

LSE

THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

LSE Research Online

Eleanor Knott

Generating data: studying identity politics from a bottom–up approach in Crimea and Moldova

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Knott, Eleanor (2015) *Generating data: studying identity politics from a bottom–up approach in Crimea and Moldova*. [East European Politics and Societies and Cultures](#), 29 (2). pp. 467-486. ISSN 0888-3254

DOI: [10.1177/0888325415584047](https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325415584047)

© 2015 [Sage Publications](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/62818/>

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2015

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Generating Data: Studying Identity Politics from a Bottom-up Approach in Crimea and Moldova

Eleanor Knott*
Department of Government
London School of Economics
e.k.knott[at]lse.ac.uk

April 2015

Abstract

This article argues that bottom-up, people-centered research which uses ethnographic and everyday approaches is crucial but underutilized in research on identity politics in Eastern Europe. In order to understand what concepts such as ethnicity and citizenship mean in the context of their people's everyday lives, it is vital for understanding whether taken-for granted political concepts are appropriate and how to make up of data, such as census data. The article first introduces the methods of political ethnography and bottom-up interviews by discussing how they can be applied and their value within political science. The paper uses data gathered from interviews in Moldova and Crimea (when it was still de jure and de facto part of Ukraine) to demonstrate the value of this approach. It shows how interview data can add significantly to the understanding of kin-state relations within political science by adding a richness of context and a bottom-up perspective that quantitative and elite-level interviews have failed to provide. Lastly the paper draws on experiences gained from research design to discuss how bottom-up research in political science can be conducted rigorously. The article argues that this approach can deepen the understanding of identity politics and kin-state relations, or more broadly in relation to important post-Communist questions such as democratization and Europeanization.

East European Politics, Societies and Cultures (2015) 29(2): 467-486

“Interpretive approaches start with the insight that to understand actions, practices and institutions, we need to grasp the relevant meanings, beliefs and preferences of the people involved.”¹

“Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them.”²

*I am grateful to the ESRC for the funding to complete the doctoral research and fieldwork. I am for the comments of my supervisor, Denisa Kostovicova, and to Gerard Toal, Jon Fox, the participants of the Association for the Study of Nationalities 2014 World Convention and the Graduate Network Conference at Sciences Po in 2014 for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this article.

¹A. Finlayson, M. Bevir, R. A. W. Rhodes, K. Dowding, and C. Hay, “The Interpretive Approach in Political Science: A Symposium”, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 6, no. 2 (2004): 129-64, 130.

²H. Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (London: Heinemann, 1960).

When I presented this research at the “Whither Eastern Europe” workshop at the University of Florida in early January 2014, the violence on the Euromaidan had not yet reached its climax and Crimea remained an autonomous region of Ukraine. The data that is discussed in this article from the perspective of methods and methodology, I collected in the months preceding Crimea’s de facto annexation by Russia in March 2014. Hence this data was collected in a different political and geopolitical context from that in which my respondents live in today. In Moldova, the second case of this research, citizens find themselves caught between uncertain relations with Russia and deepening engagement with the EU.³ Changing geopolitical contexts are one reason, among many others that are discussed in this article, to engage with everyday actors in post-Communist and post-Soviet societies from below and to put the people back into political science, an approach which has value also beyond Eastern Europe, in other regions of area studies and comparative politics.

Introduction

Within political science approaches to post-Communist problems, such as understanding the processes of democratization and the relationship of ethnicity to politics, there has been a tendency to focus only on top-down institutional approaches.⁴ This is not to deny the ongoing discussion between anthropologists and political scientists in post-Communist research, but more to argue that political science approaches, which focus on studying issues related to the state, need to gather data that allows for an understanding of informal and everyday understandings of practices related to the state, such as ethnic politics.

For example kin-state relations research, which analyses relations arising from states reaching outside state borders considered to be co-ethnic, has focused on analyzing only the relations and tensions between state-level actors,⁵ or in the case of anthropology has failed to engage everyday domestic research in a wider conceptual analysis of interstate/kin-state relations. This has left a gap in understanding the bottom-up perspective of kin-state relations, for example in terms of what it means to identify as a member of a kin community, i.e. a community claimed by an external (kin)state as co-ethnic, and the practice of kin-state policies by those eligible. My research argues that understanding why members identify with kin-states, how this relates to their identification to their home-state, and why they seek kin-state policies is a crucial part of the story of kin-state relations that is left out of top-down institutional perspectives.

To examine these issues, this article argues that a bottom-up interpretive approach allows for engagement with everyday actors who are usually overlooked by institutional political science explanations to post-Communist questions. Here the bottom-up approach is not only a way of gathering data, but also an approach centered on people, to unpack individuals’ experiences, meanings and practices of politics, and argue that vernacular “knowledge” is an important but “neglected” political arena.⁶ While this article discusses the value of such an approach it argues also that when using bottom-up methods, such

³For example, Moldovans were granted visa-free access to Schengen on 28 April 2014 and Moldova is likely to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in the coming months.

⁴See for example O. Shevel, “The Post-Communist Diaspora Laws Beyond the “Good Civic Versus Bad Ethnic” Nationalism Dichotomy”, *East European Politics & Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 159-87. M. A. Waterbury, “Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion: Diaspora Politics and Party-Building Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary”, *East European Politics & Societies* 20, no. 3 (2006): 483-515.

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

⁶D. Kostovicova and M. Glasius, *Bottom-up Politics: An Agency-Centred Approach to Globalisation* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

as ethnography, it is necessary to ensure that rigorous standards are met, to provide useful context-rich political science research.

