RESEARCH NOTE

Migrations of Ethnic Unmixing in the “New Europe”

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To the extent that ethnicity or nationality has been relevant to the study of migrations to, from or within Europe in the last century and a half, the focus has usually been on migration as a “heterogenizing” process, one important consequence of which has been to introduce or increase ethnic or national heterogeneity in the receiving countries. This article addresses a different, and neglected, link between migration and ethnicity or nationality in Europe. It explores migrations of “ethnic unmixing” or “ethnic affinity.”

Ethnic unmixing and ethnic affinity have somewhat different connotations and call attention to two distinct respects in which ethnicity may figure in such migrations: 1) as a push factor at the point of origin, and 2) as a pull factor at the point of destination. Of course ethnicity means something different in these two contexts: ethnic conflict as a push factor, ethnic affinity as a pull factor. The former has received considerable attention in the literature on refugee flows, including an incipient literature on “ethnic cleansing” (Marrus, 1985; Zolberg, Suhirke and Aguayo, 1989; Weiner, 1993; Hayden, 1996). Yet ethnic conflict—or politicized ethnicity, broadly understood—can engender or contribute to migration not only in the spectacular form of refugee flows, forced migration, large-scale population “transfers,” or “ethnic cleansing”, but also in less dramatic forms that have received less attention in the literature. This becomes especially clear if we consider migration engen-

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2Henceforth, I speak simply of ethnicity but I use this term to designate a broad range of ethnonational, ethnonilingual or ethnoreligious identities.
migrations of some Jews and Russians. But even where fear is a central motive of the migrants, it is not always appropriate to speak of forced migrations. Fear is a capacious concept; there is a world of difference between migration arising from a sharply focused fear of imminent violence and migration engendered by a diffuse fear, concern, or anxiety about one’s well-being, or the well-being of one’s children, in the future. The conception of forced migration is simply not very useful as an umbrella concept here; it is insufficiently differentiated, and it obscures the fact that there is almost always, even in the case of flight from immediately threatening violence, a more or less significant element of will or choice involved in the act of migration. To question the usefulness of an insufficiently differentiated, overextended concept of forced migration, needless to say, is not to deny the importance of intimidation and violence as means deliberately employed to provoke migration.

On the other hand, these ethnomigrants cannot simply be considered labor migrants or “economic refugees.” Labor market and other economic considerations have indeed often been important in their migration decisions. But unlike cases of conceptually “pure” labor migration, ethnicity plays a crucial role in engendering, patterning and regulating these flows.5

In this article, I explore some features of (and raise some questions about) these “amphibious” migrations of ethnic unmixing — migrations that fit poorly into our ordinary taxonomies of migration flows. I take up the German, Hungarian and Russian cases in turn, and conclude with a few more general questions and observations.5

GERMANS

About two and a half million ethnic Germans have resettled from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to Germany since 1987. This migration was induced, and has been regulated, by special provisions in Germany’s post-war constitution for refugees or expellees of German Volksangehörigkeit. (Volksangehörigkeit literally means membership of the Volk, perhaps best translated as ethnic nationality; it is contrasted with Staatsangehörigkeit, literally membership of the state, or formal legal citizenship). In principle, these special provisions — granting such persons the rights and duties of German citizenship as soon as they arrived on German territory — applied only to ethnic German “refugees and expellees,” not to all ethnic Germans in the region, still

1Distinguish the engendering from the patterning of migration flow in recognition of the fact that while migrations of ethnic unmixing may be motivated in significant part by economic considerations, they are crucially regulated and patterned by constructed or experienced ethnic affinity.

2Migrations of ethnic unmixing are, of course, not new. The locus classicus of such migrations was East Central Europe during and immediately after the disintegration of the great multinational Ottoman, Habsburg, Romanov, and Hohenzollern empires. These earlier unmixings are examined in Brubaker 1995, which focuses on the way such migrations were engendered and sustained by the massive reconfiguration of political space along national lines in the aftermath of empire. Even more colossal migrations of ethnic unmixing occurred on the Indian sub-continent in the aftermath of empire in connection with the creation of India, Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, and later Bangladesh as independent states (Weiner 1993:150ff).
less (as is sometimes assumed) to all persons of German descent anywhere in the world. The 1949 Constitution afforded a privileged status to ethnic German "refugees and expellees" as a means of regularizing the legal status of the more than 10 million ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who either fled before advancing Soviet armies at the end of World War II or were driven out of these countries immediately after the war. (This and the next paragraph draw on Brubaker, 1992:170–171.)

