

NATIONAL VERSUS REGIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF ORAWA

RYSZARD KANTOR
Uniwersytet Jagielloński
Katedra etnologii
Ul. Grodzka 52
34-044 Kraków

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The author aims to present the formation process of ethnic and national consciousness among the inhabitants of Orawa over the past one hundred years, paying special attention to the external factors influencing this process. Against this background, an attempt is made to explain the present state of split consciousness of the Polish Orawa population and predict, as far as possible, the future development of national consciousness in the region. It is claimed that national consciousness can be replaced with "substitute" declarations of regional identity only under exceptional conditions and on a short-term basis.

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, professor Mieczyslaw Gladysz made the following remark in the introductory part of his interesting paper on cultural processes going on in ethnic borderland regions (exemplified by the Polish-Czech borderland area): "The major stumbling block on the way to an in-depth study of the , that shape the culture of ethnic borderland is, typically, not the shortage of concrete, ethnographic data, but the researchers' emotional attitude towards the object of their investigations" (Gladysz 1972:8). Undoubtedly, emotions run even higher in the case of studies of the ethnic and national identity of borderland populations. Any person wishing to take up this problem should keep this in mind and would be well-advised to follow Tacitus' maxim: *Sine ira et studio*.

In order to present in the proper context the problem of borderland culture as seen by Polish ethnographers, one has to mention two greatest researchers: Kazimierz Moszynski and Jan Stanislaw Bystron. The two scholars differed considerably in their views, but they did agree that the most important determinant of an ethnic group is language. They likewise believed that "a (cultural) product cannot be characterized in ethnic terms". Yet another point of convergence was their focus on the genesis of ethnic differentiation. But the main line of research of Moszynski and Bystron had to do with the cultural inventories of particular areas.

Investigators of the history of Polish ethnography point out that the discipline's approach to ethnic problems underwent a dramatic change, inspired by the work of Jozef Obrebski. Lack of space does not allow us to discuss his ideas in detail, so only a brief outline can be offered at this point. As A. Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa rightly claims, owing to Obrebski, the issue of the ethnographic (or, in fact, ethnic) group became relocated from the level of things to that of individual and social consciousness. Let us quote Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa's summary of Obrebski's views: "The ethnic group is a schema based on images, rather than concrete criteria. Unlike a tribe, it is

spontaneous, and not genetic in character. It does not invoke the ancestry myth. An ethnic group's self-image mirrors in a way the image of other groups - as its antithesis. Borders between groups are in a flux and can be delineated with greater or lesser sharpness. There also exist borderline groups. The main indicators allowing one group to perceive members of another as "strangers" are based on external, easily observable phenomena" (Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa 1979:81).

During the period between the world wars, Obrebski did fieldwork among the inhabitants of the Polesie region in Poland. He concluded that the population formed a borderland group - "a broken-up, disorganized ethnic group, whose fundamental social values, organized around the traditional system of control over the use of land, become threatened by the sudden, large-scale exposure to the social and moral influence of the dominating strata of society - those representing the nation - state. It simultaneously exhibits a centrifugal tendency towards assimilation and feels disappointed in its aspirations. Its attitude towards social reality is mostly negative, modeled on the traditional stereotypes and reinforced by the situation and experience of the members. In short, the group is in a state of typical social crisis, which undoubtedly contributes to its consolidation and make it susceptible to collective psychoses and illusions" (Kutrzeba-Pojnarowa 1979:80-81).

Obreski seems not so much to have disassociated the problem of the ethnic group from the level of things as to have placed it in the context of current reality, grasping it in a purely dynamic fashion. Unlike his predecessors, he did not place much emphasis on such questions as the history of an ethnic group, its cultural - as especially material - heritage, and objective criteria of ethnic divisions- One could say that he shifted ethnic issued from the level of history of culture towards ethnopsychology. Such an approach appears particularly attractive today.

THE NOTION OF BORDERLAND AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

When discussing borderland cultures and the question of identity of borderland populations, we usually think about ethnic, as opposed to ethnographic, borderland, although the latter has also become the subject of some interesting research, e.g., the one done by Roman Reinfuss in the border between Krakow region and the Highlands (Reinfuss 1946:226-234). Ethnographic borderland also allows one to observe symptoms of cultural distance, alienation, and, to a greater or lesser extent, the need for self-identification among the inhabitants. It is, however, in ethnic borderland areas that these phenomena assume their most spectacular forms.

The very existence of the term *borderland* shows that when discussing the territorial distribution of ethnic groups, we tend to do it now so much in terms of fixed boundary lines as of zones. One might assume that an ethnic territory is a "territory which has long remained a significant element contributing to the culture of a given ethnic group in such a way as to be reflected in the sphere of consciousness: the group's historical links with its territory are seen as having stronger legitimacy than the links that any other ethnic group might have established" (Stownik 1978: 348). On such an interpretation, *borderland* denotes areas between "unquestionably" ethnic territories - areas difficult to be defined unambiguously, ones that have repeatedly passed from the denomination of one political entity to another. Accordingly, borderland - in this sense - can also comprise an area inhabited by people whose ethnic make-up is homogeneous, but who have been subjected by the political sovereigns to conscious, bureaucratic efforts aimed at eradicating their national consciousness.

