Anke Weber, Wesley Hiers, and Anaïd Flesken, *Politicized Ethnicity: A Comparative Perspective***, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, ISBN 978-1-349-56922-9, 187 pages**

Review by Marius Ioan TĂTAR

Social scientists have made contradictory claims about the impact of ethnic diversity on social cohesion, the levels of social trust, civic and political engagement (Tătar, 2011). This is so because various societies perform differently in accommodating ethnic diversity. Ethnic boundaries can act both as spaces of mutual understanding and inclusion of various ethnicities, as well as contact areas based on divergence and exclusion between different ethnic groups (Tătar, 2003). Given these divergent outcomes, scholars have suggested that it is not ethnic diversity per se that is relevant, but the degree to which ethnicities are politicized and become salient in the political process. However, few studies convincingly explain and illustrate with in-depth case studies why and how ethnic identities become politicized. The book authored by Anke Weber, Wesley Hiers, and Anaïd Flesken, *Politicized Ethnicity: A Comparative Perspective,* aims to fill this gap in the literature by offering an extensive comparative analysis of five cases: Kenya, Tanzania, Bolivia, Peru, and the United States.

In the introductory chapter, the authors develop a comprehensive theoretical framework which both conceptualizes politicized ethnicity as a dependent variable and identifies a comprehensive set of factors that lead to the politicization of ethnicity. The authors start from a constructivist approach of ethnicity, that is both dynamic and relational, aiming to explain why ethnic identities become important issues in the political arena (p. 3). They argue that the politicization of ethnicity occurs when specific types of "ethnic actions" are carried out in the context of institutions that are linked to the state/political arena" (p.4).

According to the authors, politicization of ethnic identities can take various discursive and nondiscursive forms. The most important discursive forms appear when actors frame various issues in ethnic terms and bring them into the political arena (p.4). On the supply side of the political process, the authors also emphasize other forms of ethnicity politicization through the formation of ethnic parties and their competition in the electoral arena, ethnically based public policies, and other legal and administrative forms (pp. 5-6). On the demand side, the authors pinpoint the support of the population for the actions of ethnic actors, illustrated for instance by voting for ethnic parties (p. 7). Based on these indicators, the authors place the five cases analyzed in this book on a continuum of ethnicity politicization: Kenya (high), US (medium-high), Bolivia (medium-low), Peru (low), Tanzania (low) (pp. 137-138).

To explain differences between these countries in terms of ethnicity politicization the authors provide an integrated analytical framework that considers the interplay between structure and actors in creating salient ethnic identities and the subsequent politicization of these identities (p.15). As the authors argue, "ethnic markers are typically among the most important salient identities around the world" (p. 15) and out of the pool of potential identities only a small number of identities become salient and get eventually politicized (p. 15). As the authors claim, the emergence of "salient ethnic identities is a long-term process and depends on structural factors" while "the activation of salient ethnic identities for the political purpose, on the other hand, is a shorter-term process driven mainly by political actors" (pp. 16-17). Structural and actor centered explanatory factors are grouped into four categories (see Table 5.1): "a. Resource distribution (land, education, housing) was biased along ethnic lines; b. Nation-building policies inadequate for targeting all ethnic groups in population; c. Electoral system and geographic location of ethnic groups supported the use of ethnic identities for political mobilization; d. Political entrepreneurs used ethnicity for political purposes" (pp.138-139). The influence of these factors is then empirically tested using a structured and focused comparison of the five cases belonging to different geographical regions: The United States, two pairs of most similar cases from Africa and Latin America.

Chapter two examines the two African cases: Kenya and Tanzania. Despite having many similar features, the two countries have registered very different outcomes in terms of ethnicity politicization. The authors highlight the fact that average levels of politicization in Kenya remained high throughout the observation
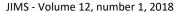
period. In contrast, politicization of ethnicity in Tanzania remained very low throughout its history (p. 61). The authors argue that these differences can be primarily explained by their different institutional settings: Kenya having deeply divided ethnic groups reflected in the electoral process, while in Tanzania the ethnic divisions were weaker favoring pan-ethnic political organization (p. 64). Nation-building policies aiming to create a national language and to favor interethnic cooperation through education lessened the politicization of ethnic identities in Tanzania. Moreover, biased distribution of resources such as land, political posts and infrastructure fostered the politicization of ethnicity in Kenya by politicians (p. 64).