The Bottom-up Approach in Political Science

This research uses the ethnographic method, defined as “close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space”, to argue for a bottom-up immersive approach to political science problems which tries to “detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do”.⁷ Ethnographic methods are popular across social science disciplines, because of the “thick description” potential to provide rich empirical data.⁸ However these methods have been rare in mainstream political science, with only one article published in the *American Political Science Review* between 1995 and 2006 which used ethnographic methods.⁹ In contrast, this paper argues that an “ethnographic sensibility”, as discussed by Jan Kubik at the workshop, has a great potential for political science.¹⁰ It allows the researcher to provide not just interesting data but to go further into the “gray zone” and “backstage of politics”¹¹ by exploring the bottom-up and “lived experience” of identities and institutions, as discussed by Jelena Subotic in this issue.¹²

Political ethnography falls within interpretive approaches to political science and does not have to focus on non-elite actors, as this research does, but it does require a more immersive and meaning-focused approach.¹³ The researcher has to become involved in everyday situations and analyze problems from the perspective of everyday actors by engaging with “what actors are thinking and doing”.¹⁴ The bottom-up approach is therefore not so much a method, using anthropological tools, but is a method that allows for, and encourages, a “people-centered approach” to political science problems and a recognition of people as important because, as a “neglected political arena”, our understanding is based on un-tested assumptions of actors’ preferences and identities constructed from above.¹⁵ Hence everyday actors’ impact on political outcomes is minimized and their perspective is rarely “systematically reconstructed and thoroughly interpreted”.¹⁶ The bottom-up immersive approach provides a way to “move beyond official rhetoric” and

⁷L. Wacquant, “Ethnografeast: A Progress Report on the Practice and Promise of Ethnography”, *Ethnography* 4, no. 1 (2003): 5-14, 5.

⁸C. Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30.

⁹J. Soss, “Lessons of Welfare: Policy Design, Political Learning, and Political Action”, *American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999): 363-80. This article uses ethnographic methods as part of a mixed method approach. See L. Joseph and J. Auyero, “Introduction: Politics under the Ethnographic Microscope”, in *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*, eds. Lauren Joseph, Matthew Mahler, and Javier Auyero (New York: Springer, 2007), 1-13.

¹⁰J. Kubik, “From Transitology to Contextual Holism: A Theoretical Trajectory of Postcommunist Studies”, in *Postcommunism from Within: Social Justice, Mobilization, and Hegemony*, eds. Jan Kubik and Amy Linch (New York, London: New York University Press, 2013), 27-94, 63.

¹¹J. Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Joseph et al., “Introduction,” 1.

¹²J. Subotic, “Out of Eastern Europe: Legacies of Violence and the Challenge of Multiple Transitions” (paper presented at the *Whither Eastern Europe? Changing Political Science Perspectives on the Region*, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 9-11 January 2014 2013).

¹³L. Bayard de Volo and E. Schatz, “From the inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research”, *PS: Political Science & Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 267-71.

¹⁴M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2, 237.

¹⁵Kostovicova et al., *Bottom-up Politics: An Agency-Centred Approach to Globalisation*, 14.

¹⁶Bayard de Volo et al., “From the inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research”. Kubik, “From Transitology to Contextual Holism: A Theoretical Trajectory of Postcommunist Studies.”

explore how this “resonates [...] in everyday contexts by everyday actors”.¹⁷ As the next section argues this is valuable for areas of political research, such as kin relations research, where research has overlooked the actors who comprise kin communities, while anthropologists have overlooked the inter-state implications of these identities.

Using Political Ethnography for Researching Identity Politics

Ethnicity in political science has largely been studied via top-down approaches which are based on based on “descent-based” assumptions and which have rarely been tested in the field.¹⁸ Moreover ethnicity is often assumed, as discussed by Kopstein and Bernhard in this issue,¹⁹ to play a crucial role in the democratization process, in particular the assumption that a lack of ethnic homogeneity is positively correlated with political instability.²⁰ Much of this research is based on the ethnolinguistic fractionalization (ELF) index which uses data conducted by Soviet ethnographers, who conceptualized ethnicity as based as objective criteria such as “native language”. This data has been used by a lot of highly cited research, such as that which measures the conflict potential of different groups²¹ and onset of civil war.²²

However there is an inherent mismatch between “understandings of the ‘nation’ as constructed and imagined” and how ethnicity in these datasets is taken as a “given category of belonging” by assuming that “people are Hutu or Tutsi, Slavs or Germans” (emphasis added).²³ As Laitin and Posner argue, both the data collection techniques and the use of the ELF index maintain an “essentialistic premise” by failing to gather and analyze data which “validly represents the multiple dimensions of ethnic diversity” across time and space.²⁴ Hence there needs to be a commitment within political science to collect data that “represents the multiple dimensions of ethnic diversity found”²⁵ and a greater focus on what ethnicity means and “how it (ethnicity) will manifest itself in politics”.²⁶

¹⁷K. M. Blee and A. Currier, “Are National Politics Local? Social Movement Responses to the 2004 Us Presidential Election”, in *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*, eds. Lauren Joseph, Matthew Mahler, and Javier Auyero (New York: Springer, 2007), 156-79, 158.

¹⁸K. Chandra, “What Is Ethnic Identity and Does It Matter?”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 9(2006): 397-424, 397. K. Chandra, “Cumulative Findings in the Study of Ethnic Politics”, *Newsletter of the Organized Section in Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 7-25. K. Chandra and S. Wilkinson, “Measuring the Effect of “Ethnicity””, *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4-5 (2008): 515-63.

¹⁹J. Kopstein and M. Bernhard, “Post-Communism, the Civilizing Process, and the Mixed Impact of Leninist Violence” (paper presented at the *Whither Eastern Europe? Changing Political Science Perspectives on the Region*, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 9-11 January 2014 2013).

²⁰G. Pop-Eleches, “Historical Legacies and Post-Communist Regime Change”, *Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007): 908-26.

²¹P. G. Roeder, *Where Nation-States Come From: Institutional Change in the Age of Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). A. Alesina, A. Devleeschauwer, W. Easterly, S. Kurlat, and R. Wacziarg, “Fractionalization”, *Journal of Economic Growth* 8, no. 2 (2003): 155-94. D. N. Posner, “Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa”, *American journal of political science* 48, no. 4 (2004): 849-63. J. D. Fearon and D. D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”, *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90. J. D. Fearon, “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity by Country”, *Journal of Economic Growth* 8, no. 2 (2003): 195-222.

²²Fearon et al., “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”. P. Collier and A. Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War”, *Oxford economic papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563-95.

²³L. Wedeen, “Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science”, *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 4 (2002): 713-28, 724.

