully argues, people are located in social space and their actions, practices and visions are shaped by their social relations and position. Power is strongly bound up with culture, and the cultural idioms, the cognitive schemas or the discursive frames are not free floating but entrenched in filed of forces that organize visions and experiences. I argue that it is not a contingency that the socialist workers were first to vote for Mayor Funar, their preferences and self-understanding were fashioned by their position in the socialist political economy. And once the reproduction of that self-understanding was threatened by the new postsocialist settings ethnicity became an important tool for reworking their subaltern social location. "Put another way, challenges to the reproduction of cultural patterns engender efforts to defend them that may contribute to making them sharper identities" (Calhoun, 2003: 561-2).

Without doubt, Brubaker and Cooper (2002) address the fact that the state is as a powerful identifier, since it hast the material and symbolic resources to produce and enforce classificatory schemes and categories. Also, speaks about self-unerstanding as a product of a 'situated subjectivity' in a social location. Yet, when these concepts are employed in the analysis of ethnicity (Brubaker, et. al. 2006), power remains outside of

culture, and the story becomes only about grupness and fluid membership, about ethnicity as a discursive resource employed in specific situations and actors. Ethnicity is not only a 'dicoursive resource' randomly deployed by individuals in relations as Faje (2008) rightly stress, it is a resource dynamically constituted in a field of power. We can conceptualize in many ways the field of power, but I will use here E.P. Thompson (1978) and Kalb (1997) understanding of class as a field of power, and I argue that class has to be factored in this particular site in order to make sense of it, and more generally, it is important not to decouple culture from power, especially in ethnicity studies.

I do not contend with Brubaker view that on the level of everyday practices, we can hardly speak of bounded ethnic groups in Cluj, but I want to explore why ethnicity became on the discursive level a strong categorical code, especially for the socialist workers, the main voters for Mayor Funar. In order to understand the junction between class and identity I have conducted 25 interviews with workers and managers about their representations and daily practices on the shop flour and habitation during socialism and postsocialism in Cluj. The interviews focused not on how workers envisioned ethnicity and the ethnic conflict, but both on the way workers used and imagined the space of the two biggest socialist neighborhoods in Cluj (Manastur and Marasti) and the way they organized their daily routine in the factory. We followed the way ethnic categorization emerged in these discussions and the way it was linked with other categories and practices.

Although occupying a subordinate position in the social division of labor, from the point of view of the symbolic order, the worker was the key actor in the legitimizing socialist pantheon. However, after the collapse of the system, the privatization discourse turned the worker and the unions into an obstacle hindering the rebirth of factories as successful capitalist enterprises. I argue that in this new context, the language of nationalism and ethnicity offered Romanian working class from Cluj an 'us' that attempt to cut across the class divisions in a city with a peculiar ethnic geography. Ethnicity and nationalism played the role of a language of power mobilized for the purpose of redrawing the socio-spatial positional asymmetries and thus articulating the right to the city for the working class. Yet this language emerged because of an electoral alliance between a nationalist faction of the middle class and the workers. The paper has two

parts. First, in order to understand the postsocialist ethnic conflict in Cluj a historical look is needed to trace how class and ethnic dynamics were entrenched in the state socialism project since socialist working class nationalism cannot understood outside State and state coordinated economy. Second, I will outline the postsocialist specific political alliances in Cluj that transformed the city in a site of ethnic symbolic conflict, which did not burst in violence.

The Socialist State and the National Ideology

The Middle Class Nationalist Ideology

The communist state, in many instances, had been actively involved in nationalist mobilization, sometimes idealistically and sometimes cynically (Chirot 1991, Connor 1984). Nationalism was arguably a technique through which the weak socialist state represented itself as a strong, unified will (Verdery, 1991), a technique trough which the 'high modernist' state, to use James Scott (1998) expression, made itself visible to the population in a similar way in which such states governed using techniques of representations that made the population visible and legible. Such views of "the state" as a reified actor have been recently criticized in the anthropological literature especially because the micro studies uncovered a plurality of nonstate actors such as scientist, intellectuals, doctors, that are responsible with the creation of a web of regulation similar to those of the state (Das and Poole 2004; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Herzfeld, 2005; Li 2005). The state in this vision is "an assemblage or ensemble of agents, objects and practice" as Dunn (2008: 245) puts it, an ensemble of actors and practices that exceed it own institutional boundaries. I think that this understanding of the state can be usefully employed to see how nationalism emerged at the state level and how latter was used.

