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About the Role of the State Border in the Theory of Borderland

ABSTRACT:

The interest in borders in recent years has rather focused on processes and phenomena that question state jurisdiction over a territory and its inhabitants. This is connected with at least three noticeable phenomena, which are as follows: (1) intensifying migrations out of economic and political motives; (2) the growth of separatist tendencies, revival of ethnic movements, striving to obtain autonomy by old-new ethno-regional and ethno-cultural groups; (3) transfer of still new and new aspects of human activity into virtual space that does not possess its representation in “reality”. Accepting that the existence of a borderland is determined by a form of border (historical, mental, or cultural), I will attempt to point to a few arguments to prove that a state border does not have to be the border in question. 1. The logic of demarcating borders in the twentieth century was based on two main criteria: ethnic and historical. The ethnic criterion, introduced into the political geography at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century ousted the formerly valid historical one. Then a state border is rather to prevent the appearance of borderlands as new forms of organization of groups understood as culturally hybrid. 2. Within the output of cultural anthropology, sociology of a nation, and intercultural education, one can find a number of theoretical models that confirm the thesis of the possibility of a borderland forming in various references to a state border. 3. Some territory turns into a borderland not due to the functioning of a border in it, but because of people’s migrations. 4. It is an ethnic group that possesses the property of assigning and excluding. Such an approach lays an emphasis on cultural values which can be acquired, even if as a culture of choice, which is not given because of being born in the given cultural circle (which is, in any case, e.g., the basis of the identity of the American nation). This is now only a step away from concluding that in today’s world – one of a post-capitalist society – lasting systems of cultural patterns will emerge not on the basis of ethnicity, but on that of identifications intersecting them across, whose coexistence will give rise to new forms of life in the borderland. 5. Looking for synonyms for the word “borderland” in both fiction and scientific literature, we frequently come across the term “frontier”. The frontier, however, used to typically mean a “border” between civilization delineated by the state and its institutions and the primitive culture.

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The problem area of the border creates one of the key notions in political science, in particular, in one of its sub-disciplines, that is political geography. We speak about an administrative (political) border with reference to a state and its jurisdiction: a border delineates the range of territorial ruling over the given territory. However, the interest in borders in recent years has rather focused on processes and phenomena that question state jurisdiction over a territory and its inhabitants. This is connected with at least three noticeable phenomena, which are as follows: (1) intensifying migrations out of economic and political motives; (2) the growth of separatist tendencies, revival of ethnic movements, striving to obtain autonomy by old-new ethno-regional and ethno-cultural groups; (3) transfer of still new and new aspects of human activity into virtual space that does not possess its representation in “reality” (does not have its territory in the geographical sense; Newman, Paasi 2013).

An approach of this type has already taken fairly strong roots in the political sciences [Beck 2005; Bauman 2006; Castells 2013; Habermas 2001; Urry 2009]; still it is not free from a number of deficiencies: first and foremost, it does not yield easily to operations of methodological reduction, hence it is hard to work out coherent theoretical models. At the same time, researchers who represent the above-mentioned approach often criticize traditional paradigms, themselves having merely hybrids, eclecticism or unclear notions to offer. This does not mean, however, that such a search for new trails in social sciences is aimless; on the contrary – it turns out to be highly useful. We come to deal with such a situation, among others, in the case of studies on the borderland. Contemporary research on the theory of borderland focuses on separating the designate from the root of the word “borderland” – *border* – which has so far decided about the including the borderland within the network of notions linked to that of a “border” understood as a state border. Thus, there has been created a new theoretical model that does not appeal to the physical border (i.e., a state border) as the fundamental feature of the constitutive theory. It is rather the notion of “borderland” that becomes the central one, around which a network of notions such as: borderland character, social area of borderland, social borderland, is being built [Sadowski 2008]. In the territorial sense, on the other hand, the territorial bond becomes a more important structural feature in studies on borderland, marking out its spatial scope in a more precise manner than a border. An approach of this kind surely allows us a better grasp of the phenomenon of borderlands in Europe, where many social borderlands have formed (are being formed) on the basis of historical borders that are a cultural representation of old administrative divisions.

