

Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe



Sherrill Stroschein

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SHERRILL STROSCHEIN

University College London



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Preface

I started this project with a basic question. While teaching English in Slovakia in the early 1990s, it became clear to me that ethnicity was of fraught political significance. Coming from the United States, where ethnicity is also often a fraught issue, I was intrigued. *What was going on* with ethnicity in Eastern Europe?

FIELDWORK AND ETHNOGRAPHY

In trying to answer this question, I found that some of the most interesting insights on ethnic politics were revealed around kitchen tables or in truly unplanned and unexpected encounters. This sort of approach to information is known in my field as ethnography,¹ but I tend to also think of it as simply a sensible part of answering a complex question. As political science has become more polarized over the matter of how one goes about answering questions, a few words on what I did to answer this question should establish my own boundaries around the research for this book.

As part of the ethnographic portion of this research, I lived with families of different ethnic groups during my months in Eastern Europe – many, although not all, of them women who were widows. In total, I lived in eight different households representing a mixture of different groups in Romania, Slovakia, and Transcarpathian Ukraine. Through this domestic experience, I not only improved my use of these languages, but I also developed a keen respect for the concerns, claims, and understandings of locals of each group. This in-depth exposure to their ideas on a regular basis made me begin to realize just how deeply their political claims could relate to identity at certain points – but I also saw group boundaries dissolve to help a neighbor or in the conduct of business. I also learned some of the routines of discussion: controversial topics are rarely

¹ Edward Schatz mentions ethnography as a sensibility that one brings to research. Schatz, “Introduction,” in Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 5.

breached in cross-group conversations, and it is usually polite to know a few words of the other's language as a greeting or to smooth over everyday interactions. As I got to know some individuals over a sustained period of time, I came to trust their sincerity on these matters in a way that would not have been possible in one-off interviews.

I conducted a mixture of participant observation and interviews as part of this project. Some interactions were a mixture of both. I attempted to understand the views of both groups and to absorb the more extreme and more moderate views within each group to get a sense of the range of viewpoints. When conducting interviews, I usually had a basic set of questions in mind that related to what I wanted to know about that person's perspective, given his or her role that had first identified the person to me as a potential source of information. These questions were often introduced at the beginning of an interaction. But I found it best to allow some flexibility as the interview proceeded, as individuals often had their own stories to tell me about these subjects and often provided unexpected information.² Trying to control these interviews fully, a practice sometimes advised as a step toward science, would have hampered my ability to obtain a full understanding of what was going on. Most of the people I met were remarkably talkative about these controversial topics, thus I have not used their actual names, save in cases of public sources or when they were speaking in an official role. I did not use tape recorders in interviews. The socialist governments had conducted extensive recording of conversations before 1989, and there was a general sense that recordings were unwelcome. Instead, I took extensive handwritten notes during the interviews and transcribed them onto a computer within a few days. I conducted the interviews in the four languages (or sometimes English with officials) without a translator.

The 1990s in Eastern Europe constituted a complex period in which everything was changing, and some of the events perceived by locals to be extremely important were simply not well covered in the Western press – particularly in the early 1990s. For this reason, my first month of fieldwork in each of the three countries was fraught with misunderstanding and full of “unidentified political objects,”³ terms and events that were rapidly thrown around by my interlocutors as important but that did not yet have meaning for me. I dutifully recorded them in my field notes, and over time with fieldwork exposure discovered what most of them were – and that they were often more important than my training and initial research design might have led me to expect. When I entered the field, I wore glasses that directed me to look for “ethnic conflict.” But through exposure, I began to learn the political significance of seemingly minor items, such as statues and bilingual report cards. One imperative of inductive research is to be open to unexpected information rather than to expect the field to

² Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography*, p. 12, emphasizes this point.

³ Cédric Jourde, “The Ethnographic Sensibility: Overlooked Authoritarian Dynamics and Islamic Ambivalences in West Africa,” in Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography*, pp. 202–4.

conform to one's research design. Shutting out information in the name of project control and scientism may result in missing what is going on.⁴

Conducting research under conditions of tensions between groups mandates an effort to understand both perspectives on disputes. I learned each group's language and tried to immerse myself in each perspective for this purpose. But I also wanted those I was interviewing to understand my effort to serve as a neutral observer. It seemed important to most of my interlocutors that I spoke their language, and most found it intriguing that I also spoke that of the other group. To try to remain as neutral as possible, and to project neutrality as much as possible, this linguistic absorption was crucial. I also tried to obtain exposure to both extreme and moderate opinions. Each group, as a contested field, contains a spectrum of opinion.⁵ Through this exposure, I tried to get a view of the social facts that operate on the ground rather than holding fast to my predisposed notions and theories.