²⁴D. D. Laitin and D. Posner, “The Implications of Constructivism for Constructing Ethnic Fractionalization Indices”, *APSA-CP: Newsletter of the Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 12, no. 1 (2001): 13-17, 17.

²⁵ibid

²⁶M. R. Beissinger, “A New Look at Ethnicity and Democratization”, *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 3 (2008): 85-97, 88.

Political scientists need to engage, therefore, with this interpretive and bottom-up approach also to gather data that is consistent with answering comparative political questions from an informal, everyday approach. The “everyday nationalism” approach, which is derived from anthropological and sociological research, encourages researchers to shift towards valuing bottom-up discourses of nationalism and ethnicity in political science.²⁷ The key focus of this approach is that it is people-centered and examines the “‘lay’ categories”²⁸ and “actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives”, such as whether or not ethnic identification is salient, as Brubaker et al. analyzed in Transylvania.²⁹ It also allows researchers to examine how people “appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories” such as mutually exclusive census categories “that are imposed upon them”.³⁰

The bottom-up people-centered approach using everyday nationalism allows the researcher to observe those on the ground, with the goal of furthering understanding, and challenging assumptions, on problems of identity politics beyond the dominant top-down perspective, to examine the interaction between identity politics and informal and everyday state practices.

Using Political Ethnography for Researching Kin-state Relations

This article argues that analysis of kin-state relations benefits from an informal and everyday approach, by applying the concepts of “everyday nationalism” to an inter-state framing. This fills a niche arising both the anthropological perspective, which has considered everyday nationalism predominantly in domestic settings,³¹ and in political science perspectives, where kin-state research has focused only on top-down institutionalist perspectives or at least approaches that analyze only the state-level actors involved (kin-state and home-state).³²

Hence in political science, there is lack of linking up between how everyday members of kin communities identify and interact with their kin-state via the use of kin-state policies, such as dual citizenship. There needs to be a refocusing of kin relations research which explores what has so far been overlooked, namely the lived experience of kin identities and kin institutions for which a bottom-up and people-centered approach is appropriate. This lived experience of kin-state relations, in terms of the meaning of kin identification and practice of kin-state policies, is crucial for understanding the bigger picture concerning kin-state relations as it allows for a different perspective on the political impact of these identities and institutions

²⁷J. E. Fox and C. Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood”, *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 536-63. R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, J. Fox, and L. Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). T. Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (New York, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002). J. Dawson, “The Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Politics of Everyday Life in Bulgaria’s Southern Borderland”, *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 3 (2012): 473-89. V. P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 188. G. Day and A. Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). R. de Cillia, M. Reisigl, and R. Wodak, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities”, *Discourse and Society* 10, no. 2 (1999): 149-73. See also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 10.

²⁸R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-47, 4.

²⁹Fox et al., “Everyday Nationhood” 537. Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*.

³⁰Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 12.

³¹*Ibid.* C. Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Understandings of Citizenship in Germany”, *Citizenship Studies* 10, no. 5 (2006): 541 - 70.

³²See for example Shevel, “The Post-Communist Diaspora Laws Beyond the “Good Civic Versus Bad Ethnic” Nationalism Dichotomy”. Waterbury, “Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion: Diaspora Politics and Party-Building Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary”.

within the “triadic nexus”.³³ Moreover it helps to pick apart the reasons why actors identify in different ways through their discourse, to uncover the layers of their identification discourse and to examine the impact of different colonial and post-colonial legacies in kin identification.

Secondly, in more interpretive bottom-up research, in Moldova and Crimea, the primary focus has been on questions of identity politics in a domestic setting, without exploring how these relations fit within broader conceptual political, such as the kin relation nexus, and geopolitical questions. In Moldova, there has been excellent research into cultural practices and the domestic contestation of language and education policy.³⁴ However there has been a failure to unpack how everyday understandings of ethnic identification affect relations both with the kin-state and home-state, to disaggregate how individuals identify *as* Romanian,³⁵ whether they identify *with* Romania (as a kin-state). Moreover this research has failed to explore how these identifications towards the kin-state affects sentiments towards Moldova, as a nation-state, a provider of public goods to its citizens, and in terms of territorial preferences vis-à-vis Moldova’s political and geopolitical relations with Romania. For example, Cash assumes that the failure of unification movement necessarily relates to the preferences of Moldovan society regarding domestic ethnic politics, within Moldova, and inter-state politics, concerning Moldova’s relationship with Romania, but has no evidence to affirm these assumptions.³⁶

In Crimea, arguably less is known about everyday identification, than in Moldova. This is because research of the experience of Russian ethnicity and language has either avoided researching Crimea, because Crimea (as region with a Russian ethnic and linguistic majority) is not seen as representative of the rest of Ukraine,³⁷ or studies of Crimea have been subsumed within analysis of Russian identity as a whole,³⁸ ignoring the specificities of Russian identity across a regionally diverse Ukraine.³⁹ While existing research might consider how Russian identification functions in other regions of Ukraine, such as the Donbas, and how this inter-relates with local/regional economic and social practices.⁴⁰ However this cannot be extrapolated to understanding what it means to identify as Russian in Crimea, where Russians formed an ethnic and linguistic majority (unlike other Ukrainian regions) and had their own institutions that at least, de facto, protected the ability and norm of speaking Russian in official and unofficial contexts. In the political realm, Crimea has therefore been constructed as a region which is necessarily and uncritically Russian,⁴¹ in contrast to the findings of my research where Russian identification was much more negotiated and nuanced, than had previously been suggested by anthropological and political research in Crimea.

A bottom-up approach is not only useful for studying kin-state relations from a new perspective, but

³³Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 6.

³⁴M. H. Ciscel, *The Language of the Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and Identity in an Ex-Soviet Republic* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007). M. Heintz, *Weak State, Uncertain Citizenship: Moldova* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2008). E. A. Worden, *National Identity and Educational Reform: Contested Classrooms*, Routledge Research in International and Comparative Education (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

³⁵For example there has been a tendency to conclude that there “can be no doubt” that Moldovans “can only be considered Romanians”, see J. Eyal and G. Smith, “Moldova and the Moldovans”, in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. G. Smith (London: Longman, 1996), 223-44, 223.