Studies of borderland, which have had a rich history and output in Poland, resulting from many domains of social sciences, have their own

specific character, which allows us to refer to them as the Polish research school. Justifying this name and status, I would like to pay attention to the following features, which in my opinion justify the use of the name “school” (as a matter of fact being a blurred expression in itself):

- Orienteering of studies done within social sciences and humanities in Poland in general rather towards studies of borderlands than those of the center [Fras 2013: 69-70];

- Basing theoretical models on observations following from empirical studies conducted in Polish borderlands;

- Unwillingness to make use of foreign theoretical output with simultaneous working out of a coherent domestic theoretical model;

- The existence of research centers concentrated on studies of the borderland, which are located in different cities of Poland, representing different disciplines within the framework of social sciences, which cooperate with one another (among others, the ones based in Białystok, Wrocław, Opole, Olsztyn, Szczecin).

However, as Professor Andrzej Sadowski, one of the most acknowledged sociologists as regards this research area, observes, understanding the borderland by researchers in Poland is different in different regions and therefore incoherent with some universal theoretical model. In other words, a theoretical reflection is conditioned territorially. To a researcher from a center based in Białystok studies of trans-border processes in an area close to the Polish-German border will not be studies on the borderland, although they are sometimes referred to as such by authors from western centers. Accepting that the basis of constructing a network of notions in studies of the borderland should be a strict differentiation between such notions as: borderland-frontier, transborder-frontier-borderland character, it needs to be noted that “there sometimes occurs a lack of habit of advancing a theoretical reflection while preparing and realizing empirical research” [Sadowski 2008: 17]. It happens then that research carried out in regions lying close to a border, which at the same time are not frontier regions, can be included in the current of studies on frontier.

PROBLEMS PERTAINING TO TERMINOLOGY

To order the next part of the argument I would like, at the very beginning, to explain the point of view that I have adopted. I acknowledge that in defining the borderland in Poland, researchers representing different disciplines accept one of the following three perspectives: geographical, interactive or mixed, combining both of them at the same time. The geographical perspective accepts territory as the basic constitutive element

of the borderland; the interactive one – the social reality resulting from regular contacts of two or more culturally differing communities; the mixed perspective – both of the previous ones as necessary [Czepil, Opióła 2013: 58-63].

This differentiation will be important in the next part of this work, where I would like to solve the dilemma of the indispensability condition of the border and the borderland: Can the community of a borderland exist in a territory which is different from the borderland?

Defining a borderland, I agree with A. Sadowski that the fundamental and inseparable feature of it is the fact of one territory being inhabited by representatives of two or more different groups. This difference can result from both culture – certain “distinctive features which, in social consciousness, are treated as different” [Sadowski 2008: 18], derived from traditionally perceived ethnicity, as well as from group-related norms – a group as assigning and excluding people [Barth 2004: 353; Sadowski 2008: 18]. In compliance with this assumption, the definition of the borderland will take on the following form: the borderland is a space inhabited by representatives of at least two different groups, in which – as a result of long-lasting interactions – there has formed a new kind of community. Such a borderland can take on two forms: one of an inner borderland (two groups living within the system of one state) or that of a tangent borderland [cf. Sadowski 2008: 18-19].

The notion of an inner (transitory) borderland, mentioned in the paragraph above, can prove to be an especially important tool for researchers of the borderland in Central Europe, in which it is many times within recent 200 years that state borders have been altered, which has always led to a formation of enclaves of national minorities, migrations, processes of creating a new culture (the culture of the borderland). A few examples of places of this type are the Opole Region (the German-Silesian-*Kresovian* [connected with the Former Eastern Lands of Poland] borderland, which formed as a result of post-war displacements of people), environs of Uzhhorod in Ukraine (Hungarian-Ukrainian-Slovakian borderland), and the Košice Region in Slovakia (Slovakian-Hungarian borderland).

These long-term interactions between groups allow differentiating categories of territorial bonds (inhabitants of a borderland identify themselves with their borderland character through the territorial differentiation between “we” – the borderland and “they” – not-borderland, culturally homogeneous center). The territorial bond therefore does not run across borderland community, but in compliance with the assumption that the borderland character means “awareness of the existence of many borders and the necessity of almost continuous crossing them” [Sadowski 2008: 20].