What I was told in the field reflected not only the opinions of those I met, but also my position as a young female American in their countries at a time of serious political change.⁶ Being female, I likely obtained more informal information from women than from men, as I was more likely to inhabit domestic kitchens than bars or pubs. A male researcher could likely have the opposite sort of exposure. On a few occasions, I had an impression that a man I was interviewing was being extremely open with his opinions because it did not occur to him that I might produce a serious project in which the material would be used. My unavoidable attributes are thus worth mention, as they had some influence on potential interactions. In addition, I likely came to these topics with my own predispositions, having grown up in a small town that was extremely divided on religious grounds. The degree to which these traits might bias the project is open to reader evaluation.

I used four languages for this project: Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, and Ukrainian. That alphabetical order also represents my descending familiarity with each, as Hungarian and Romanian remain my strongest languages years after my fieldwork. I maintain reading and verbal comprehension in Slovak and Ukrainian, in that order, although I would currently have trouble speaking them.

NEWSPAPERS AND FIELDWORK

The newspapers used in this project represented all of the language groups and thus constitute written narratives of each group's perspective on events. I turned

⁴ Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography*, p. 315.

⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 3.

⁶ This point is well made by Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Paula Pickering, *Peacebuilding in the Balkans: The View from the Ground Floor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

to the newspapers when it became clear that I simply could not obtain enough information on what was going on through discussion alone. The use of local newspapers representing each group maximized the likelihood of obtaining records of the majority of significant events for the database. Some may criticize this turn to newspapers as a deviation from ground-level discussions. But newspapers preserve the local narratives of events in great detail and remain extremely useful sources to document what is going on. They need not hinder an ability to absorb non-elite perspectives any more than might our reading of our own daily news.⁷

Many (but not all) of these local newspapers were initially owned by the state or by local governing bodies. Given this fact, it could at first glance seem odd that there was so much reporting on contention. But in the aftermath of socialism during the 1990s, there was a quite high standard of trying to deliver information to the public – likely a reaction to the lack of information under the socialist regimes. The public also seemed quite hungry for this information. I often saw individuals in libraries reading newspapers that they perhaps otherwise could not afford, obtaining the information as a public resource. That said, in the post-1990s era there has been a substantial decline in newspaper quality, frequency, and quantity, due largely to the emergence of the Internet. These 1990s newspapers were an excellent source of local information and narratives on events. Some have continued to maintain quite high standards, but others have declined in quality or have now even ended operations – as is the case for some of their counterparts in the West.

I have used event analysis in this book because it was the best way I could find to respect the empirical detail of events as they unfolded in a manner that could reveal some systematic patterns. As a social scientist, I am interested in revealing general patterns of interaction, and I do think they exist in many instances. As a *relational* social scientist, I have an inkling that these patterns emerge because our options as individuals are constrained within interactions. Not all might agree with these philosophical points. But I hope that social researchers might begin to have more conversations across the identity boundaries of quantitative versus qualitative and deductive versus inductive approaches. Surely the topics we study are important enough for us to use all of the research options that might be at our disposal.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND TERMS

Individuals in Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine tend to refer to themselves by simply using one word to denote a group, such as “Hungarian” or “Romanian,” rather than “ethnic Hungarian.” These terms are used as neutral words by locals of both ethnicities; for example, Romanians and Hungarians both use the term “Hungarian” to denote Hungarians living in Romania. The phrase

⁷ This may affect perceptions, but as we accept such constraints in our daily lived experience, it should not unduly hinder an effort to undertake research within the same constraints.

“Hungarians from Hungary” is commonly used to designate those living in the Hungarian state. To reflect this local common usage, I maintain the use of the terms “Hungarian” and “Romanian” to refer to local groups in the stories. Where Hungarians in Hungary are indicated, additional words will make this clear.

There is a degree of simplification inherent in the use of these categories of “Romanian” and “Hungarian,” including their related perspectives or group stances. In using these categories in the book, I am reifying them, but only to the degree that they are reified in lived experience in these contexts. In the events discussed in this book, individuals tended to adhere closely to these categories, engaging in practices that corresponded to and reified ethnic group boundaries in a remarkably consistent fashion. Where more moderate or more extreme positions of group members affect these narratives, these stances are mentioned. It is worth mention that ethnic group boundaries were somewhat weaker in Transcarpathian Ukraine than in Romania or Slovakia. The high level of ethnic mixing and the complex history of Transcarpathia perhaps foster a less bifurcated sense of “us” and “them” than do the cleavages that are clear in the Romanian and Slovak contexts. However, even in Transcarpathia the use of the term “Hungarian” retains a clear meaning.