The ideal type proposed by Tismăneanu (2003), for the description of the socialist political system is an excellent tool for theorizing the origins of nationalism at the level of the state: national Communism and national Stalinism. *National communism*

represents an ensemble of practices, actors and institutions open to internal pluralism, which creates its own horizon of possibilities and selection of possibilities, independent of the hegemonic plans of the Soviet communist political system. *National Stalinism* is an ensemble of practices, actors and institutions that are aiming at the limitation of the spectrum of possibilities and selection and do not allow the renegotiation of the dominant positions in the party. Whether a socialist political system is national Communist or national Stalinist originates in the way the (re)production of discourse and practices were routinized at the level of the Party organizations. The more marginal a communist party was prior to its organization as a sate power, Tismăneanu argues, the more it became sectarian and thus more likely to develop a national Stalinism and not a national communism. That is because marginality meant low capacity of articulation of resistance discourses and practices against the Moscow thus high degree of internal orthodoxy. The Romanian Communist Party was the quintessential marginal party. It was marginal both in the sense of the marginality of the communist ideas among intellectuals, and in the sense of the social base of the party (Shafir, 1985).

Hruşciov critique of Stalin's 'cult of personality' and Moscow's return to the Leninist principles of internal party democracy meant that Moscow supported a new set of practices of pluralism, which needed a new set of institutions in order to deal with an increasing complexity of voices in the party. Now political positions could be obtained not only through contesting whether a leader is orthodox enough, but also through contesting orthodoxy itself. Some parties had already the organizational routines necessary for facing this complexity and reorganizing their current doings so that they ensured both the reproduction of the party and dominance over society, and raising their internal complexity through reforms of the economical system and bureaucracy. Others, like the Romanian communist party, did not have such routines and practices, in fact, the party was entrenched in an assemblage of non-pluralist practices of reproduction of power, and the new routines that Moscow wanted to translate were potentially destructive for the texture of local relationships. Gheorghiu-Dej, the head of the Romanian communist party, and the members of the Political Bureau understood that the main problem arising from the refusal of destalinization coordinated by Moscow is the loss of the already fragile legitimacy of the party that relied precisely on the support of Moscow.

The gesture of moderate opposition towards Moscow, gesture related to the path dependency of the party, brought an unexpected internal legitimization. The gesture, in the context of the universal anti-Russian feelings and the traditional right-wing orientation of the intellectuals, was received and processed in nationalistic terms by the humanistic cultural fields (Verdery 1991) and by the middle stratum of the cadres generally (Seton-Watson 1964). Consequently, the party leadership ended up through identifying more with the national anti-Russian feelings of the population than with Soviet patrons (p. 104). Ceauşescu explored and carried out to a new level this kind of legitimization of the party, while concentrating the power of the party eventually to a very small inner-circle (i.e. his family), and offered support to the intellectuals receptive to the new orientation (Verdery, 1991). Thus the emergency of a virulent discourse in most of the cultural-professional fields can be observed, which took the specific form of protochronism, a trend of ideas preoccupied with emphasizing Romanian cultural anticipations in the history of culture on a universal level. The pivotal idea of protochronism was that of autonomous cultural production, against or prior to Western cultural fields, idea that perfectly fitted the tendencies of isolation and economic protectionism.

The state from the point of view of the nationalism discourse reconfigured itself in the Ceausescu era as an ensemble of nomenklatura, protochronist, and a complicated material infrastructure of art and literature journals, prizes, professional organizations, folk-rock festivals, and schools (see. Lungu 2003). The schools were the places to socialize the new generation in the new nationalistically orientated artistic and literary canon, yet the working class escapes this sophisticated assemblage, because of their problematic integration in the socialist schooling system and generally their marginal institutional position (Rotariu, 1980). The socialist middle class were the key actors in this ensemble both as actors and as subject. The working class nationalism originates in exactly in their marginality in the socialist power fields.

The Working Class Nationalist Ideology

Working class nationalism emerges from workers low negotiation capacity and the shortage economy that make that weakness even more visible. Even if they had some autonomy on the shop flour as working collectivities, they were in a subalterne position in the socialist social space. I argue that because of this marginality, and not because of the socialist propaganda, the nationalism of working class emerged as efficient category in the daily practices. The result was an indigenist nationalism, produced by both those processes that created a lax solidarity between workers and those processes that favored exclusivism.

Solidarity. In order to analyze the status of the socialist work contract Câmpeanu (2002[1980]) uses very well the concept of *non-negotiability* or *non-transactionality* and generalizes arguing that socialist society was a non-negotiable society. Even though they are freed from the exploitation through capital, given that private property is suspended in communism, workers still find themselves in a situation in which they are constrained to sell their labor force, given that the true cleavage in socialism is drawn between management and non-management, between those who have the monopoly over the incomplete control pf property and those who do not. The extra-economic political authority, the one that owns the monopoly over the incomplete control of the means of production, becomes the only employer. In socialism, the labor force stays a merchandise, but the transactional process is completely distorted through assimetrization to such an extent that basically the conditions that make the buying and selling process negotiable are eliminated. In this way there are two asymmetries accumulated: economic asymmetries and juridical asymmetries, which are rendering the labor market in a fictional space. "The nonnegociable regulation of the labor represents a determinant factor not only in the production relations, but also in the whole ensemble of social relations. That is why the Stalinism can be correctly defined as a non-negotiable or a non-transactional society" (p. 67).

