The Notion of Ethnic Space

Sacred Ethnicity and Territory

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Abstract. Benefiting from the experience of the past and being aware of the political dangers of the present, the branches of science that explore issues of nationality do not endeavour to proclaim the immobile state of ethnic territorial structures (in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) and historical continuity. Their objective is not to serve separatist political decisions but to analyse their effects.

Keywords: spatial projection

1. Territory and ideology

The scientific investigation concerning the territoriality of nationality problems has been revitalised lately parallel to the revival of ethnic conflicts in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The investigation has been realised with the help of introducing nationality maps and area processes. The simple representation and analysis of the territorial projection of minorities (with the help of ethnic maps) do not exclusively belong to the field of cartography and geography, but also to other fields of study: the scholars of extremely different areas – from international law to history and ethnography – have set out to answer the complex territorial questions of European minorities.

The interest in the territorial aspect of ethnic questions is not new, since it is of the same age as the formation of modern nation states in Central Europe.

However, ethnic mapping, nationality statistics and the description of ethnic boundaries started to play decisive roles only at the beginning of the 20th century as a means of strengthening political decisions providing the basis of modifying national boundaries. In other words, the research of ethnic spatial projections has emerged as an independent field of study at the turn of the century, in the frames of cartography and geography, serving small state ambitions and relying on the results of national statistical surveys. It is because then any traceable data, forming the basis of so-called ethnographic maps, were used (or concealed) for the purpose of detecting linguistic and ethnic distribution and also for cartographic representation. Hungarian scholars also tried to compile conclusive material and maps about nationalities, which indicate the precise ethnic boundaries and their several-hundred-year-old constancy thus proving their stability. The verification of this permanence was emphasised in those territories which were ethnically mixed and whose affiliation was difficult to define.

> The precise demarcation is made even more difficult by the fact that in villages situated on linguistic borders the population is mixed […] I annexed the villages to this or that linguistic territory on the basis of its linguistic majority. But there are villages without absolute majority. In these cases several factors should be considered: first of all, the relative majority and then the cultural influence of the different nationalities in the given settlement. (M. Kiss 1915: 443)[1]

Hungarian ethnic territorial research is influenced by German geography, which defined its aims of research in the field of ethnic geography and its functions and tasks of education on the basis of a highly influential ideology, which has deeper consequences than the strongly political ones of Hungary. Geo-political and ethno-political territorial theories have appeared since the beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, they were twisted so that they could serve politics. On the other hand, they were worded by researchers themselves in a way that they could give a scientific ideological frame to German political efforts. Thus, the territorial, political, and national ambitions which had been disguised got exposed and received geographical support. The ideological components of territorial research were *Blut und Boden* (*blood and earth*)*, Lebensraum* (*living space*)*,* and *Volk ohne Raum* (*people without space*)*.* These radical views fundamentally defined the mainstream of geography at the time (*Geopolitika* (*geopolitics*)*, Rassenkunde* (*race studies*), *Heimatkunde* (*homeland studies*)*, völkische Lebensraumkunde* (*study of people's living space),* *Wehrgeographie* (*defence geography*)*, Kolonialgeographie* (*colonial geography*). The idea that the state is obliged to view its own ethnic groups, living in different foreign countries as its own territorially unalienable parts, can be found in almost all

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[1] Author's translation.

of these branches of national socialist geography. To realise the political task of unification – often entwined with ethnography, especially enclave ethnography, *Volkstumskunde* and *Deutschtumskunde* – in the frames of ethnical mapping and national territorial science, territories inhabited by German groups were introduced and their spreading was mapped. The supporters of these actions were the famous-infamous institutions like *Publikationsstelle-Berlin-Dahlem* and *Publikationsstelle-Wien* (Kosiński 1976: 21-34).