Strictly interpreted, this special constitutional provision would have applied only to these ethnic German refugees and expellees of the immediate postwar period. It certainly would not have included the influx of ethnic Germans that began in the late 1980s. These resettlers were not refugees or expellees. By all accounts, the deliberate Vertriebung or "driving out" of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union ended in 1947. Nevertheless, a law of 1953 defined Vertriebene, or expellees, to broadly include not only persons who were actually driven out but also persons leaving Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union "as" ethnic Germans "after the end of the general expulsion measures." Administrative guidelines interpreted this law in a remarkably inclusive manner. Reasoning from the premise that "the repression of Germans in these territories continues" since Germans "are not recognized as a national group and can not protect their cultural identity," the guidelines specified that "it is generally to be assumed — without special examination — that it [the repression of Germans] is the essential cause for departure." So while one had to prove that one was an ethnic German, one did not ordinarily need to prove that one left because of the repression of ethnic Germans in these countries; this was generally assumed. Thus, what began as a transitional legal provision intended to grant a secure legal status to millions of ethnic Germans who were quite literally driven out of their homes and homelands, ended up as something quite different: an open door to immigration and automatic citizenship for ethnic German immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The last several years have witnessed several changes in the law and a considerable tightening of administrative practice, but a substantial flow continues, at approximately 200,000 per year.7

Official ethnic nationality was central in generating and regulating this massive migration. Without the formal legal granting of special immigration and citizenship rights to certain persons officially defined and categorized as persons of deutscher Volkszugehörigkeit, or German ethnic nationality, this migration would not have occurred.

Yet while official ethnicity — ethnicity as legally codified and bureaucratically administered — has been central to this migration, informal ethnicity — ethnicity as a meaningful category organizing perception, experience, and social relations in everyday life — seems to have played very little role. The continuing immigration and citizenship privileges for ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have been justified by a narrative — what one might call a "legal myth" — of ethnically motivated migration. According to this justificatory narrative or myth, this ethnic unmixing has been governed by ethnicity — not by the "official ethnicity" constructed by the German government, but by the putatively "real" ethnicity of East European and ex-Soviet Germans, by the alleged repression of expressions of that ethnicity in those countries, and by Germans' alleged desire to escape this repression (not, it should be noted, the general repressiveness of state-socialist societies but — according to this "legal myth" — the specific repression of German ethnicity) and to preserve their German ethnic identities by resettling in Germany. Only this legal myth allowed authorities to assume, as the law required, that the resettlers left their countries of region "as" ethnic Germans, i.e., as persons seeking to "realize" and "express" their German ethnicity and not, for example, "as" labor migrants.

Officially, then, ethnicity drove the whole process: the putative repression of German ethnicity in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; the putative commitment to maintaining that ethnic identity on the part of the resettlers; and the putative significance of the Federal Republic of Germany as a homeland where that ethnic identity could be freely sustained, cultivated and preserved.

But this official emphasis on ethnicity was largely a legal fiction. It was a fiction with important consequences: it enabled resettlers to qualify legally for the special constitutional privileges afforded ethnic German refugees and expellees. But it bore little relation to the actual dynamics of migration. In practice, ironically, it was the constructed, official ethnicity codified in German constitutional law and administrative practice that was decisive, while the "living" ethnicity that was presupposed by that constitutional law and administrative practice was largely irrelevant.

In practice, neither ethnic repression nor ethnic identity was important in generating migration. In recent years, Germans have neither been victims of ethnic repression nor involved in ethnic conflict. In Romania, for example, Germans occupied a relatively favored niche in the ethnic landscape, certainly much better than that of Hungarians, because they were considered much less dangerous than the putatively irredentist Hungarians. Nor was an organized German minority presence considered dangerous elsewhere in the region (except perhaps in parts of Poland). Thanks, ironically, to the mass flight and expulsions of Germans in the final stages and immediate aftermath of the war, which dramatically reduced their numbers and thereby rendered those that remained relatively "harmless," Germans were comparatively benign-

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7As a result of the legislative and administrative changes, the opportunity to resettle is now restricted almost entirely to Germans from the former Soviet Union. A detailed overview of these changes is given by Delfs, 1993; more recent changes are discussed by Münz and Ohliger, 1997:15–16 and by Klekowski and Ohliger, 1997:16–18.
ly treated (as well as valued for their economic skills). To put the point rather sharply and disagreeably, it could be said that, in this instance, the immediately postwar “ethnic cleansing” against Germans created the conditions for the relatively benign treatment of those that remained.