This observations made by Pavel Câmpeanu can help us clarify why nationalism is endemic in the societies industrialized in socialism (industrialization without capitalism). If in capitalism the calculations take place within the frame established by

the civil contract, such an institutional arrangement does not exist in socialism, the *socialist calculation*, if we were to use Kideckel's expression (1993), functions differently. Even though in capitalism the contract does not necessarily offer the worker the possibility to control or manipulate the production of goods and values, he can manipulate the institutional frame offered by the contract in order to negotiate his position (either individually, or collectively). In socialism the calculation takes places within the frame of a kind of *domestic corporatism* (Kideckel, 1993), a system of reciprocity based on exchange and trust networks, located outside the realm of any legal arrangement. Consequently, the local, regional and national networks, and on an abstract level the 'ethnic nation', became the form of social contract through which an attempt was made to establish on a capillary level the social control needed to prevent deserting from the contract, it was the way through which social actors could develop relationships of trust in order to be able to work together without legal or normative sanctions. Generalized non-negotiability turns the institutions formally designated for negotiation into fictitious ones, such being the case of unions[2]. Under these conditions, all class organizations are atrophied and eroded, these institutions and organizations turning rather into a system of ratification, of staging democracy, of 'practically applying the indisputable'. The neostalinism of the Ceauşescu regime made these tendencies within Romanian socialism even more accentuated. That is why Barbu (2004) is right when he argues that 'Romanians use their ethnicity in the same way workers use their membership in the unions, that is with the purpose of negotiating between themselves and with authority, in a way that is rational in accordance with their own interest, the relationship with the means of production and the value of the conducted work' (p. 77).

Exclusion. Nationalism was producing solidarity; it transformed the workers into a loosely articulated community. However, the same systemic tendencies of emptying symbolic power codes and the economy of shortage turned this nationalism into an exclusivist one. The most intense competition, in capitalism, is over the clients. In socialism, the most intense competition is placed on the level of acquisition. If capitalism is a system 'constrained by demand', socialism is a system 'constrained by supply' (Kornai, 1992), and the strategies aimed at the limitation of supply or those meant to create preferential channels for its distribution are among the most important economic

games in this economic system. Nationalism, as Verdery (1991) maintains, plays a very important role in this case, because it clearly delimitates the community indicating the identity related problems of the possible competitor, thus excluding possible competitors, and empowering few local ones. National ideology thus becomes a discourse useful on all levels of society, because it indicates who is a part and who is not a part of the community. The nation played in this case the role of a mechanism of closure and exclusion, and that is why it takes a specific form: it is indigenous (Verdery, 1991). Indigenousness had various levels of manifestation, depending on the instrumental purpose of each discourse. *The neighborhood* became was the peripheral space of the city that constructed exceptionality that prevented material loss of accumulation (demolishing) or relational (political control over informal help networks). The working class neighborhoods, as Cluj's Manăştur or Mărăşti, became exactly this kind of exceptions.

Postsocialist Alliances

During the socialism, the neighborhood and industrial space were linked in an imaginary whole that gave coherence to the city. The state through the industrialization project linked the city in a consistent assemblage. An enormous infrastructure was tied together, even if an inefficient and arrhythmic way (Verdery 1996), an ensemble of factories, apartments, roads, workers, trolleys and busses, food stores and semi-rural markets. The collapse of socialist state meant the disassembling of this production and reproduction facilities. These diverse elements that composed the city of the workers were no longer lashed up by the state project and now "they float in the social space, unmoored by their previous sociopolitical matrix" (Dunn, 2008: 254). For the inefficient factories not attuned for the world capitalist markets the workers became just another liability. The city lost its coherence and the worker position in it as a worker became redundant. The state that lashed up all this elements is gone, yet the nostalgia and memories of this assemblage were still present.

Cluj had at the end of the socialisms a peculiar ethnic geography, where the young Romanian working class socialist neighborhoods bordered the Hungarian old middle class inner city (Petrovici, 2007). Mayor Funar's nationalist political project

linked all the floating elements of the city in a new assemble in which the 'Romanians', their neighborhoods and the city center were tied in a coherent way. The new local state project had the advantage of eluding the problems form the industrial platform, focusing only on the city and its center. Funar made its best to improve the town's appearance and to provide good municipal services, shielding it in the mean time form any capitalist foreign investment. Nevertheless, even if political entrepreneurship played a key role in the maintenance of the conflict, it could not have created this new spatial assemblage out of thin air. The indigenist language learned by the working class during the socialist period, which manipulated a specific type of community (an 'us' that is not 'yours'), allowed the rearticulation of the right to the city and a reshaping of the symbolic positional asymmetries, through national and local pride. The question is why nationalism did not became the dominant political discourse in Romanian politics, and why ethnopolitical entrepreneurs did not take advantage of the latent nationalism of the working class. Why did not such kind of new assemblages spurred all over Romania?