Thanks to this period, today one can use the extreme expressions like the following: ethnic bastion, ethnic defensive zone, ethnic frontline soldier, ethnic hostage situation, ethnic spiritual weapon or crumbling the ethnic sea. These discordant phrases refer to territoriality, like the expression "enclave", and can appear in the political analysis of the present nationality conflicts. Several experts have critically analysed the place of negative ethnic studies in the history of science.[2] Therefore, it is not surprising that after World War II ethnic territorial science disappeared from the domain of Western-European academia. If there is a scholar applying data of ethnic areal projection, he distances himself at the beginning of the study from "*brown geography"* and tries to define the new aspects of his view compared to the ones preceding the war:

> Die unselige Auffassung einiger älterer Kulturlandschaftsgeographen, daß aus der sog. Landschaft und v.a. den Siedlungsstrukturen Wesensmerkmale des dort lebenden (Kultur-)Volkes (d.i. dessen 'Ethnizität') abzuleiten seien, hat sich disziplingeschichtlich inzwischen selbst marginalisiert. Dadurch hat sich die Geographie von einer Reihe ihrer völkischen Traditionen befreit. Zumindest explizit ist es selbstverständlich geworden, gesellschaftliche Produkte (hier: Siedlungen) nicht mehr als Ausdruck dieses oder jenen Volkstums zu sehen. (Aschauer – Heller 1989: 228)

> "Certain old-school practitioners of anthropogeography used to argue – not quite appropriately, it seems – that the ethnic features (i.e. ethnicity) of (modern) peoples are direct consequences of their so called "landscapes," most of all the structures of settlements they inhabit. More recent considerations of the history of science have led to the marginalisation of this approach. This has helped the field of geography to shed a number of its formerly relevant folk traditions. All in all, it has become unambiguously clear that social products can no longer be taken as forms of expression of one nationality or another."

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[2] For a vast pool of literature on the subject, categorised for the periods prior to and following 1945, see Hesske 1988: 171-173, 211-238, – for charts and sample maps, consult the same source; Weber-Kellermann 1959: 19-47; Weber-Kellermann, Bimmer 1985: 103-113; Kost 1988: 385-395; Corni – Gies 1994; Ebeling 1994; Gerndt 1995: 53-75; Becker 1996: 131-142; Fata 1999; Fahlbusch 1999.

While in the western part of Central-Europe the negative experience concerning national socialism prevented the configurational analysis of ethnic tensions and the organic formation of scientific institutions dealing with minorities, in the eastern part its role in peace treaties and the ideology of international socialism did the same. Although the territorial analysis of nationality problems was discredited because of the reasons mentioned above, parallel to the revival of ethnic conflicts in Central-Eastern and Southeast Europe, the introduction of nationality maps and territorial processes were reborn. But what are the reasons for the strengthening of ethnic processes? Why do we need the territorial aspect in the analysis of ethnic conflicts these days (and the meaning of ethnic territory)?

2. Territory and minority

The territorial approach addresses the divergent meanings of intercultural communication between East and West. If one looks at the situation after the collapse of the Eastern European social system, one can see that in the eastern part of Europe the old reflex concerning the belief in the territorial settling of ethnic conflicts has survived in the context of revitalised nationalism, which prefers the freedom of the national community and the independence (ethnic separation) from an ethnically-culturally foreign political power to individual human rights. Thus, the expression of national minority is not a notion emphasising and referring to individual cultural differences but rather a static, "untouchable", technical term suggesting a historical continuity which signifies a state (Suppan – Heuberger 1991: 208). This is the reason why the legislation of cultural nations strictly differentiates between "old" and "new" nationalities. While the former group has collective rights and protection, the latter group (immigrants and migrant workers) has only individual rights. The accepted definition of national minority in nation states is as follows:

> Nationale Minderheiten sind sozialstrukturell heterogene Bevölkerungsgruppen, die in Folge der Konstitution des Nationalstaats aufgrund historischer Siedlungstrukturen oder Staatsgebietsveränderungen als Resultat von Vereinbarungen oder Konflikten zwischen Nationalstaaten, innerhalb eines in Bezug auf ihre ethnische Identität, Kultur und Geschichte fremden Staatsgebiets leben. (Heckmann 1992: 62)

> "Viewed from the angle of their social structure, ethnic minorities are complex groups of people. Considering their ethnic identities, cultures, and histories, they live on state territories foreign to their nature. This is as much a consequence of the mere existence of nation states, as the historical structure of

settlements, or changes in state territories due to conflicts or agreements between said nation states."