In these conditions, the door held open by Germany beckoned not to a haven where ethnic identity could be freely cultivated and expressed, but to a richly rewarding labor market, to a generous welfare state, and to an exemplary, stable liberal democracy — powerful lures indeed in a region where all three were conspicuously absent. Not only was German ethnicity as a “lived reality” not decisive in motivating migrants, but the highly prized opportunity to migrate — as a citizen! — to the fabled “new world” of Western Europe generated strong incentives to cultivate, retrieve, reinvigorate, invent, or otherwise acquire the requisite official ethnicity.8

This applies not only to Germans but also to others in the region (including Jews and Hungarians) who enjoy “most favored nationality” status, i.e., an ethnic nationality that entitles one to, or at least increases the chances of receiving, immigration and citizenship privileges in a desirable external “homeland.”9 In the context of intensifying economic and political dislocations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the high value of such a status induces persons with partial, vestigial or ambiguous claims to it to seek to strengthen their claims (and induces others to invent or fabricate them). Given high rates of assimilation, intermarriage, and bilingualism in many minority groups in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the boundaries delimiting these groups are by no means sharp;10 and the number of persons with some connection to a “most favored nationality” far exceeds the number who officially possessed that nationality in their internal passports (in the Soviet Union) or officially professed it to a census-taker. There

8These incentives have weakened somewhat in the last few years as special welfare benefits for Auswanderer have been curbed and as access to Auswanderer status has become more closely regulated.
9The concept of most favored nationality was suggested to me by David Laitin’s, 1991 notion of “most favored lord,” playing, of course, on the notion of most favored nation in international trade. This paragraph draws on Brubaker, 1993.
10While the 1989 census, for example, put the number of Jews in the Soviet Union at 1.45 million, unofficial estimates run up to four or five times that high. There is of course no “correct” figure. The literature on situational ethnicity has amply shown that the salience and activation of ethnic identity are heavily context-dependent. When the contexts have changed radically as they have in the Soviet Union and its incipient successor states, the fluctuations in ethnic identification should come as no surprise, at least in the case of a loosely bound community with high rates of linguistic assimilation and intermarriage and strong inducements — in the case of Soviet Jews, the desire to escape pervasive discrimination — to reidentify with other groups. Soviet Germans, too, were anything but a sharply bounded group. Roughly 40% of the Auswanderer from the former Soviet Union, for example, grew up or live in ethnically mixed families (Münz and Ohligher 1997: 9).

has been considerable room for creative ethnic reidentification with a most favored nationality for purposes of emigration. This is the foundation for what might be called the “non-Euclidean” demography governing emigrations of ethnic affinity to highly prized homelands: by inducing ethnic reidentification, such outmigrations may increase rather than decrease the reservoir of potential ethnemigrants remaining in the countries of origin.

Thus instead of ethnonational (or ethnoreligious) identity generating migration, as in the German legal myth of resettlement (and the Israeli legal myth of return), we see in some cases migration (or the prospect of migration) generating (or at least reinforcing) the requisite identity. Yet — and there we encounter a further irony — the identity officially recognized by the receiving state is not necessarily recognized in everyday life in the receiving country. Having been admitted to Germany “as” Germans, many resettlers find themselves treated as “Russians.” Russian Jews, too, find themselves identified as “Russians” in Israel (or in Brighton Beach), while Hungarians from Transylvania are identified as “Romanians.” Admitted to the state because of their official ethnic (or ethnoreligious) sameness, they experience instead ethnic or quasi-ethnic difference, sustained by a host of factors linked to lived “ethnicity” such as language, dress, demeanor, habits, customs and so on. Indeed, some ethnemigrants (the previously more assimilated ones) may be more aware of their ethnic distinctness in Germany or Israel than they were in their country of origin. Thus, migrations of ethnic unmixing may in practice generate new forms of ethnic or quasi-ethnic heterogeneity in the receiving countries.

One final irony is worth highlighting. Nearly all nonforced migration flows are generated and patterned at least in part by social networks, and that of ethnic German resettlers is no exception. However, their privileged immigration, citizenship, and welfare status has made networks much less important in generating migration for ethnic Germans than for “ordinary” labor migrants. Reducing this to a formula, one might say that the migration of ethnic Germans has been status-driven rather than network-driven.11 But the privileged status accorded ethnic German resettlers has been a mixed blessing. It has enabled, indeed encouraged, ethnic Germans to resettle in Germany even without concrete employment possibilities and without knowledge of

11One indicator of this is that a very high fraction of the eligible pool of ethnic resettlers has in fact resettled in Germany. I noted above, to be sure, that the eligible pool is elastic, capable of expanding in proportion to the perceived attractiveness of the resettlement option, and that it is consequently impossible to specify precisely the size of the pool of potential resettlers. But some indication of the order of magnitude involved is suggested by the fact that about 1.5 million Auswanderer have come from the Soviet Union and its successor states in the last decade — nearly as many as the roughly 2 million persons who gave their ethnic nationality as “German” in the last Soviet census of 1989.
German. Of those who resettled during the first half of the 1990s, fully 44 percent were unemployed in 1995 (Münz and Ohliger, 1997:17). The privileged legal position of resettlers has contributed to their social and economic marginalization (Klekowski and Ohliger, 1997:26).