³⁶Cash, “Origins, Memory, and Identity: “Villages” and the Politics of Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova” 589.

³⁷A. Fournier, “Mapping Identities: Russian Resistance to Linguistic Ukrainisation in Central and Eastern Ukraine”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 3 (2002): 415-33.

³⁸A. Wilson, “Elements of a Theory of Ukrainian Ethno-National Identities”, *Nations and Nationalism* 8, no. 1 (2002): 31-54.

³⁹E. Narvselius, *Ukrainian Intelligentsia in Post-Soviet L’Viv: Narratives, Identity, and Power* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012). A. L. Osipian and A. L. Osipian, “Regional Diversity and Divided Memories in Ukraine: Contested Past as Electoral Resource, 2004-2010”, *East European Politics & Societies* (2012): 0888325412447642.

⁴⁰Osipian et al., “Regional Diversity and Divided Memories in Ukraine: Contested Past as Electoral Resource, 2004-2010”.

⁴¹M. Maigre, *Crimea – the Achilles Heel of Ukraine*, (2008), T. Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe’s Next Flashpoint?*, (Jamestown Foundation 2010). J. Hedenskog, *Crimea: After the Georgian Crisis*, (Defence Analysis, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI)2008)

it also generates data that otherwise would not exist to circumnavigate problems inherent in existing data by engaging with the nuances of how ethnic identification is experienced.⁴² Many sociological studies and censuses are available in the public domain and provide data for larger numbers of respondents than is possible through more immersive approaches.⁴³ However these surveys do not allow respondents flexibility in their own answers and often assume the mutual exclusivity of categories, such as ethnicity, in contrast to the everyday nationalism approach. For example, data from a Razumkov survey asked respondents to choose between different homelands (Ukraine, Soviet Union, Russian, own region) thereby assuming that respondents had mutually exclusive, rather than overlapping, notions of homeland, which is a problematic assumption.⁴⁴ Surveys and censuses lack deep engagement with everyday actors and can indicate less about the actors themselves, than about the way in which researchers want to collect data that fits with their pre-existing notions of how categories function, as will be elaborated below. The bottom-up approach aligned with political ethnography is useful for generating data which goes beyond institutional approaches to explore the lived experience of identities and institutions in an era of advancing kin-state policies, and to understand the political impact of these identities and institutions on the ground.

A Bottom-up Analysis of Kin-state Relations

To operationalize this bottom-up approach, following preliminary fieldwork, I visited each case twice for a month during 2012 and 2013. During these visits, I conducted 53-55 informal semi-structured interviews with local people. In Moldova, I conducted interviews in Chişinău and several control interviews in Bălţi, the second city in Moldova.⁴⁵ In Crimea, I conducted interviews in Simferopol, and several control interviews in Yalta.⁴⁶

In both cases, I combined informal semi-structured interviews with observations of everyday activities, such as protests and festivals and conversations and participation in everyday life. I drew insights from conversations in both households in Crimea and Moldova, whether about the families' life histories and generational differences in perspectives about identity and, in the Moldovan case, acquisition of Romanian citizenship.

These experiences helped to underline the salience of the issues I was researching and at the same time, the irrelevance of other issues from the perspective of these households. I recorded these insights in daily fieldwork notes, while semi-structured interviews were, depending on the respondents' wishes, either taped or recorded via notes which I then transcribed promptly. In accordance with the immersive and everyday approach, I conducted interviews and conversations in whatever language respondents felt

⁴²Osipian et al., "Regional Diversity and Divided Memories in Ukraine: Contested Past as Electoral Resource, 2004-2010".

⁴³Razumkov Centre, "Dominant Communities of Crimea: Self-Identification, Character of Relations, Prospects of Their Evolution (in Crimean and Pan-Ukrainian Contexts)", *National Security & Defence* 109, no. 5 (2009): 1-88. D. Petruţi, A. Roşca, T. Cărăuş, V. Catană, M. Guzun, V. Cantarji, N. Cojocaru, and L. Handrabura, "Etnobarometer - Republica Moldova (Ethnobarometer - the Republic of Moldova)", IPP, (accessed 20/6/2012).

⁴⁴G. Pop-Eleches and G. Robertson, "Do Crimeans Actually Want to Join Russia?" *Monkey Cage Blog*, Washington Post, 6/3/2014 (accessed 1/5/2014).

⁴⁵By control interview, I mean interviews that were conducted in a second site within the same case to test if there were significant differences between the respondents in the main site where interviews were being conducted (Chişinău, Simferopol).

⁴⁶I gave respondents written information about the research, the rationale for the interview and the way in which I would use their data; I established that they consented to participate in the research before the interview commenced. I avoided signed consent forms, as this might be off-putting in a post-Soviet context where signing a form is associated with an official procedure that might have negative repercussions, so making it harder to interview respondents.

most comfortable.⁴⁷

Table 1: Interview guide

Theme	Questions
1. <i>Basic introduction questions</i>	What do you do in [fieldwork site]? What does your organization do? Where were you born? What about your parents/family?
2. <i>Culture and politics</i>	What do you think about politics in [fieldwork site]? What do you think about culture in [fieldwork site]?
3. <i>Self-identification</i>	For ethnicity, how do you feel yourself? What makes you feel [ethnicity]? What about language? Culture? Do you think that there are differences between [different groups] in [case]?
4. <i>Kin-state relations</i>	Do you feel near or far to [kin-state]? How do you feel in [kin-state]? What do you think about relations between [kin-state] and [fieldwork site] ?
5. <i>Kin-state policies</i>	What do you think about the policies of [kin-state] towards [case]? Crimea: - What do you think about the Compatriot policy? - Do you feel like a Compatriot of Russia? - What do you think about dual citizenship? What do you think about Russian citizenship? Moldova: - What do you think about reacquiring Romanian citizenship? - Have you applied for Romanian citizenship? - When did you apply? When did you receive it? - Why did you apply for Romanian citizenship? - Has Romanian citizenship changed how you feel about Romania? - What can you do as a Romanian citizen?