In fact, to some extent, in the first years after the fall of socialism, nationalism become the political language, not only in Romania, but also in the whole region (Tismaneanu, 1998). As Calhoun (1993) rightly observes "In the wake of communism's collapse, nationalism and ethnic conflict appeared as primary issue in the realignment of Eastern Europe politics and identity" (p.213) Nevertheless, in Romania it did not capture popular attention for long periods of time, or at least not to the same extent as in Cluj or other few Romanian cities. This has several reasons. As Culic (2006) argues the Hungarian nationalism in Romania, as a result of the mixed atonement and repression policies of the socialist state, had to important characteristics: "The first of these was the continuous reference to the kin-state (external homeland) Hungary. The second one was the representation of the communist repression as a community repression, rather than as the repression of the whole society or of the individuals" (p. 181). Hungarian nationalism through its political voice claimed in a consistent way in the postsocialist era some level of autonomy and it nurtured some affinity with the idea of The Great Hungarian State, which engulfed autonomous ethnic areas. Since cities form Transylvania was once dominated demographically and politically by the Hungarians, irredentism worries of the Romanian ethnic political entrepreneurs were somehow confirmed in the eyes of the

public in these specific cities. In addition, the postsocialist ethnic urban ecology in which the 'Romanians' are dominating the periphery of the city while the 'Hungarian' the city centre, could be found only in the Transylvania cities. So the possibilities of indigenist urban assemblage was limited to some specific sites.

I argued that the middle class was the prime target and the main actor in unfolding the nationalist discourses. Yet the middle class has many fraction and the nationalist discourses they produced differ in important respect. Brubeker, et. al. (2006) commenting on this topic observed that Târgu Mureş, another Transylvanian city with a similar urban ecology as Cluj and home of important Hungarian ethnic leaders, was led after the fall of communism by a political alliance dominated by intelligentsia coming from the army, whereas Cluj, a university center, was politically dominated by an alliance formed by protocronist intelligentsia and counterbalanced by a strong critical university environment. At the beginning of the 90s both in Cluj and in Târgu Mureş Hungarians asked in the middle of the school year the Romanians to leave the schools that were traditionally Hungarian prior to communism. If in Cluj this did not draw the attention of the Romanian community, in Târgu Mureş it led to violent conflicts. In Târgu Mureş the middle class fraction that took up the power was used to mobilize violence, being part of the army and the former secret police. The means for ethnic struggles were not just games of symbolical resignification; in fact in Târgu Mureş masses were mobilized for open violence. That is not to say that in Cluj the mobilization of people could not have occurred, provided there would have been a different political alliance.

The political entrepreneurship of some fraction of the middle class played a key role in the maintenance of the conflict, but at most they could create a context for identification not a self-understanding of the socialist working class as 'Romanians'. The nationalism of the working class was not an arbitrary construction, although it was historically contingent, and it was based on the solidarity produced by the shortage economy and the functioning of the socialist politics. If we were to use Castells' terms (2000), the ethnicity of the workers, immediately after socialism, constituted a 'cultural communes' that appeared as a reaction to their declining economic and social situation, offering a defensive identity that functioned as an element of solidarity and refuge. It was culturally constituted around localized and historical meanings that provided the self-

identification codes. Still it constituted a semantic, a contingent language, which surfaced from the historically determined relationship between demographics and political alliances, structured and spatialized in a particular way in the three cities. The paradox in Cluj is that in what was a class struggle, the working class made an alliance through democratic elections with a fraction of the middle class. This alliance translated in ethnic term the dissatisfaction of the working class with its sublalternity. Of course, the main beneficiary of this translation was the whole middle and upper class who could diffuse in this way any economic demands.

Notes

[1] The nationalist discourse and the economic protectionism of Mayor Gheorghe Funar was a great success, so that despite modest administrative accomplishments, he was elected as a Mayor three times in the local elections (1992, 1996, 2000). Although his successor at the town hall, Emil Boc, is not a nationalist, his policies being rather neoliberal, at the elections from 2004 some observers made the claim that he managed to win the elections through a series of nationalist gestures that brought him the support of a part of Funar's electorate (Vaida, 2004).

[2] One of the best known Romanian dissidents, Vasile Paraschiv, became the target of the communist repressive body because he tried to form a free Workers' Union, independent from the Communist Party. The Party did not allow such a project and tried to neutralize him declaring him mentally ill and hospitalizing him a couple of times; later he was tortured by the Securitate. His confessions about the attempt to create a free union and the severe repression that followed can be found in Paraschiv (2005).

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