**HUNGARIANS**

Unlike ethnic Germans, scattered over vast areas far from Germany, ethnic Hungarians are concentrated in states adjoining Hungary, especially in Romania, Slovakia, rump Yugoslavia, and Ukraine and, within these states, in territories formerly belonging to Hungary but ceded after World War I. In these states there are ethnic Hungarian communities of (very approximately) 1.6 million, 600,000, 330,000, and 170,000, respectively. In proportion to the population of Hungary (about 10 million), this is a much larger pool of potential ethnemigrants than exists in the German case. Another key difference is that ethnic Hungarians in the neighboring states, except Ukraine, have been involved in recent years – at least at the elite level – in tense ethno-political conflicts.

The migration patterns of Hungarians in these neighboring states differ sharply from one another. Hungarian in Romanian Transylvania are involved in well-articulated networks of labor migration to Hungary (with considerable permanent resettlement on the part of the urban intelligentsia as well). Hungarians from the Voivodina province of rump Yugoslavia (and from the adjoining Croatian region of Eastern Slavonia), especially young men, have fled to Hungary in what was initially a temporary move to escape conscription, war, and war-linked economic crisis, but has since assumed a more settled form. Hungarians from southwestern Ukraine have been involved mainly in cross-border petty commerce, exploiting the tremendous economic disparities between the two states (though the already thin ranks of the Hungarian intelligentsia have been depleted through the resettlement of educated specialists – teachers, doctors, etc. – in Hungary). Hungarians from southern Slovakia, at this writing, have not become involved in significant patterns of migration to Hungary; in the absence of large economic disparities between the countries, ethno-political tensions (considerable at the political level, but minimal in everyday life) have failed to generate a substantial cross-border migration. Adequate statistics are lacking on all of these flows, but in general it is clear that although the pool of potential resettlers is larger in proportion to population than in Germany, the actual resettlement of ethnic Hungarians so far has been on a much smaller scale, in proportion to population, than in Germany. In the following discussion, I focus mainly on migration from Romania, from which the largest migrant flows have originated and which contains (by far) the largest reservoir of potential migrants and settlers.

Hungary’s policy toward ethnic Hungarian resettlers is more ambivalent than Germany’s. Unlike Germany, Hungary is not committed to extending citizenship rights to, or allowing the immigration of, coethnics in neighboring states. Hungarians from all points on the political spectrum agree that the state should not promote the resettlement of ethnic Hungarians in Hungary. Some hold this view on nationalist grounds, strongly opposing the erosion through outmigration of the Hungarian presence in such traditional areas of Hungarian settlement as Transylvania and southern Slovakia; others are more concerned about the economic consequences of large-scale resettlement.

Yet while Hungary is not committed to guaranteeing immigration and citizenship rights of ethnic Hungarians in neighboring states, it is committed to according them some form of preferential treatment in immigration and citizenship matters. The new law on citizenship of 1993, for example, exempts persons of Hungarian ethnicity from the ordinary eight-year residence requirement for naturalization, and the companion 1993 law on the entry, residence and immigration of foreigners (or more precisely the administrative regulations pertaining to its implementation) exempts them from the ordinary three-year residence requirement for obtaining permission to immigrate (i.e., to settle permanently) in Hungary. But these laws do not guarantee ethnic Hungarians rights to either immigration or citizenship; they simply permit government officials to treat them preferentially in these respects.5

Because of this more ambivalent and indeterminate governmental stance, “official” ethnicity does not play the same crucial role in the Hungarian case...
that it does in the German. In the German case, establishing one's official German ethnonational identity until recently has sufficed to establish one's rights to immigration and citizenship. Even now, as the German government has begun to tighten procedures for admission of ethnic Germans, all questions of legal status concerning such migrants are resolved before they enter Germany; ethnic Germans continue to enter Germany with all the rights and duties of German citizens.

Ethnic Hungarians enter Hungary in a more ambiguous status. For ethnic Hungarians, unlike ethnic Germans, it has not been possible to enter the "mother country" with citizenship rights already established. Ethnic Hungarians have had to enter Hungary as foreigners, albeit as favored foreigners. But favored in what way and in what contexts? This has been ambiguous for Hungarians. Ethnic Germans were able to "capitalize" on their ethnonationality in advance, once and for all, "converting" it into a permanent and durably valuable bundle of citizenship rights. But for ethnic Hungarians, the "value" of their ethnonationality has been uncertain and context-dependent. They could not simply convert it in advance into a durably valuable citizenship status.

There is not, then, a single clear "exchange rate" for Hungarian ethnic nationality. Its value is context-dependent, varying across numerous "spot markets." Ethnographic research would be required to reveal the contexts in which and the mechanisms through which the value of Hungarian ethnic nationality is effectively "realized" - or not realized. It would be necessary, for example, to study encounters with border officials, with interior ministry bureaucrats vested with discretionary authority to grant permanent residence permits and citizenship, with labor inspectors checking workers' documents at workplaces, and with policemen checking documents in other settings. In those and similar encounters, how do the migrants "present" their Hungarian ethnicity? In what circumstances is it "recognized" - or not recognized - by agents of the state? And what difference does it make? That is, are persons (suc-cessfully) presenting themselves as ethnic Hungarians in such encounters treated better than, say, ethnic Romanians in a legally identical status?