Notes: [fieldwork site] = Moldova or Crimea; [kin-state] = Romania (for Moldovan case) or Russia (for Crimean case)

In the interviews, I tried to be consistent across cases and respondents in the methods used, the themes of the questions asked and the types of respondents I approached. I was deliberately vague in terms of what my interests were, when contacting my respondents and introducing the research, to minimize any influence on their answers. When talking to respondents, I used icebreaker topics discussing respondents' profession and opinions on politics and culture, before broaching the specific areas of interest: how respondents conceptualized their identity, and ethnicity, and how they used kin-state policies. This was useful to determine whether respondents would discuss, without prompting, the specific areas that I was interested in such as language rights and inter-ethnic relations, which helped to place respondents in terms of the importance that they ascribed to these issues. Using an interview guide, I followed a consistent thematic structure but adapted it or asked further questions depending on a respondent's position (Table 1). I also used a conversational style so that the respondent felt at ease and so that the interview flowed across different topics of interest, without obviously using the interview guide.

⁴⁷In Crimea, the majority of interviews were conducted in Russian, while in Moldova interviews were conducted in English and Romanian, and also in Russian where this was most convenient.

Table 2: Types of respondents interviewed in Moldova and Crimea

Young people (18-35 years)	Youth wings of main political parties Student and youth organisations Students and young people
>35 years	Members of other organisations Other ordinary citizens

Selecting respondents is crucial in framing the research.⁴⁸ However due to the intensive nature of this research, the number of respondents was too small to warrant a random selection of respondents.⁴⁹ Instead, the goal was to have a broad overview of each case by engaging with a diverse range of ordinary citizens residing in the main urban center of each case, in particular the young post-Soviet generation, without the claim that these were representative of all residents within each case.⁵⁰ Respondents were sought from the political spheres, such as the youth wings of political parties to get a broad overview of the political spectrum, and apolitical youth and student organizations (Table 2). In terms of identity characteristics, respondents were not chosen based on their ethnicity or citizenship status as this was unknown until I asked them during the interview.

The aim of this methodological approach was to get a broad overview of each case by engaging with a variety of respondents, who were generally not experts in the issues that I questioned them about but instead were everyday actors. The main benefit of the ethnographic approach was the richness of the collected data which helped to examine the missing bottom-up perspective to kin-state relations. As the research was comparative it was also important to set the boundaries of the research. For example in Moldova, ensuring the focus was on issues related to Russia and Romania as kin-state actors (and hence facilitator of citizenship and quasi-citizenship policies) rather than questions related to the ability to acquire policies from other states (e.g. Russian and/or Ukrainian citizenship in Moldova),⁵¹ and does not analyze those who primarily identified with minority ethnic groups (e.g. Ukrainian or Russian in Moldova, or Crimean Tatar in Crimea). That is to say that while they formed a part of fieldwork, they do not form a part of the analysis of this research. I took this approach for two reasons, firstly the research was concerned with the meanings and practices of those who the kin-state would consider kin (e.g. Russian/Ukrainian in Crimea, Romanian/Moldovan in Moldova), and secondly, to see between these two categories to understand how individuals themselves experienced, constructed and/or subverted these mutually exclusive census categories.

⁴⁸For example, see K. Goldstein, "Getting in the Door: Sampling and Completing Elite Interviews", *PS: Political Science & Politics* 35, no. 4 (2002): 669-72, 669.

⁴⁹In terms of case selection for small-n research, randomly selected cases and respondents for small-n research are less likely to be representative and insightful, and it is therefore more useful to select cases which have sufficient leverage and interest. See J. Seawright and J. Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research", *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): 294-308. J. Gerring, "Techniques for Case Selection: A Response to David Freedman", *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 6, no. 2 (2008): 7-10. M. L. Small, "How Many Cases Do I Need? On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research", *Ethnography* 10, no. 1 (2009): 5-38.

⁵⁰L. L. Adams, "Techniques for Measuring Identity in Ethnographic Research", in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, eds. Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 316-41.

⁵¹Indeed, because the focus of the research was on Moldova, and not Transnistria, I encountered no one who had acquired, or wanted to acquire, Russian citizenship in Moldova (or indeed in Crimea).

Table 3: Explaining the inductively derived identification categories

Crimea	Moldova
<i>Discriminated Russians</i> (n=9) emphasized not just a strong Russian identification but also how they felt threatened by the Ukrainian state	<i>Organic Romanians</i> (n=22) professed strongest and organic identification as ethnically Romanian
<i>Ethnic Russians</i> (n=18) identified primarily as Russian but this was expressed without feeling discriminated	<i>Cultural Romanians</i> (n=15) identified ethnically as Romanian, but qualified this by identifying Moldova as their home
<i>Political Ukrainians</i> (n=15) identified primarily as citizens of Ukraine, regardless of ethnic identification	<i>Ambivalent Romanians</i> (n=5) identified as partially but not wholly both Romanian and somewhat Moldovan
<i>Crimeans</i> (n=5) identified primarily regionally and inter-ethnically, identifying as between Ukrainian and Russian	<i>Moldovans</i> (n=10) identified primarily as Moldovan but explained this in terms of being a citizen of Moldova
<i>Ethnic Ukrainians</i> (n=6) identified ethnically and linguistically as Ukrainian	<i>Linguistic Moldovans</i> (n=3) identified primarily as Moldovan on the basis that they were culturally and linguistically Moldovan and distinct from those who were Romanian

Producing Rich Data and Seeing between Categories

The bottom-up approach enabled a rich understanding of the complexity of kin identification from an everyday perspective. Whereas previous approaches conceptualize kin communities in mutually exclusive ethnic categories, respondents identified themselves more in terms of assemblages of different dimensions, namely ethnic, civic, linguistic and cultural ideas. These nuances were conceptualized via inductively derived categories which highlight the multiplicity of self-identification, according to the different dimensions, and analyze how respondents identify themselves vis-à-vis the kin-state and home-state (Table 3).

Note: that there are five inductively derived identification categories in both Moldovan and Crimean cases is incidental and not deliberate.

