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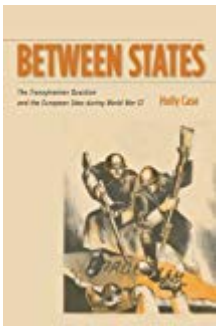
Holly Case. *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. 349 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-5986-1.



Reviewed by Roland Clark

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Commissioned by John C. Swanson (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)

In this provocative new book, Holly Case challenges her readers to reassess what they think they know about the history of twentieth-century Europe. Through a case study of contestations over Transylvania during the Second World War, Case argues that "perhaps the conflicts of the twentieth century were not about ideological incompatibilities, but about a consensus around the standards for legitimate statehood that produced mutually exclusive conceptions of Europe's future boundaries" (p. 226). In doing so, she makes the striking claims that the "Jewish Question" was often understood in relation to territorial disputes; that the Second World War was not an anomaly in international relations, but that diplomacy during the war was simply an outworking of the Treaty of Versailles; that the actions and motivations of small states shaped the standards for legitimate European statehood; and that Germany and Italy performed an alternative yet comparable role to the League of Nations as mediators in interstate conflicts and as representatives of "Europe" in the eyes of several East-Central European statesmen.

Formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Transylvania was incorporated into the Romanian state in 1918 following decades of lobbying on the behalf of Romanian statesmen and diplomats. A multiethnic region populated mostly by Germans, Hungarians, Jews, Roma, and Romanians, Transylvania was coveted by both the Romanian and Hungarian states. After two decades of government attempts to Romanianize the territory, the Second Vienna Arbitration (August 30, 1940) divided Transylvania, giving Hungary the northern half and Romania the southern. Neither state was completely happy with this arrangement as both believed that the whole territory was rightfully theirs. ***Between States*** is the story of Hungarian and Romanian attempts during the Second World War to permanently bring Transylvania under their control.

Eloquently written with no small sense of irony and the absurd, amply illustrated, and meticulously researched, Case's book is a pleasure to read. Based on archives from eight different countries in a multitude of languages, this is the

work of a very careful historian. Case is all too aware of how sensitive her topic is, and she rarely relies on hearsay evidence or propaganda accounts to document the past. Both governments actively attempted to shape stories about discrimination and atrocities being perpetrated against their conationals, and the production of maps and census data was highly politicized. Statistics are rhetorical devices for Case and she analyzes them as such, never pretending to know Transylvanian realities better than the claimants themselves did. To overcome claims of prejudice, Case alternates place names according to who ruled Transylvania at the historical moment she is describing. She devotes equal space to both Romanian and Hungarian protagonists and shows that the tactics employed by the two states were remarkably similar even while each accused the other of being disingenuous.

The book shifts easily between focusing on citizens, social scientists, and diplomats, and although the main emphasis lies with the latter the other two are far from being forgotten. Case shows how Transylvanians themselves influenced these debates by migrating or fleeing as refugees to Hungary or Romania, and how both governments attempted to restrict population movements that might have reduced the number of their conationals living in the territory. The refugee problem gave rise to property disputes and employment issues in both countries. Some people simply assimilated, while others, who resisted through verbal and written complaints about the authorities, were prosecuted. Rather than presenting these trials as authentic moments of rebellion, Case is careful to contextualize them within the perilous world of nationalizing states, noting that "in over half of the cases whose proceedings I examined most thoroughly--all tried in Hungarian courts in Kolozvár from 1940 to 1942--the accused was either in a tavern or on his way home from one when the slanderous comments were said to have been made" (p. 139). The actions of the populations living in the disputed territories became important once the Great Powers identified "minority rights" as a factor in determining state legitimacy and the respective governments reacted to their subjects' behavior accordingly.

Whereas mid-nineteenth-century claims to territory were framed in terms of "freedom," twentieth-century claims making relied on the work of historians, cartographers, statisticians, and eugenicists. ***Between States*** devotes ample space to the work of these researchers, and shows how methodological considerations in mapping ethnicity were used to impact results, and how Hungarian and Romanian researchers consistently arrived at different numbers when they broke down Transylvania's population by ethnicity or religion. Eugenicists from both countries analyzed blood types to determine who rightfully belonged there, and General Ion Antonescu explained Romanian history to Adolf Hitler in an attempt to justify his claims. In describing these discussions, Case makes the important point that "marginal" states preferred to focus on certain issues and ignore others when presenting their petitions to the Great Powers. In so doing, these states managed to frame the debate in their own terms, thereby influencing not only the fate of Transylvania but also the way that Europeans adjudicated interstate conflicts.

Case's conception of Europe is a relational one, and she sees "the European idea as emerging from relations between neighboring states" (p. 7). Diplomatic conversations about contested territories created Europe, she suggests, not ideas about common culture or civilization. As such, Case builds on Mark Mazower's ***Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe*** (2008) in arguing that Nazi Germany was fighting to create a "New Europe" just as the Allied Powers were. Like their opponents, arbitration in Nazi Europe took certain values as given, and made decisions based on their own strategic interests as well as on the basis of ideas about "rights." ***Between States*** shows

how during the Second World War Romania and Hungary treated Germany and Italy in much the same way as they had treated the League of Nations during the interwar period. For these small states, one Great Power was as good as another so long as it produced the desired results. The foreign and domestic policies of both Hungary and Romania during the war, Case argues, were focused primarily on regaining Transylvania. Both countries attacked Russia and exterminated their Jews in an attempt to impress on Hitler that they, and not their neighbor, deserved the contested territory.

Case might be criticized for sometimes appearing to overstate the importance of Transylvania to European history, but to do so would be a misreading of her intentions. At various points, she argues that the apparently incoherent and variable policies of both states were actually consistently focused on regaining this one territory (p. 66). The persecution of the Jews in 1941 and attempts to shelter Jews in 1943, for example, were part of one and the same policy of appeasing whichever powers looked likely to be able to determine the fate of Transylvania (pp. 188-189). Similarly, both Hungary and Romania apparently attacked the Soviet Union primarily because they wanted to control Transylvania and not because they were interested in a crusade against Bolshevism (p. 95). Case is most open to the charge of reducing all Romanian and Hungarian history to a dispute over Transylvania in her chapter covering the period 1945 to 2007. In broad strokes, she often concentrates on marginal nationalist figures to the exclusion of a mainstream public sphere that was increasingly less interested in the Transylvanian Question. As she says though, "this chapter is not meant to offer a comprehensive account of what took place in Transylvania after the war, but rather to track some of the events and phenomena that drew on wartime and prewar conceptions relating to the future of Transylvania" (p. 201). A similar hermeneutic deserves to be applied to the work as a whole, which is most effective as a corrective to existing historiographical preoccupations with ideology, racism, violence, and identity politics. Territorial disputes, Case maintains, were deeply embedded within all of these issues, and deserve historians' attention. Of course the contest between fascism, communism, and liberalism was important, but so was the fact that two or more nation-states felt entitled to the same piece of land, and it would be misleading to focus on one of these factors without the other.

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