The proximity to Hungary of ethnic Hungarians in neighboring states and the cross-border relations linking them with Hungarians in Hungary marks another difference with the German case. Because of the lack of proximity and restrictions on travel, such cross-border relations were virtually absent in the German case. Once the late 1980s migration surge began, ties were established between Germany and ethnic German communities to the East, but mostly between those who already had migrated to Germany and potential ethnomigrants remaining in the countries of origin. The networks and relations thus established were like those resulting from all forms of international migration, linking migrants to potential migrants remaining at home. Shared ethnicity provides fertile soil for such networks; but the ethnicity that is shared in these cases is typically shared between persons having already migrated and potential migrants; there need not be any sharing with the wider population in the country of residence. In the German case, I would expect to find strong ties between immigrant Germans and Germans in the corresponding countries of origin, but weak ties between nonimmigrant Germans and potential German ethnomigrants in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In the German case, if this is correct, ethnicity is shared only "officially" between potential ethnomigrants and nonimmigrant Germans in Germany; there is no sociologically "real" or "living" shared ethnicity sustaining dense social relations between them.

In the Hungarian case, social relations do link Hungarians in Hungary with those in neighboring states. Partly, these relations have been sustained by family ties. Partly, they were facilitated by the relatively greater ease of travel among socialist countries than between those countries and Germany. In the case of Hungarians in Romania, ties with Hungarians in the mother country were reinforced in the mid and late 1980s by an unofficial, quasi-oppositional social movement in Hungary in support of coethnics in Romania. As Ceausescu's regime became increasingly repressive, many students and others from Hungary began to travel frequently to Transylvania, bringing basic goods that were in short supply in Romania and demonstrating their solidarity with Transylvanian Hungarians. I do not want to exaggerate the density of the ties between Hungarians in Hungary and those in neighboring states, but my working hypothesis is that these ties contributed significantly to the rapid development of migration from Transylvania in the late 1980s (beginning a couple of years before the fall of Ceausescu) once it became clear that the migrants' presence would be tolerated (if not actively encouraged) by the Hungarian government.

In the Hungarian case, then, while "official" ethnicity could not be converted in advance into citizenship as in the German case, ethnicity (more precisely the social relations emerging on the basis of a common language, family ties, relative proximity, and in some cases a politically charged sense of common ethnicity) could function informally as a form of migration-facilitating "social
capital,” facilitating the establishment of wider connections, the flow of information about work and study opportunities, and so on. 19

Now, of course, as indicated above, migration-facilitating networks do not depend on shared ethnicity or dense social relations with nonimmigrant populations. (For an overview of the manifold ways in which networks of different kinds shape migration flows, see Gurak and Caces, 1992.) So is there any specific migration-facilitating effect of shared ethnicity here? I think there is, for two reasons. First, shared ethnicity helps get the migration going in the first place. This is crucial, since the migration-facilitating networks embedded in relations between actual migrants and potential migrants can only sustain existing migration patterns, not generate them in the first place. Second, even once migration networks are in place, shared ethnicity and the associated social ties to nonmigrants generate richer and more valuable networks than those linking migrants and potential migrants alone.

This specific effect of ethnicity as a form of migration-facilitating social capital could be analyzed in the case of migration from Romania to Hungary. I suggest above that one might investigate the extent to which and the manner in which the value of asserted and recognized Hungarian ethnicity could be realized in encounters with agents of the Hungarian state. But independently of its role in occasioning differential treatment from state officials, one might also investigate the specific effect of ethnicity by comparing the richness and migration-related value of the networks of similarly situated ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians from Transylvania (i.e., of those with the same occupation, same skills, from the same village or the same workplace, etc.). Once ethnic Romanians’ migration streams developed, 20 they could be sustained by intra-Romanian ties between migrants in Hungary and potential migrants in Romania. But my hunch is that these networks are not as rich and rewarding (in terms of migration-related opportunities pertaining to jobs, fellowships, opportunities to study, opportunities to apply for permanent residence and citizenship, and so on) as those of similarly situated ethnic Hungarians.

The shared ethnicity linking Hungarians in Romania (and other neighboring states) to Hungarians in Hungary is not (as it is in the German case) pri-

19. In the literature on migration, the concept of social capital has recently come to be used both in connection with the integration of immigrants (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993) and in connection with the migration process itself (Massey et al. 1993:448ff; Massey and Espinosa 1997:51ff).