The meanings of kin-state relations: an inductive approach to kin identification

In Crimea, these categories helped to understand the ways in which respondents might describe themselves “as a mixture” between Ukrainian and Russian by analyzing on which dimension they placed greatest emphasis: citizenship or political identification with Ukraine (Political Ukrainians), feeling in between territorially and personally (Crimean), or in the case of Discriminated Russians identifying not just as ethnically Russian (as Ethnic Russians did) but as victims of Ukrainian policies (as Ethnic Russians did not).

In Moldova, the categories demonstrated the debate between respondents about not just how they self-identified, but how they identified what they saw as a cohesive, though contested, ethnic majority in Moldova. Hence, like in Crimea, different respondents placed weight on different dimensions of their identity which demonstrated subtle differences between how they self-identified. It was possible to analyze also respondents’ rationales for their identification, according to voluntaristic or naturalistic-primordial

paradigms.⁵² For Organic Romanians identifying as Romanian and Moldovan were analogous because “all Moldovans are Romanians, but not all Romanians are Moldovans” signifying how they saw Moldovan as regional identity within a multiplicity of regional Romanian identities.⁵³ Hence Organic Romanians identified with Romania not just in terms of having the “same language”, but organically, sharing the “same blood” and sense of common ancestry because they were “brothers”. Whereas Cultural Romanians identified with Romania in a cultural dimension but combined this with a political, and voluntaristic identification with Moldova via their holding of Moldovan citizenship.

Other respondents demonstrated more uncertainty about how they identified themselves, and Moldovans, because they felt “kind of Bessarabian, kind of Romanian but not 100% Romanian” (Ambivalent Romanian).⁵⁴ This was predicated on a more voluntaristic understanding of identification where cultural similarity, sharing “the same ethno-culture, basically, and language”, was intersected by political experiences, such as the Soviet legacy and the idea that “they (Romanians) imitated the French model. We entered modernity let’s say from the Russian door”.

The rationale behind identities was therefore interesting and demonstrated the differing intensity of identification with the kin-state among the different respondents and the uncertainty and complexity that many felt in terms of their own identification. Moreover it showed that there needs to be more research which unpacks the difference between identifying wholly/partially as the same ethnicity as the kin-state and identifying with the kin-state, which so far have been assumed to be analogous identifications.

The practices of kin-state relations: an inductive approach to kin-state policies

The bottom-up approach allowed for analysis of how these policies work in everyday life, namely: acquisition of Romanian citizenship in Moldova and use of Russia’s Compatriot policy in Crimea, which tries to formalise and legitimise relations between Russia and those Russia claim as kin, including ethnic Russians, cultural Russians and even former Soviet citizens.⁵⁵

In Crimea, respondents indicated how far the Compatriot policy failed to work in everyday life. Respondents were uninterested in its provisions, such as facilitated migration to underdeveloped regions of Russia which are far from Crimea, and not interested in identifying as Russian Compatriots (Ethnic Russians, Political Ukrainians, Crimeans, Ethnic Ukrainians). It was only Discriminated Russians who wanted to engage with Russia’s Compatriot policy, and wanted to identify as Russian Compatriots. However they were dissatisfied that the policy did not go far enough in offering what they wanted: namely greater protection from Russia, within Ukraine, predicated on the right to acquire Russian citizenship. Hence, desire for engagement with Russia, and Russian policies, was a minority sentiment expressed by only those who felt most strongly pro-Russia and anti-Ukraine. It is ironic to compare these findings with the situation post-annexation in Crimea, where residents were required to choose between becoming Russian citizens or registering as foreigners. This demonstrates too the contingency of these findings, predicated on a specific

⁵²O. Zimmer, “Boundary Mechanisms and Symbolic Resources: Towards a Process-Oriented Approach to National Identity”, *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 2 (2003): 173-93.

⁵³C.f. Cash, “Origins, Memory, and Identity: “Villages” and the Politics of Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova”.

⁵⁴Bessarabia refers is another historical name for Moldova, referring to the Bessarabian gubernia in the Russian empire (1812-1918), which is relatively contiguous with present day state of Moldova.

⁵⁵See O. Shevel, *Migration, Refugee Policy, and State Building in Postcommunist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). I. A. Zevelev, “Russia’s Policy toward Compatriots in the Former Soviet Union”, *Russia in Global Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2008): 49-62.

time and location, telling a story that is different to that of present-day Crimea.

In Moldova, respondents gave detailed descriptions of how and why they had acquired Romanian citizenship, how they used and intended to use the rights acquired through citizenship acquisition, such as the right to travel and work within the EU, and the right to vote in Romanian elections, and how citizenship related to their identification with Romania. Engagement with Romanian policies, in particular “reacquisition” of Romanian citizenship,⁵⁶ was a much broader concern of respondents, that went beyond, individuals who identified strongest with the kin-state, unlike in Crimea, involving many more respondents than just Organic Romanians who were invested in reacquiring Romanian citizenship.

Previous research has assumed that Moldovans (re)acquired Romanian citizenship for largely pragmatic, as opposed to symbolic reasons.⁵⁷ The bottom-up approach allowed for a greater unpacking of the reasons underpinning Romanian citizenship practices, whether symbolic (mostly Organic Romanians), pragmatic (most respondents) or normative (Organic, Cultural and Ambivalent Romanians). Here the contribution of the bottom-up approach was the ability to see how and why these discourses intertwined, at this moment in time. and also the normative perspective on Romanian citizenship which normalized this practice because it was Romania’s “way of saying we are sorry” for their actions during the World War II (Ambivalent Romanian) which had led to their grandparents being “deprived of their natural right” in a “very abusive way” (Organic Romanian). Yet these practices and motivations are not assumed to be fixed and one area for future research will be to map, over time, the dynamics of these practices, to consider the fluid nature of motivations vis-à-vis the changing context (e.g. advancing or diverting processes of Europeanization within Moldova).

Secondly the bottom-up approach allowed an understanding for how this motivated other practices related to the state, in particular use of rights derived from citizenship acquisition such as extra-territorial voting practices in Romanian elections. It was interesting therefore to observe how respondents talked about their “duty” to vote in Romanian elections, to give something back to the state that had helped them, and how many declared support for Băsescu, the current Romanian president, whom they saw as a figure who had helped them personally in facilitating Romanian citizenship.