Finally, the use of the city and location names is a politically fraught issue in these states, as discussed in Chapter 6. For the sake of simplicity, I made an editorial decision for this book to use the official town names as reflected in the titular language of the state in question – although a table with both language names appears in Chapter 2. Similarly, after much consideration, I decided to use the titular abbreviations for political parties and organizations to remain consistent with this usage. However, the Hungarian abbreviations for these political parties and organizations also appear in the abbreviations list and in a table in Chapter 3. This was a difficult decision, as I am also more familiar with the Hungarian organization names in Hungarian, given my focus on local sources. It is hoped that those reading this book will understand that these decisions are editorial and not political ones.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A vast number of people and organizations contributed to the emergence of this book. Each was crucial for different steps of the project. I was enticed to pursue graduate study by the works of the late Joseph Rothschild. In the course of my studies, I received Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships, which were administered through the Institute on East Central Europe (now part of the European Institute) at Columbia University. These fellowships, part of U.S. government Title VI funding, facilitated language study and area studies. I can see recent reductions in funding of these areas only as a tragic blow for regional understanding and good policy making. Fieldwork research was covered by a National Security Education Program (NSEP) David L. Boren Fellowship, which allowed for several months in the field, and additional support was provided by

the Institute of War and Peace Studies and the Harriman Institute at Columbia, in conjunction with the Carnegie Corporation for a concurrent project researching the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the region. Support for my graduate training was provided by the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, and dissertation write-up support was provided by an American Council of Learned Societies East European Dissertation Fellowship and by an Institute for the Study of World Politics Dissertation Fellowship. I remain grateful to John Micgiel of the European Institute at Columbia, who provided me with a job that allowed me to absorb a wealth of information on Eastern Europe during my graduate training at Columbia. Joseph Rothschild inspired me to conduct graduate study, and Marguerite Freund also provided a much-needed source of encouragement through tough financial times. I am also indebted in particular to the late Charles Tilly, who was the source of inspirational ideas and an ocean of good advice, and who expressed rare faith in this project even in its early stages. He should be remembered not just for his genius but also for his serious mentoring of graduate students as well as his consistent efforts to make academia a nicer place. Peter Juviler, Ira Katznelson, and Jack Snyder also provided some extremely helpful advice on the project.

Some thinking time following receipt of my Ph.D. was provided by the Institute on Race and Social Division at Boston University, and some travel support was provided by an Ohio University Research Committee Grant during my time at Ohio University. I am particularly indebted to the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, which provided two years of research leave from teaching at a crucial time when I was starting to fully develop the theoretical and methodological aspects of the project. It was during my time at Harvard that I embarked on a crash course in event analysis and a full empirical and methodological reworking of the manuscript, guided in particular by the wise advice of Bear Braumoeller and Takeshi Wada. Additional inspiration came from events at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, where I was an associate during this time. Once I moved to University College London (UCL), the British Academy provided a small grant for fieldwork to fill in the gaps in the newspaper data, which also inspired me to continue to develop a newspaper archive from digital photos that broadens the empirical foundation for this project and enriches the event database.

The length of time required to work this project into shape means that there were a great number of people who assisted in its production, more than I will be able to possibly list here. In particular, I have made a decision not to mention here by name those who cooperated with me or gave me assistance during my time in Eastern Europe. This is simply because the content of this book could be considered controversial given the divided context, and I would not wish for any particular interpretations to disadvantage them in the future. I remain immensely grateful for the wisdom, advice, hospitality, and humor that they provided me during my time there, and I hope that my future holds many more trips to Eastern Europe to experience that way of being.