20. How did Romanians get involved in the first place in the networks of labor migration, in the absence of any organized recruitment from the Hungarian side? Tentatively, two mechanisms can be suggested. First, in the last years of the Ceausescu regime, some Romanians as well as ethnic Hungarians fleeing the Romanian regime were admitted to Hungary and even eventually recognized as refugees. Secondly, many labor migrants, especially those involved in construction, migrate in teams, and some of these teams are ethnically mixed. In these ways, Romanians may have acquired the basis for developing the networks that could sustain further labor migration by Romanians.

marily a legal fiction but rather, at least to some extent and in some contexts, a sociological reality. Yet despite this more substantial shared ethnicity, ethnic Hungarians are not simply assimilated to Hungarian Hungarians once they migrate to Hungary. Rather, like ethnic German migrants to Germany or Russian Jews in Israel, they too are perceived as “different” in a quasi-ethnic way. To capture adequately the ambivalent, fluctuating, contested and context-dependent quality of Transylvanian Hungarians’ “Hungarianness” in Hungary would require sustained ethnographic study of the various occasions and contexts in which that “Hungarianness” is asserted, experienced, acknowledged, questioned, or denied (for a first step in this direction, see Fox, 1998).

RUSSIANS

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some 25 million ethnic Russians—that is persons having declared their ethnic nationality to be Russian at the last Soviet census in 1989—became residents of the incipient non-Russian successor states, all of which defined themselves (and justified their claim to sovereignty) as the states of and for specific non-Russian ethnic nationalities. In the context of this “nationalization” of a formerly multinational or imperial political space, the huge Russian presence could not help but seem anomalous, its position precarious—especially in the light of the Yugoslav refugee crisis, by far the most serious in Europe since the aftermath of World War II and one that resulted directly from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its incipient reconfiguration along national lines (Hayden 1992; Rieff 1992). Understandably, the specter of an analogous “unmixing of peoples” in post-Soviet Eurasia—the specter of ethnic cleansing on a vaster canvas—has haunted discussions of post-Soviet migration.

Bloody unmixing has indeed occurred in the former Soviet Union, but so far it has not involved Russians. At the same time, a substantial centripetal flow of Russians from the former peripheral Soviet republics—or in Russocentric terms from the “near abroad”—to Russia has occurred, but so far in the measured tempo of a long-term process rather than in the convulsive form of refugee flows.

The forms and dynamics of the post-Soviet Russian migration to Russia differ sharply from those of the German and Hungarian migrations. As a crude first approximation, one can note that the pull factors dominant in the German case (and operative in the Hungarian case as well) are absent in the Russian case. The Russian economy is indeed, in the aggregate, in less worse shape than those of most of the other Soviet successor states (Estonia being a notable exception). Yet this isn’t saying much—except about how abysmal conditions are elsewhere. The Russian economy does not draw Russians in the near abroad the way the Hungarian economy does Hungarians from Romania, not even to speak of the powerful lure of the German economy. Push factors seem much more impor-
tant in the Russian case. I do not mean the dramatic sorts of push factors associated with refugee flows: it is a striking fact, for example, that Russians have been the targets of scarcely any ethnic violence so far. The push factors have been chronic and processual rather than acute. They concern the long-term "nationalization" of the successor states, a process that began in some republics (and even produced considerable Russian outmigration from "southern tier" republics) long before the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As a result of this gradual nationalization, which involved among other things "titular" nationalities taking over positions that Russians formerly held, Russians came to feel less "at home" in these areas, even when they still belonged to the Soviet Union. They began to look (and to move) elsewhere. As a result, the longstanding current of Russian migration outward into non-Russian areas slowed and even (in Transcaucasia and Central Asia) reversed itself. The present Russian reflux towards Russia therefore did not initiate, but rather simply reinforced, an already existing reversal of historic Russian migration patterns.

"Official" ethnicity has not figured in this migration. Russian citizenship and immigration law is, formally at least, ethnically neutral; unlike the German constitution and Hungarian citizenship and immigration law, it does not invoke Russian ethnicity or nationality. In a sense this is ironic, since the Soviet Union went further than any other state in official codifying and institutionalizing sub-state ethnic nationality. But while Russian citizenship and immigration law are formally ethnically neutral, the Russian government has pushed the governments of the newly independent states to allow their ethnically Russian or Russian-speaking citizens to hold dual citizenship - so that Russians in Kazakhstan, for example, could be citizens of both Kazakhstan and Russia. These efforts so far have had little success, but if such agreements were reached, they would obviously recreate a single "migration space" for Russians.