The ethnographic approach therefore offered crucial insights into the lived experiences of forms of kin identification and engagement with kin-state policies from everyday actors, and the political and social impacts of the kin majority cases. Crucially, it revealed ethnic majority groups to be more internally fractured than has previously been discussed, based on different narratives about the meaning and salience of ethnic forms of belonging. Secondly, unlike previous anthropological approaches, the data allowed an understanding not just of everyday ethnic identification and citizenship practices, but also of how these everyday phenomena linked to a deeper analysis of how respondents engaged with their home-state and kin-state, and how these practices related to political and geopolitical territorial preferences between the home-state and kin-state.

⁵⁶Officially, Romania describes this right as a policy of reacquisition (*redobândire*) of citizenship.

⁵⁷M. Heintz, “State and Citizenship in Moldova: A Pragmatic Point of View”, in *Weak State, Uncertain Citizenship: Moldova*, ed. Monica Heintz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 1-18. Heintz, *Weak State, Uncertain Citizenship: Moldova*.

The Problems of Political Ethnography

There are, however, problems with using political ethnography as a methodology within a largely positivist discipline and beyond. Political scientists using ethnographic methods must be prepared to defend them against criticism that this form of data collection is beyond the “permissible limits of political science”.⁵⁸ As King, Keohane, and Verba discuss, the criteria of good qualitative political science have been established as providing data that is verifiable, reliable and repeatable.⁵⁹ The assumption is that ethnographic methods cannot meet these criteria because, unless triangulated with other data sources, the data provided by respondents is not verifiable and is therefore unreliable.⁶⁰ The challenge is to design bottom-up political research that can maintain standards of rigor and to determine what rigor means within qualitative research aside from “applying words” of more positivistic approaches “without adopting their meaning”.⁶¹

Because of the comparatively small sample size, compared to large-N surveys, the potential for respondents to be misleading cannot be controlled for, because of the weight given to each respondent in small-n versus large-N studies. However the validity of the information is less important for interpretivist approaches which focus more on meaning rather than on facts. Gagnon argues that, whether or not it can be trusted as correct, the rhetoric contained in the speech acts of politicians is “meaningful” because it “is a story they are telling about themselves and about how they would like to be perceived by the relevant audiences”. Thus it is evidence of the “calculations of political actors about the preferences and values of the politically relevant audiences”.⁶² It is also a responsibility of researchers to ensure that in the context of interviews that they avoid taking information at face value, and rather probe respondents in terms of why and how they hold their opinions.

In terms of the reliability problems of ethnographic data, in post-Communist states there is an issue of whether existing data can be trusted, in particular census data as Christoph Schnellbach also discusses in this issue.⁶³ Censuses have become politicized tools because there is an “imperative to create statistical majorities”.⁶⁴ During the Ukrainian 2001 census, in Crimea there was a fear of Russians being undercounted, and the “psychological blow” that might come if censuses ever indicated that Russians were no longer the local majority.⁶⁵ Censuses therefore act less as a source of information and more as a “medium through which nationalization is effected” and as guide to the underlying ideology of the state conducting the census.⁶⁶

⁵⁸V. P. Gagnon, “Thoughts on Ethnography and Political Science” (paper presented at the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York, April 2008 2008). In fact, in an interview, Gagnon describes himself as a “bad political scientist” because he privileges richness over rigour and generalizability see V. P. Gagnon, 11/7/2013, 2013, Ithaca, NY.

⁵⁹G. King, R. O. Keohane, and S. Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁶⁰S. Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (London: Sage, 1996). J. Elliott, *Using Narrative in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: SAGE, 2005).

⁶¹Small, “How Many Cases Do I Need?” 10.

⁶²Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*, 26.

⁶³C. Schnellbach, “Mapping Ethnic Identities in East-Central Europe: The Results of the Census 2011” (paper presented at the *Whither Eastern Europe? Changing Political Science Perspectives on the Region*, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 9-11 January 2014 2013).

⁶⁴D. Arel, “Demography and Politics in the First Post-Soviet Censuses: Mistrusted State, Contested Identities”, *Population* (English Edition) 57, no. 6 (2002): 801-27, 813.

⁶⁵D. Arel, “Interpreting “Nationality” and “Language” in the 2001 Ukrainian Census”, *Post-Soviet Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2002): 213-49, 232. B. Dave, “Entitlement through Numbers: Nationality and Language Categories in the First Post-Soviet Census of Kazakhstan”, *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 4 (2004): 439-59. D. I. Kertzer and D. Arel, *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, vol. no. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶R. Brubaker, “Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States”, *Ethnic and*

Ethnography can therefore help analysis of census data by bringing “greater clarity to how various representatives of the state (and its citizens) are involved”.⁶⁷ Consistent and trustworthy sources of statistics are also lacking for other elements of this research, such as how many Moldovans have acquired Romanian citizenship with statistics varying widely between official and unofficial sources⁶⁸ and official sources failing to provide up-to-date data.⁶⁹ A people-centered approach allows these data insufficiencies to be overcome, by using a method that does not require existing data but seeks to create new sorts of data and new kinds of insights.

When trying to reconcile the criticisms that political ethnography is not scientific enough, an appropriate middle ground is to consider how bottom-up approaches can become more rigorous through the theoretical framework and research of the project. In terms of the research design, I used a cross-case comparison of two cases which were similar but differed in terms of the policies available. Comparative work is uncommon in anthropological uses of ethnography, as anthropologists stress that the subjective nature of the data collected means data is tied to “particular cultural systems” and therefore hard to compare between cases.⁷⁰ However for political science, comparison helps to draw out the idiosyncrasies of each case and offers a great scope for theory building, by understanding what might be the drivers of certain interactions based on the cases’ similarities and differences. Comparison can therefore add value to bottom-up approaches, because it helps to tie the observation of micro-processes with the broader macro-dynamic framework of researching kin-state policies.