Defining a state border causes far fewer problems. As such a state border is a vertical surface running through the border line, separating the space under the ground, on the ground and in the air between two states, or – separating the area of a state from nobody’s land. A state border also performs an important political function – it marks the range of jurisdiction of the state authority. It needs to be pointed out, too, that in the literature the term “borderland” is often accepted to be the area lying at the border. This is quite an unfortunate treatment in light of the terminological explanations mentioned earlier, as well as due to the fact that as regards the area located near the border there exists another name for it, that is, “frontier zone”. The term “borderland” used in this context could lead a researcher to the conclusion that a borderland can exist exclusively at a state border (a contact borderland, between two communities separated by a state border), and that a borderland exists along the whole length of the border. Both of these statements are fallacious. Below, by means of six arguments, I am going to justify more extensively the fallacy of the first one. The other one seems not to pose problems: it is enough to imagine a border between two states, which is delineated by a river (e.g., the Lusatian Neisse and the Oder) over which there is no bridge at the distance of a few dozen kilometers (Zgorzelec-Przewóz). Firstly, this does not favor settlement in the frontier zone; secondly – even in the case there is a bridge somewhere there, potential interactions are difficult to realize because of a geographical barrier.

A BORDERLAND WITHOUT A (STATE) BORDER

Accepting that the existence of a borderland is determined by a form of border (historical, mental, cultural), I will attempt to point to a few arguments to prove that a state border does not have to be the border in question.

1. The logic of demarcating borders in the twentieth century was based on two main criteria: ethnic and historical. The ethnic criterion, introduced into the political geography at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century by such politicians and political scientists as George Curzon, Friedrich Ratzel or Rudolf Kjellen, ousted the formerly valid historical one. The time of concluding treaties after the First World War can be regarded as the battle royal of these two paradigms, of which the winning one – eventually – was the paradigm including the criterion of ethnicity as the basic one while demarcating state borders. It needs to be mentioned that following great wars, decisions concerning borders were the responsibility of the victorious coalitions, and not only the interested states themselves.

Analyzing, however, the very criterion of ethnicity itself, one needs to realize that there is the wish to form a state as a nationally uniform organism that lies at its foundation. This postulate is only too well readable in the Kjellean metaphor of a hand (a state) and five fingers (the geographical space, the nation, society, economy, the system of authority), which make the strength of the state [Eberhardt 2012: 321]. Then a state border is rather to prevent the appearance of borderlands as new forms of organization of groups understood as culturally hybrid. A whole series of state-controlled instruments is to serve the purpose, ones which are designed to order (and also to make it difficult) to cross borders, also including the so-called small border movement: border services, border controls, visas, the customs-related policy, etc. A departure from this paradigm is the idea of integration of European states, yet it must be remembered that this relates exclusively to the European character: for example, the problem of borders and borderlands looks completely different from the perspective of African states [Modzelewski, Żukowski 2013].

Accepting the historical criterion – where the justifying of the right to a given territory is based on arguments that prove the continuity of statehood in the given area in the past – there does not follow the indispensability condition between a borderland and a political border. What is more – accepting the historical criterion, it is much easier to justify the possibility of forming inner borderlands – a “historical” state may be a multi-ethnic or multinational state after all, while borderlands are – as a matter of fact – processes that occur at the meeting point of social groups (a nation, ethnos) and not at that of an institution (a state).

2. Within the output of cultural anthropology, sociology of a nation, intercultural education, one can find a number of theoretical models that confirm the thesis of the possibility of a borderland forming in various references to a state border. As Józef Chlebowczyk proposed, in defining a borderland one should differentiate between a territorial (geographical) borderland and a language-national borderland. The latter, on the other hand, can function in the form of both a contact (tangent) borderland and a transitory one. The former concerns the co-existence of cultures that are clearly different (e.g., the Polish and the German, or the Polish and the Lithuanian); the other one – those which are ethnically related (e.g., the Czech and the Slovak). Such a language-national transitory borderland can be observed, for instance, in the Opole Voivodeship (Province), where the population using the Polish language inhabits the area together with a population cultivating the Silesian dialect [Chlebowczyk 1983]. In turn, Wojciech Burszta, while classifying ethnicity of borderlands, observed that in so far as territorial borders are always cultural borders, the others “do not always have the spatial dimension” [Burszta 2001: 66]. A similar point

of view is represented by Andrzej Sadowski who, defining the social area of a borderland writes that “in the Polish conditions, European ones and not only, pointing to a culture-based differentiation of borderlands does not connect with and does not require the existence of borders causing spatial separations or segregations of socio-cultural groups” [Sadowski 2008: 20; see also Sadowski 2004]. Last, there exists the category of an inner borderland, by means of which multicultural regions are analyzed and in which the borderland character is determined by migrations and historical borders rather than the current state border. For instance, Marek Barwiński [2004] wrote his book in the spirit of a borderland understood in this way.