The government also has vigorously and vocally championed the rights of ethnic Russians, Russian-speakers, or "compatriots" in the "near abroad." (For a comparative analysis of contemporary Russian and Weimar German claims to protect transborder coethnics, see Brubaker, 1996:ch. 5). The multiplicity of terms designating the object of the Russian government's concerns is itself significant. "Russians" (Rossiye) is the most restrictive term: it designates persons of Russian ethnic nationality. "Russian-speaking" is a broader but indeterminate term. Since almost everyone in the former Soviet Union knew at least some Russian, the term could be extended indefinitely. But the core reference

includes, besides ethnic Russians, persons (especially but not exclusively other Slavic nationalities) living outside "their own" republics who tended to assimilate linguistically and otherwise to Russians. "Compatriot" is a still more indefinite term, capable of being construed in cultural or political terms as including all who somehow identify with the Russian state or, in more ethnocultural terms, as including members of all ethnonational groups who have their "homeland" inside the Russian Federation.

Like the Hungarian government vis-a-vis ethnic Hungarians, the Russian government does not seek to encourage the migration of ethnic Russians (or of others who could be construed as Russian-speakers or "compatriots") to Russia. On the other hand, it has so far made no attempt to restrict the entry or residence of those who have wanted to migrate to Russia (nor indeed the entry and residence of any former Soviet citizens who have wanted to migrate to Russia).

Good data on the Russian reflux to Russia are lacking. But there is evidence of (and good reason to continue to expect) a good deal of variation between (and also within) successor states in patterns of migration. Relevant conditioning factors include: 1) ethnodemographic variables such as the size, concentration and rootedness of the Russian populations in the territories in question, as well as the trajectory of these variables over time, with small, scattered, weakly rooted, and rapidly shrinking Russian populations (as in the cities of Central Asia) engendering further migration, while large, concentrated and deeply rooted Russian populations (as in Ukraine or Northern Kazakhstan) experience lower rates of outmigration (but higher rates of collective political action); 2) the texture of everyday life for Russians in the successor states, with insecurity, especially involving actual or feared violence - and not only violence directed specifically against Russians - powerfully stimulating outmigration, as from Tajikistan; 3) and the prospective economic or political advantages, balanced against cultural and psychological costs, that might induce Russians to remain in a successor state despite anti-Russian sentiment and nationalistic language and citizenship legislation, as in the Baltic states, which may be seen as having brighter medium- and long-term prospects for economic integration into Europe, and brighter prospects for maintaining public order and establishing liberal institutions.

These and other considerations would lead one to expect sharply differing rates of migration to Russia on the part of different diaspora groups. Migration has been and probably will continue to be strongest among Russians in Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Russian outmigration rates have been much lower (though nonetheless very substantial in the case of

21Ironically, the major Russian civilian casualties in non-Russian areas have occurred not in the "near abroad" but within the Russian Federation itself, as a result of the Russian attack on the Chechen capital of Grozny, many thousands of whose Russian residents (unlike the Chechen residents, who could escape to nearby Chechen villages) had nowhere to go and suffered the brunt of the assault (Cany 1995).

22Two Russian terms are translated "Russians" in English: the ethnic term Rossiye and the political term Rossiane. The latter designates the (multiethnic) population of Russia (Rossia).

23This and the following paragraphs in this section draw on Brubaker, 1995:209ff, and 1996:173ff.
Kazakhstan from areas with territorially concentrated and historically rooted Russian populations such as the eastern and southern Ukraine, northern and eastern Kazakhstan, Moldova east of the Dniester, and northeastern Estonia. There we are more likely to see— and in some cases, of course, already seeing— collective political responses on the part of Russians to non-Russian nationalisms. Elsewhere in the Baltics, too, Russian outmigration has been limited, perhaps because of comparatively bright medium- and long-term economic and political prospects.

Of the 25 million Russians in the non-Russian successor states, only a small fraction— if nonetheless a large group in absolute numbers— is at high risk of being induced or forced to flee to Russia in the next few years. The Russians most likely to resettle in Russia are those in Central Asia (3.3 million in 1989) and Transcaucasia (785,000). Many of these— although we don’t have a very precise idea how many— have already moved. This pool of potential migrants amounts to less than 3 percent of the total population of Russia. In principle, the resettlement of even a substantial fraction of this migrant pool might benefit Russia, given longstanding concerns about rural depopulation in central Russia and about labor deficits in certain developing areas. In practice, however, it has been and will continue to be difficult for the state to steer resettlement in accordance with demographic and economic needs. Already, heavy migration to southern Russian Stavropol and Krasnodar regions has caused considerable social tension. A substantially larger migration could dangerously exacerbate tensions, especially in a state in the throes of economic crisis, having no experience with immigration or refugee flows, and largely unprepared to handle a substantial influx of settlers or refugees.

Such migration would also further damage Central Asian economies, given the Russian or European monopoly or quasi-monopoly of many technical occupations. The outflow of skilled specialists in the last few years has already disrupted enterprises. Fearing further, more serious disruptions, ruling elites of the Central Asian successor states have sought to induce Russians and other Europeans to remain. How successful they will be remains to be seen. Retaining Russians and other Slavs will certainly be easier than retaining those with more attractive resettlement opportunities (especially Germans and Jews, whose Central Asian settlements have been rapidly shrinking). Much will depend on successor state governments’ ability to maintain public order and on the overall social and political atmosphere in these states.