A comparative approach requires consistency of conduct at the different stages of the research. It is important to put in consistency checks both in terms of how the research is conducted, such as interview guides and respondent selection rationales, and analyzed, such as the use of cross-case coding frameworks which allow the data to be more manageable and comparable. Fundamental to this should be the aim of increasing the transparency of data collection and analysis, both in qualitative and quantitative research. There needs to be an onus on researchers to explain to readers the choices they made in terms of “evidence, theory, and method” which in turn allows “at the very least [...] a better awareness of the potential biases” of the research,⁷¹ such as making interview guides available for peers to understand and evaluate how the research was conducted (Table 1).

Racial Studies 34, no. 11 (2011): 1-30, 1795.

⁶⁷G. Uehling, “The First Independent Ukrainian Census: Myths, Miscoding and Missed Opportunities”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 1 (2004): 149-70, 149.

⁶⁸The official statistics provided to Eurostat by the Romanian state are far less than unofficial statistics which bases its calculations on news sources of how many applications has been processed. Compare Eurostat, “Acquisition of Citizenship by Sex, Age Group and Former Citizenship,” with A. Toderita, C. Silaghi, and C. Ghinea, “Reacquiring the Romanian Citizenship: Who, When, How, Where, and Why?”, in *Reacquiring the Romanian Citizenship: Historical, Comparative and Applied Perspectives*, eds. Constantin Iordachi, Stefan Leonescu, Alexandra Toderita, Claudia Silaghi, and Cristian Ghinea (Bucharest: Soros Foundation Romania, 2012). S. Panainte and V. Nedelciuc, “Redobandire Cetateniei Romane: O Politica Fara Viziune?” (the Reacquisition of Romanian Citizenship: A Policy without a Vision?), *Soros Foundation Romania*, no. 7/11/2013 (2012).

⁶⁹While other EU member-states have provided acquisition data as far as 2011, Romania has failed to submit any data on citizenship acquisition since 2009.

⁷⁰W. D. Roth and J. D. Mehta, “The Rashomon Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events”, *Sociological Methods & Research* 31, no. 2 (2002): 131-73, 134.

⁷¹C. Elman and D. Kapiszewski, “Data Access and Research Transparency in the Qualitative Tradition”, *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47, no. 1 (2014): 43-47.

Conclusion: the Benefits of a Bottom-up Approach for Post-Soviet Political Research

The bottom-up perspective of identity politics is vital to understand how taken-for-granted concepts, like ethnicity and citizenship, function in everyday life and for bridging the gaps between anthropology and political science, by using anthropological methods in deepening understanding of the state in post-Communist societies. This allows us to investigate how phenomena operate from below, such as whether and how individuals identify with the kin community, rather than working with assumptions that are formed from an over-confidence in the validity of datasets, like the ELF.

The bottom-up interpretive perspective has applicability far beyond questions just of identity politics. As discussed at the “Whither Eastern Europe” workshop, there are many empirical political questions that can only be answered by bottom-up approaches, because much of the data needed does not exist, is untrustworthy or is overly-simplified, such as censuses. Conceptually too, the bottom-up approach allows researchers to engage with local and micro-processes, related to the state but usually not studied by top-down or quantitative analysis, and therefore improves understanding of how phenomena function in “everyday life in local places” in Eastern Europe states.⁷²

Moreover the bottom-up approach forces political scientists to go beyond the formality of institutions, to explore the role of informality in post-Communist systems and to give agency back to seemingly homogenized actors, such as civil society.⁷³ Thus to have a greater understanding of phenomena such as ethnic identification, democratization and Europeanization, it is important to address these problems from the perspective of everyday actors who have previously been left out of political studies of Eastern Europe and, by being immersed in their social reality, try to bring them back into research. Such an endeavor may be the pursuit also of anthropologists but it should also be the concern of political scientists, to collect data which probes into informal and everyday experiences of post-Communist states and societies. This is part of an ongoing dialogue that realizes the fluidity and contingency of identification, where the goal is not the answer but a snap-shot, though context-rich, understanding of the position and experiences of individuals in politics within a dynamic system of changing post-Communist states and societies. By continuing to research to the dynamics and experiences of identification, it is possible to map how the experience of post-Communist itself is, and will, affect identification, as part of an ongoing discussion between political scientists, anthropologists and sociologists studying the region, who can use, reflect on and even try to replicate and test bottom-up context-rich data. This ongoing dialogue is important since here that hegemonic ways of analyzing, such as obsession with ethnicity/identity politics in these cases as opposed to other forms of identification (of which this article is guilty),⁷⁴ can be questioned and steps made to adapt what is research going forward. Often these challenges to understanding the region come not from within the discipline of political science but from anthropologists, who expose the problems of top-down data, such as the politicization of post-Communist censuses,⁷⁵ that does not let people speak for themselves.

By no means is the potential utility of bottom-up interpretive approaches limited to political studies

⁷²Kubik, “From Transitory to Contextual Holism: A Theoretical Trajectory of Postcommunist Studies.” G. Ó. Tuathail, “Localizing Geopolitics: Disaggregating Violence and Return in Conflict Regions”, *Political Geography* 29, no. 5 (2010): 256-65, 257. Ekiert et al., “Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe One Hundred Years On”.

⁷³A. Linch, “Postcommunism in a New Key: Bottom up and inside Out”, in *Postcommunism from Within: Social Justice, Mobilization, and Hegemony*, eds. Jan Kubik and Amy Linch (New York, London New York University Press, 2013), 1-21.

⁷⁴Cash, “Origins, Memory, and Identity: “Villages” and the Politics of Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova”.

⁷⁵Uehling, “The First Independent Ukrainian Census: Myths, Miscoding and Missed Opportunities”.

of Eastern Europe.⁷⁶ Rather bottom-up approaches, which disaggregate political concepts, processes and actors, are applicable and beneficial to the broader discipline of comparative politics, and to other regions studied by area studies specialists, by allowing researchers to get into the “gray” zone of politics and the state more than thought possible, and to challenge the assumptions on which these disciplines have been based.⁷⁷

⁷⁶See for example the excellent works using bottom-up approaches beyond Eastern Europe: L. Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). L. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). E. Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of “Blood” in Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004). J. C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷⁷Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina*. Joseph et al., “Introduction,” 1.