This approach is static. The ethnic affiliation is assumed to be more significant than any other social stratification and this definition homogenises the nationality community on the basis of considerations which are assumed to be objective. Thus, this community is real and not apparent according to the notion of the cultural nation. Moreover, as a consequence of the readjustment of the borders, the given national minority group is presumed to be endangered because of the forced separation from the mother country, therefore it urges the collective rights on the basis of origin, culture, and language instead of the individual's rights. What is more, it assumes measurability (minority statistics) as a guarantee of the collective minority rights:

> We, demographers believe that one of the key issues of nationality politics is the statistics about nationalities. There is no minority protection without minority statistics. (Kovacsics 1994: 42)

But there has been no unified definition in international law concerning minorities. Controversial issues are e.g. the necessary size of the group and definability of subjective affinity. Therefore, the works handling the issues of international minority rights are obliged to discuss minority rights separately on the basis of countries and to try to make their own general definitions of ethnic and national minorities. The absence of the definitions concerning ethnic and national minority rights does not come from the attitude of western states but rather it indicates that they are reluctant to guarantee the collective minority rights which are sometimes forced and are difficult to defend (Brunner 1993).

The straightforward consequence of this attitude towards minorities is the national relation to ethnic territoriality. Namely, that the nation states in Central and South-Eastern Europe make an effort to create a territorial projection of the cultural and linguistic fault lines dividing the peoples living on *their territories*[3]. The idea of ethnic territory *is rooted* in the basic feature of reviving nationalism in Central and South-Eastern Europe: *in the ambition to create state borders, which coincide with the ethnic borders.* Common language, culture, and the myth of common origin play a decisive role in the concept of cultural nation. In this myth of the common origin, people are also included who, despite living *outside* the borders, share the same culture and speak the same language. Although territoriality was not a decisive factor among the original criteria of this nation type (as opposed to the state nation), it was highly emphasised after the mid-19th century

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[3] The italicised words and phrases in the study are the author's emphasis (editor's note).

as one of the ramifications of national awakening and the readjustment of the frontiers in the 20th century: minorities have the right, and have to exploit this right, to unite in an independent nation state. Today, each constituent with similar ambitions – e.g. economic considerations – is subordinated to the territorial national correspondence. There are open and hidden ambitions to be observed which try to interpret the symbolic ethnic borders as territorial projections or even as state borders. That is why we cannot find a new individual identity but the revival of the old "state identity" in Eastern Europe in contrast with Western Europe. From the same point of view we can observe the will to distinguish between ethnic and economic questions on the basis of strict conditions in Eastern Europe. *While they try to follow the Western European pattern concerning the economy in Eastern Europe* (*in order to achieve a quick economic integration*), *they refuse the models of ethnic co-existence* (*e.g. ethnic-based autonomy*), *which are typical in the European Union. Moreover, the artificial separation of ethnic and economic integration further strengthens the ethnic conflicts because, as a consequence of an inadequate economic situation in small post-socialist nation states, the possibility of ethnic conflicts increases.* If, however, the essential territorial conditions of two ethnic groups overlap concerning the issue of capitalising on the same possibilities, competition follows. The effort of ousting the other group strengthens ethnic rivalry. To use a journalistic commonplace, the fear of complex ethnic separatist movements prevents the West from an economic integration which the East is longing for – and it turns out to be a vicious circle.