There were no fewer than five drafts of this project, critiqued and molded at different points by a variety of smart, thoughtful readers. Those who engaged with the project at various points and in various capacities included Dan Aldrich, Jessica Allina-Pisano, Michael Barzelay, Mark Beissinger, Dana Burde, Kanchan Chandra, James Clem, Zsuzsa Csergo, Lara Deeb, Stephen Deets, Jorge Dominguez, Grzegorz Ekiert, Allyson Ford, Venelin Ganey, Elise Giuliano, Stacie E. Goddard, Kelly Greenhill, Mary Alice Haddad, Yoshiko Herrera, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Erin Jenne, Peter Juviler, Ira Katznelson, Charles King, John Micgiel, Daniel Nexon, Conor O'Dwyer, Roger Petersen, Jack Snyder, Charles Tilly, Takeshi Wada, Stefan Wolff, Deborah Yashar, and two reviewers from Cambridge University Press, who provided remarkably detailed and insightful comments. Andy Saff copyedited the manuscript with a careful eye, expertly removing several blemishes. Extremely useful conversations and e-mail exchanges took place with Fiona Adamson, Robert Bates, Janet Box-Steffensmeier, Bear Braumoeller, Rogers Brubaker, Lisa Conant, Farimah Daftary, Jon Fox, Ron Francisco, Deborah Gerner, John Gilliom, Ann Gordon, Anna Gryzmala-Busse, Gretchen Helmke, Nahomi Ichino, Roy Licklider, Quinn Mecham, James Mosher, Paula Pickering, Manjeet Ramgotra, Jeffrey Roberts, Stephen Saideman, Gwendolyn Sasse, Philip Schrodt, Todd Sechser, Wayne te Brake, and Lucan Way. A conference entitled "Civil Resistance and Power Politics" at Oxford University in 2007, which produced a volume of the same name edited by Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford University Press, 2009),⁸ was extremely helpful in clarifying some ideas on protest and contention. Some linguistic and process advice and assistance were gratefully received in the final stages of the project from Dimitry Gorenburg, Alexandra Hrycak, Laleh Khalili, Matthew Nelson, Lara Nettelfield, Oxana Shevel, Raluca Soreanu, and Andreea Udrea. Miles Irving of the Drawing Office of the Geography Department at UCL produced the map for the book, and the photographer Tibor Somogyi managed to find a negative of his 1998 photo for newspaper *Új Szó* (Slovakia) for the cover. A portion of the information presented in Chapters 4 and 5 appeared previously in my article "Microdynamics of Bilateral Ethnic Mobilization," in *Ethnopolitics*.⁹

Finally, grateful thanks are due to all of those who helped to provide a friendly context in which I could produce this book. My family – and in particular my father, Tom Stroschein, and stepmother, Ruby Miles Stroschein – have been extremely supportive. Before she passed away in 2005, my mother, Karen Corrigan, was an early cheerleader for the book, even in its poorer versions, and Michael Corrigan, who preserves her memory, provided constant encouragement.

⁸ Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-Violent Action from Ghandi to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹ Sherrill Stroschein, "Microdynamics of Bilateral Ethnic Mobilization," *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 1 (March 2011), pp. 1–34.

My brother, the pragmatic Steven Stroschein, has been on hand to provide ample advice. Anna Balogh, ReBecca Ames Sala, and Peter Tsoulos provided continual encouragement through the home stretch. Just as the project espouses a relational approach, it emerged relationally – with insightful and nurturing influences from a diverse array of people.

Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Terms

I201	Recommendation on ethnic minority autonomy, considered by the Council of Europe and incorporated in the treaties between Hungary and Romania and between Hungary and Slovakia
AdC	<i>Adevărul de Cluj</i> , Romanian-language local newspaper in Cluj, Romania
AH	<i>Adevărul Harghitei</i> , Romanian-language local newspaper in Miercurea Ciuc and Harghita County, Romania
BH	<i>Beregi Hírlap</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Berehove, Ukraine
CD	Democratic Convention, party in Romania (also known as CDR)
CE	Council of Europe
CL	<i>Cuvîntul Liber</i> , Romanian-language local newspaper in Târgu Mureș, Romania
Coexistence	One of the Hungarian parties in Slovakia (Spolužitie in Slovak, Együttélés in Hungarian)
Csemadok	Hungarian cultural organization in Slovakia
Ctl	<i>Currentul</i> , a statewide Romanian-language newspaper in Romania
EU	European Union
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service, reports produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency during the time period discussed in this book
FSN	National Salvation Front, a broad post-revolutionary organization in Romania that later became a political party
GH	<i>Gömöri Hírlap</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia

GLR	General Linear Reality, model frequently used for theorizing
GZ	<i>Gemerské Zvesti</i> , Slovak-language local newspaper in Rimavská Sobota, Slovakia
Har-Cov	Harghita and Covasna counties, two Hungarian-majority counties in central Romania
HN	<i>Hargita Népe</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Miercurea Ciuc and Harghita County, Romania
HURS	Hungarians in Ukraine, Romania, and Slovakia (book project database)
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, party led by Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia
IDEA	Integrated Data for Events Analysis
KDH	Christian Democratic Movement, party in Slovakia
KEDS	Kansas Events Data System
KISz	<i>Kárpáti Igaz Szó</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper based in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, but also with some coverage of other towns in Transcarpathia
KL _a	<i>Komáromi Lapok</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Komárno, Slovakia
KL _i	<i>Komárňanské Listy</i> , Slovak-language local newspaper in Komárno, Slovakia
Lúč	Slovak-language local newspaper in Košice, Slovakia
Matica Slovenská	Slovak cultural organization
MdC	<i>Monitorul de Cluj</i> , Romanian-language local newspaper that emerged in Cluj, Romania, in the late 1990s
MKDH	Hungarian Christian Democratic Party, Slovakia
NS	<i>Népszabadság</i> , Hungarian left-leaning newspaper in Hungary
NÚ	<i>Népújság</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Târgu Mureș, Romania
NZ	<i>Novyny Zakarpattia</i> , Ukrainian (sometimes Ruthenian) local newspaper in Transcarpathia, Romania, based in Uzhhorod
oblast	Administrative region of Ukraine, larger than <i>raions</i> , or —counties
OF	Citizens' Forum, anticommunist political movement in 1989 and broad political movement afterward, based in the Czech lands of Czechoslovakia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PD	Democratic Party, Romania
PDSR	Party for Social Democracy of Romania

PNL	National Liberal Party in Romania
PNTȚCD	Christian Democratic National Peasant's Party, Romania
PR	Proportional Representation
prefect	Head of county structures in Romania, appointed by the central government
PRM	Greater Romania Party
PSD	Social Democratic Party, Romania, created in 2001 from the merging of the PDSR and the PSDR
PSDR	Social Democratic Party of Romania
PSM	Socialist Party of Labor in Romania
Pünkösöd	Yearly Pentecost gathering of Hungarians in Miercurea Ciuc, Romania
PUNR	Romanian National Unity Party
<i>raion</i>	Administrative counties in Ukraine, smaller than <i>oblasts</i> /regions
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (reports and briefings)
RL	<i>România Liberă</i> , a state-level Romanian-language newspaper, Romania
RMS	<i>Romániai Magyar Szó</i> , a Hungarian-language newspaper in Romania
Ruthenians	Local Slavic group in Transcarpathia, Ukraine
SDK	Slovak Democratic Coalition
SDE	Party of the Democratic Left in Slovakia
Secuime	Hungarian enclave region in central Romania (in Hungarian, Székelyföld)
<i>Slovak Spectator</i>	English-language newspaper in Slovakia
<i>Sme</i>	Primary statewide Slovak-language newspaper in Slovakia after 1995
<i>Smena</i>	Primary statewide Slovak-language newspaper in Slovakia before 1995
SMK	Hungarian Coalition, coalition of Hungarian parties in Slovakia (MK or MKP in Hungarian)
SNS	Slovak National Party
SOP	Party of Civic Understanding, founded in Slovakia by Rudolf Schuster in the late 1990s
<i>Spolužitie</i>	Coexistence party in Slovakia
SR	<i>Slovenská Republika</i> , newspaper of the HZDS and government in Slovakia while the HZDS was in power
SÚ	<i>Szabad Újság</i> , a statewide Hungarian-language newspaper in Slovakia
SV	<i>Slovenský Východ</i> , Slovak-language local newspaper in Košice, Slovakia

Sz	<i>Szabadság</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Cluj, Romania
Székely	Hungarian subgroup, concentrated in central Romania (in English, Szekler)
titular	Group that shares the name of the state, such as Romanians in Romania
Transcarpathia	Region in southwestern Ukraine (also known as Carpatho-Ukraine, Subcarpathia, and Kárpátalja)
TUKB	Hungarian Cultural Association of Berehove, Ukraine (in Hungarian, BMKSz)
TUKZ	Hungarian Cultural Association of Transcarpathia, Ukraine (in Hungarian, KMKSz)
UDMR	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians of Romania (in Hungarian, RMDSz)
ÚS	<i>Új Szó</i> , primary statewide Hungarian-language newspaper in Slovakia
Vatra Românească	Romanian cultural organization
VB	<i>Visnyk Berehivshyny</i> , local Ukrainian-language newspaper in Berehove, Ukraine
VPN	Public against Violence, an anticommunist political movement in Slovakia in 1989 and a broad political movement in the post-revolutionary period
VZ	<i>Vörös Zászló</i> , Hungarian-language local newspaper in Berehove, Ukraine, before the end of socialism; it preceded <i>Beregi Hírlap</i>
WEIS	World Event/Interaction Survey
Žitný Ostrov	Area of Hungarian concentration in southeast Slovakia (in Hungarian, Csallóköz)

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