24In absolute numbers, resettlement of Russians from Kazakhstan has been very large, probably amounting to at least 600,000 persons. Yet to keep this figure in perspective, one should remember that this amounts to about 10% of Kazakhstan’s Russian population—a very substantial outflow, but not cataclysmic. Reflecting dramatically different resettlement opportunities, some 70% of the nearly one million ethnic Germans in Kazakhstan in 1989 had emigrated by 1997. (”Kazakhstan Grapples with Migration Dilemmas,” Forced Migration Monitor, July 1997, cited from http://www.soros.org/fmm2/html/fmm july97.3.html).

Much more serious than even a near-complete Russian exodus from Central Asia would be a massive Russian exodus from the core areas of Russian settlement in the non-Russian successor states, southern and eastern Ukraine and northern and eastern Kazakhstan. With large, territorially concentrated and historically rooted communities in these areas, Russians are unlikely to leave in huge numbers or convulsive rhythms unless 1) government policies and popular practices in Ukraine and Kazakhstan take on a much more sharply anti-Russian orientation than they have at present and 2) intensifying ethnonational conflict is militarized or otherwise linked with actual or threatened violence. Although there is no immediate prospect of this occurring in either state, it must be reckoned a real possibility over the medium and longer term in Kazakhstan, given the potent historical memories that can be mobilized around the tremendous suffering inflicted by the Soviet state, with whose projects Russian settlers can be all too easily identified.

Besides the tremendous economic problems it would entail, large-scale resettlement of Russians from Ukraine or Kazakhstan to Russia might well be politically destabilizing. Especially if Russians were to flee these territories in response to sharply anti-Russian state policies or instances or threats of violence, the refugees could form core constituencies for radical Russian nationalists committed to recovering control of what they could present as “historically Russian” territories. Historically, displaced and dispossessed refugees have often provided constituencies for extreme nationalist parties and programs.

CONCLUSION

The migrations discussed here are highly heterogeneous, and I have offered a series of quite different analytical cuts into them. Why lump them together under the rubric of migrations of ethnic unmixing? Let me close by sketching a few reasons for considering them together.

First, these migrations have all been generated by the reconfiguration of political space along national lines. This nationalization of political space has occurred unevenly: the nationalization that occurred in East Central Europe after World War I, leaving Germans and Hungarians stranded as national minorities in the region’s successor states, is occurring in the former Soviet Union only now, leaving Russians similarly stranded. The ethnic unmixing involving Germans and Hungarians today is the continuation of a process that began 75 years ago, while the ethnic unmixing involving Russians is still fairly new. In broader historical perspective, these migrations, different though they are in many respects, belong together as instances of the same type of process.

Second, potentially fruitful comparative work could be done on the determinants of migrations of ethnic unmixing. I have focused here on group-level or country-level determinants, but these obviously interact with individual-level determinants. These individual-level determinants, although not unimportant in the German case, are especially important in the Hungarian and Russian
cases, where there is no single, powerful, and fairly uniformly attractive lure comparable to that exercised by Germany. Among individual-level determinants, I would expect relations — the structure of individuals' social ties — to be more important than nonrelational attributes such as education, skills, language knowledge, and so on. Detailed studies of the role of personal networks in both facilitating and restraining migration might be rewarding, especially for the Russian case where the absence or weakness of impersonally functioning labor and housing markets increases the importance of personal networks.

Third, migrations of ethnic unmixing typically involve some special openness on the part of the receiving country, derived from its understanding of itself as being a 'homeland' or mother country for coethnics abroad and as having some kind of special responsibility toward them. Comparative exploration of the political and cultural struggles over the nature and implications of this asserted responsibility for noncitizen coethnics could prove fruitful.

Fourth, the discrepancy between official identity categories — as reified in legislation and administrative regulations, as interpreted in administrative practice, and as deployed in political rhetoric — and everyday identifications and self-understandings invites study of the way agents 'play' with official categories.

Finally, while considerable attention has been focused on ethnic conflict as a cause of migrations of ethnic unmixing (especially refugee flows), less attention has been paid to the consequences of such migrations for ethnic conflict. Two very different potential consequences deserve further study. On the one hand, ethnic unmixing can alleviate ethnic conflict by serving as a 'safety valve,' by providing an opportunity for exit as an alternative to potentially conflictual voice. My hunch is that the Hungarian migration from Romania works in this way. On the other hand, massive or violence-induced ethnic unmixing can aggravate ethnic and national conflict by radicalizing politics in the mother country and pushing it to intervene on behalf of coethnics abroad. This was the consequence of the first wave of Hungarian unmixing in the interwar period (Mocsy, 1973), and it is a potential danger in post-Soviet Russia as well.

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