To sum up, the cultural definition of the notion of "nationality" refers not only to the relations and social structure of a national minority but includes territorial and geographical elements as well, which are important for the nation states of Central and Eastern Europe. Stemming from the definition of the cultural state, the extent of nationality or ethnic group is measurable and thus can be mapped spatially. On the other hand, the definition presents the ethnic borders as spatial order legitimised by historic continuity and therefore includes the possibility of moving or readjusting the borders.[4]

The modern nation states emerged from feudal state configurations, pre-national precedence in the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. The major state-forming nationality groups in Europe grew to be nations as a result of the process of "becoming a nation." This historical process established essentially another kind of national state formation. Besides the developmental type of the cultural state mentioned above we can find the outline of

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[4] It is also true in the context of Central-Eastern and South-Eastern European nation states that the competition theory involves a treatment of new immigrants and economic refugees which is similar to the norms prevailing in the western half of Europe (e.g. treaties of deportation). This ensures that symbolic borders come to the fore in lieu of spatial ethnic borders (Olzak 1992).

the state nation concept. The building blocks of the state nation are shared political-legal status and *the common territory* (simply as a frame).

In the dynamic minority concept of the state nation, the notions of nationality, national minority are not even mentioned or – similar to ethnic groups – are not emphasised among the social minorities. To belong to a nationality is a "plastic" state, that is to say, in this state nation concept language is not the most important cohesive factor of national minorities. The linguistic affiliation can be outdone by an attachment to another social layer or even to an area. The original aim of the western type of development was exactly to put an end to feudal articulation of origin and to assure that everyone living on the state nation's territory would be equal and a free member of the nation. In this way of thinking, *the members* (not collectively but individually!) of other ethnic communities (living with the state-forming nation) did not get (sink) into a minority status "theoretically" but they became parts of the state-forming nation. In this case, there is no point in talking about a national minority, detached as a collective community (Hobsbawm 1991).

Although in Europe another way of becoming a national minority (the readjustment of frontiers) is present beside the formation of nation states, it bears no significance in western thinking because the new "nationalities," becoming parts of the state nation, will become equal with the other civilians independent of their language:

> The second type of minorities in Western Europe is that of national minorities. In this group, to a greater extent than in Eastern Europe, the basic criterion is the consciousness of national affiliation. It would be a mistake to classify the Walloon and Flemish, the Swiss German and French, Corsicans and Alsatians as national minorities or define them as parts of state-forming nations living in another country on the basis of their linguistic-cultural sameness. Most of these communities have political national identities and an attachment to their own country. (Joó 1983: 66)

The different attitudes of these two basic nation types towards territoriality reflect the differences between the western and eastern type of ethnic-based regionalism. Since the second half of the 20th century, the minority communities in different parts of Europe have tried to legitimise their territorial aims alluding to their common origin and the traditions they share, though territorial autonomy in the west is a political *means* while in the east it is *a goal*.

As a means: the legal allowances achieved are to be asserted in political and economic life (as far as mostly underdeveloped regions are concerned: see the central-peripheral conflict), and the minority privileges are to be exploited but the given autonomy remains an integral part of the united Europe (Western Europe).

As a goal: the national minorities should create their autonomy with less and less *dependence* on the target country; in contrast with the feature of regionalism they should not integrate into supranational organisations but, by creating a mini cultural state, they should become separate on the basis of the language and common origin and should strengthen the local entity which is in agreement with the mother countries' local entity (Eastern and Central Europe).

The nationalism, which has been reviving in the process of the modern nation-state formation, gradually discovers parallels to the organisation of the national institutions, the questions of culture and language, and the extension and importance of the "private ethnic area." In the frame of nationalism, the mythicising of space also begins. This process has changed parallel to the rebirth of national activities: "the myth of the ethnic space" has become a significant part of the new nationalism in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, but it has also generated this nationalism.

3. To the concept of the "sacred"

Present-day ethnography uses the concept of the "sacred" most naturally. Veikko Anttonen has devoted a whole volume to the Finnish word "pyhä" – sacr(alis)ed – and he presents the surplus meaning that can be summarised by this word through the phenomena of the Finnish culture (Anttonen 1994). The relationship between "pyhä" and the religious "sacred" is very complicated. The two terms only partially overlap in certain parts of their meanings and are not precisely corresponding categories. However, the comparison of the two expressions clearly delineates the *spatially* important meaning of the sacral attribute in ethnography.