In chapter three, the cases of Bolivia and Peru, two highly heterogeneous societies of Latin America, are comparatively analyzed. According to the authors, in both countries politicization of ethnicity has been rather low but changing over time (p. 88). During colonialism and early independence periods, politicization mainly consisted of creating parallel legislative and administrative systems for indigenous and creole inhabitants and afterwards "politicization consisted of efforts to include the indigenous people into the nation" (p. 89). These developments have been influenced by the interplay between various actors (governmental and opposition elites and grassroots movements) and structural factors (colonialism, nation building and resources).

Chapter four examines the United States, a case that has, according to the authors, a medium/high level of ethnicity politicization. The chapter focuses on the ethno-racial boundaries between whites and African Americans, the largest non-white group in the US that has been socio-politically excluded for much of US history. As the authors demonstrate, "ethnoracial politicization in the United States was fundamentally shaped by colonial administrative legacies and, following independence, by political institutions and processes as well as nation building policies" (pp. 130-131). The authors mention a variety of forms of ethnoracial politicization in the fields of party system, political claim making, and policy (p. 96).

Chapter five combines evidence from all five cases in a comparative analysis that aims to display the similarities of the foundation and development of ethnicity politicization. The authors conclude that "nation-building policies have the potential to reduce ethnicity politicization and to work toward an inclusive society" that can effectively manage ethnic diversity (p. 151). The authors acknowledge that nation-building policies operate in conjunction with resource distribution and other institutional factors and further research is needed to

better understand how nation-building policies interact with the institutional environment.

The study is based on a relatively broad conceptualization of politicization of ethnicity. The authors measure this concept through 3 indicators (see Table 1.1, p. 9): ethnic rhetoric in the political sphere, electoral support for ethnic parties, and overt exclusionary policies (all these indicate a variation from low to high degree of politicization). The authors mention that their specification of ethnic politicization places politicians, political parties, policies and power at the center of the analysis (p. 3). Thus, the analysis focuses on certain actors (politicians, party officials, voters), actions (claim making, state policy creation and implementation, voting) and institutions (parties, state bureaucracies and elections). One could reasonably argue that all these traits belong to an empirical inventory of the politicization of ethnicity, but they may describe various dimensions of the concept that are qualitatively different from each other. Moreover, these dimensions might also have different weights in measuring the concept with some of them being more important than others for understanding ethnicity politicization. In additions the indicators mentioned by the authors are also measured at different levels and units of analysis: claims made in the public sphere, individuals voting for ethnic parties, pieces of legislation and other public policies. It is not clear how information on such diverse areas is combined to assess politicization of ethnicity on a continuum[1], as the authors claim (p. 8). Thus, identifying potential dimensions could be useful both for clarifying the concept and for building a typology of ethnicity politicization that could be a guide for the empirical study of this phenomenon.

In terms of explanatory framework, the authors seem to favor macro-structural determinants that are generally long run in nature, as the major factors contributing to politicization (p.2). The authors claim that: "Colonial administrative rule, access to resources, and nation building are the major factors that determine the degree to which ethnicity is enduringly politicized. Actions by political entrepreneurs, in contrast, play a major role in short run, intense bursts of politicized ethnicity" (p. 2). While this approach clearly favors a historical approach to ethnicity politicization as nationally bounded, it seems to be less adequate to study ethnicity in the contemporary context of globalization marked

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[1] This seems to suggest the ideea of a politicization of ethnicity concept having a single dimension.

by increased ethnic identification of migrants and political mobilization of anti-immigration forces. Despite these limitations the book is clearly structured and develops interesting hypotheses that contribute to the scholarly literature on the role of ethnicity in political processes and could provide a solid basis for future research.

References

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