3. One can imagine that some territory turns into a borderland not due to the functioning of a border in it, but because of people’s migrations. If one were to accept that a borderland is something more than a physical space, that it is the whole of relations between different groups that form a territorial bond, hence – in consequence – a specific culture of the borderland, there exist places where the community of the borderland is formed by people other than the dominating ethnic groups of the states on either side of the border. Therefore, as regards the Opole Province, we can speak of two borderlands: the Polish-Czech borderland, which was formed as a result of lasting contacts of representatives of two nations that possess their own national states and live in them, but also (in my view a much more extensive territorially) borderland between communities who identify themselves with the Polish, *Kresovian*, German and Silesian cultures. Their inhabiting the area of the Opole Region is connected with, respectively, the post-war settlement in the Regained Lands, enforced displacements of inhabitants in consequence of the alteration of the borders after the War, wage-earning migrations to Germany, as well as with cultivating the Silesian culture built on interpenetration of the German, Czech and Polish cultures. In this sense, it is not the border that used to be an element to constitute the borderland, but the phenomenon of mass migrations running at many stages: from the medieval settlement of Germans in Silesia, through the nineteenth-century migrations of Silesians to Germany and other western countries, displacements of Germans and migration of Poles from the Polish lands incorporated to the Soviet Union after the War, settlement of groups coming from Eastern Poland, into wage-earning migrations of people holding double citizenship after 1989. Similarly, in Podlasie (Podlachia), besides a natural penetration in the frontier zone of Russian, Lithuanian and Polish inhabitants, the character of the borderland was also influenced to a large extent by settlement of Tartars and Crimean Karaites. In this type of borderland, very frequently apart from national identification there forms a very strong sense of regional identification, the “autochthonous”. In addition to Silesia and Podlachia, one can mention, for

example, Warmia and Kashubia as regions where many inhabitants identify themselves through the term “of this place” [indigenous; Barwiński 2004: 5 and 101-107].

4. The above considerations concentrate on ethnicity as the basic distinctive feature in the reflection on the borderland. Meanwhile one can – not being accused of any methodological abuse – carry out an analysis of an urban territory as a borderland region. Andrzej Sadowski follows a similar route, calling on Frederic Barth, who regards group norms as the basis of acknowledging an individual to be a member of a community; ethnicity is not a value in itself. It is an ethnic group that possesses the property of assigning and excluding. Such an approach lays an emphasis on cultural values that can be acquired, even if as a culture of choice, which is not given because of being born in the given cultural circle (which is, in any case, e.g., the basis of the identity of the American nation). This is now only a step away from concluding that in today’s world – one of a post-capitalist society – lasting systems of cultural patterns will emerge not on the basis of ethnicity, but on that of identifications intersecting them across, whose coexistence will give rise to new forms of life in the borderland. Thus, borderlands will be falling into decline since the traditional values attributed to them (readiness to cross borders and the consciousness of their existence) can be made easily accessible outside them. I am careful and skeptical about formulating the state of things in such a way for two reasons: firstly, I am not certain whether considerations of this sort will not lead us astray, on to some post-modernistic statements in the style “everything is a borderland”; secondly, what is characteristic of new non-ethnic cultural identifications is rather their radicalism (in the literature we will find a good number of metaphors of the new Middle Ages, tribal cultures, etc.) and I am thinking here about both subcultures in the form of football fans and cultures open to dissimilarity, which are often hostile towards traditionalism and conservatism so different from them, at the same time.

5. Looking for synonyms of the word “borderland” in both fiction and scientific literature, we frequently come across the term “frontier”. The frontier, however, used to typically mean a “border” between civilization delineated by the state and its institutions and the primitive culture. A property of the frontier is that the border between the state and what lies outside it is a matter of convention: it spreads sometimes over hundreds of kilometers, simultaneously, changing its position along with the frontier turning “civilized”. Thus, this is not a state border, but rather an area which should be colonized. The American Wild West performed a similar function to that of the Polish frontier.

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