The etymological root of the word "pyhä," basically used as an adjective, means: "to separate". The word "pyhä", the closest interpretation of which is "taken out of the environment", is used to denote such special natural places (eg.: rivers, ponds, hills) which separate the (wild) territories of different peoples. The question is this: Why should we call these spatial phenomena "sacred?" According to Veikko Anttonen, the following criteria should be fulfilled when using the expression:
  1. the place is an uninhabited, wild territory
  2. this should be the first name of the territory
  3. the place has a special function for the owner population
  4. the place is special, uncommon from a topographical point of view.
The above-mentioned criteria refer to a conscious activity, through which the residents attempt to reconcile the given place with mythical places in order to reinforce their local identity (Gribben 1990: 277-291).

The word "pyhä" has a *religious* reference only to the extent that it can be related to "sociality" and "territoriality".

"Pyhä": *Social relevance*: Crossing borders can be done only after proper, socially prescribed ceremonies.

Spatial relevance: Spatial borders are of magic, religious nature. "Pyhä" refers to the presence of subjective factors besides religion, which can make certain spatial elements or points of time sacral. In other words, a way of thinking different from religious thinking can also make a place or object "sacred".

The sacral in a religious sense (sacr(alis)ed) simultaneously refers to the process and the result of the process. Although sacral phenomena are recognised by other creeds as well, only followers of the religion concerned are capable of decoding the exact meaning of the sacred. The general content of the sacred (sacral) can be summed up in three points:

1. consciousness in operation
2. recognising sacred things
3. dissimilitude in quality, different from the profane environment

This environment induces the religious individual / community to practice their religion, or simply reminds them of their religion. I believe that we should return to the meaning of "pyhä" in order to describe the Janus-faced sacral landscape and "sacred ethnic space" more subtly.

According to the above-mentioned concepts, the expression primarily referred to the partition (accentuation) of not the built, but the natural *landscape elements* (river, creek, hill, forest) from the profane environment. In other words, the "pyhä" is a concept primarily (but not exclusively) related to the *landscape* (and also to space). So the term is applicable in describing the ecological approach:

- It can refer to the (in this case: mainly) border-constituting potency of real landscape elements existing in the objective environment, and
- It can refer to that content of the conscience which "sets off" the given element from space.

On the basis of this, the functioning of a given part of landscape can be analysed with traditional geographical or/and with (cultural) ecological methods, and with methods aiming the mental space. While "pyhä" has only a limited religious reference (see above), the meaning of this adjective can be transferred to the research of explicitly religious spaces (Anttonen 1999). In this case the link between the religious "sacred" and "pyhä" is *spatiality*.

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Nationalism is connected to ethnic space. The role of the latter is overemphasised and *turned* into the source of nationalism. Therefore, in the nation states of Central and South-Eastern Europe, new nationalism means the struggle for

the territorial realisation of the symbolic ethnic borders (Smith 2000: 97-120). There are different approaches to interpret the notion of nation state. According to a general definition, it refers to states whose populations are homogenous (linguistically and nationally) or which try to unite the inhabitants on the basis of a common culture, symbols, values, and traditions. According to this interpretation, we can say that ethnic space constructed the new nation states at the end of the 20th century (e.g. the nation states of the former Yugoslavia).[5]

Benefiting from the experience of the past and being aware of the political dangers of the present, the branches of science that explore issues of nationality do not endeavour to proclaim the immobile state of ethnic territorial structures (in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe) and historical continuity. Their objective is not to serve separatist political decisions but to analyse their effects.

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[5] This tendency gains an especially strong impetus in situations when foreign ethnic groups inhabit territories which constitute an integral part of the mythical origins of a nation (Conversi 1995: 73-85).

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