In most cases, however, borderland does bring into contact groups which differ in their cul-

tural tradition, value systems, languages or dialects. The intensity of such contacts in borderland areas gives rise to a fairly specific form of culture. According to M. Gladysz, the borderland culture "is characterized by greater diversity of elements, whose function and position in the overall structure of the system exhibit a marked tendency to change" (Gladysz, 1972:8). Let us add that in borderland areas - more than anywhere else - the transmission of culture can be liable to strict control. Conditions (possibly of an institutional type) are created which favour the acceptance or rejection of particular cultural elements.

It appears that borderland can provide a rewarding field of research on the formation of culture and the problem of adoption - more or less conscious - of cultural traits of groups other than one's own. But first and foremost it is a laboratory for the study of self-definition of group identity, since, as M. Pokropek aptly observes, "such self-definition usually takes place in times of danger, conflicts, political and socio-economic changes" (Pokropek 1979:154). The history of any borderland area abounds in such periods.

"Self-definition of group identity", Pokropek continues, "may result from the action of internal forces, but it is more often induced by external agents, such as various organizations, the church, schools, administration or persons of widely recognized authority. When the external agents come into play, some form of ideology becomes necessary, which could be disseminated with the help of a particular cultural product with a symbolic significance... Self-definition of group identity brings about a cultural intensity, that is to say, it engenders cultural products that, beyond their purely utilitarian function, also convey ideology" (Pokropek 1979:154).

It seems that borderland cultures are not only richer, in view of the intense inter-group (and also inter-ethnic) contacts, but also have a special, distinct quality of being more outgoing, confrontation-oriented or, indeed, aggressive in some of their manifestations

DELIMITING ETHNIC BORDERLAND

We must not content ourselves with the conclusion that ethnic borderland is a zone: what is needed is a set of objective criteria that would allow us to delimit its boundaries with reasonable precision. The historical data at our disposal are more relevant to political divisions, which rarely coincide with ethnic ones. Likewise, the language criterion, although more precise, does not seem satisfactory, since language can only be treated as an auxiliary "sign" of membership in an ethnic group or a nation. The recently established consensus is that the delimitation of ethnic territories and borderland areas requires the use of a combination of historical, linguistic, archaeological and ethnographic data.

Let us repeat, however, the words of Zofia Staszczak, the significance of which goes beyond the context in which they have been uttered - that of studies of the Polish-German borderland: "Is determining the distinctness of a given culture tantamount to determining ethnic distinctness? It would seem that the ethnic aspect of culture can be safely ignored only in the case of a *healthy* ethnos, that is, one in which the subjective and objective criteria of nationhood form an organic unity. Things are very different, however, in the borderland, marked by a pathological split not only between the national consciousness and objective national identity, but even between particular elements of that objective identity (e.g. language and other elements of culture). In that case, all such phenomena can and should be studied separately, as indicators (also of the ethnographic type) of the level of ethnic differentiation" (Staszczak 1975:64). Such an approach should be taken into account, too.

The hitherto attempts to delimit borderland areas have been criticized first of all for their criteria of selection of cultural phenomena to focus on and for the way these are subsequently employed. Selected elements of culture, examined in terms of their spatial range of occurrence, can produce only a static picture and one which does not really depict borderland, but rather some arbitrary borderlines. They are not seen in connection with other data, thus failing to reflect the ethnic relationships in the given area. Culture must not be treated as the sum of selected phenomena; it is a structure comprising elements functionally linked to one another.

Studies of borderland areas based on the atlas method have become much subtler recently, but even so they give rise to doubts as to the interpretation of the findings. Determining the cultural distinctness of some area is not enough to describe it unambiguously in ethnic terms

CULTURAL DIFFERENTIATION OF BORDERLAND AREAS VERSUS CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE INHABITANTS

Ethnic borderland cannot be delimited with precision using exclusively the subjective theory of the nation - the criterion of individual or group consciousness. No data are available on the national (or even ethnic) consciousness as declared by people prior to the 20th century. This is due to the fact that the rise of ethnic and national consciousness in the modern sense of the term is a fairly recent phenomenon. Today, however, study of the current situation of ethnic and national borderland areas does not seem possible without taking into account the inhabitants' consciousness, as borderland areas can nowadays be grasped, or, in fact, defined on the basis of the way the population (or its significant proportion) perceives its identity.

Modern ethnography, with its interest in ethnographic and ethnic borderland areas, assumes, so to speak, as the point of departure the study of the spatial extent of particular cultural phenomena and delimitation of culturally distinct areas. The next stage, very interesting, although not always necessary, concentrates on the origin of such differentiation. One can benefit at this point from historical-type studies, reconstructing the settlement process in a given area, the types and extent of the inhabitants' contacts, economic and religious relations, etc. The problem which now seems to receive most attention of ethnographers/ethnologists (and was partly or wholly overlooked by the previous generations of researchers) is that of the perception (realization) of cultural differences by members of the group, seen as bearers of culture. This is the starting point for the most essential stage of the research, at which one attempts to find out on what cultural elements or combinations thereof the sense of the group's distinctness and identity is based.

It appears that the tendency to compare one's own group with groups from the outside, especially neighbouring ones, is inherent in every individual and, consequently, every community. The "we/they" opposition is present in all kinds of human relations and has its various social consequences. Equally obvious and generally recognized is the tendency to create stereotyped images of the outsiders and the employment of such stereotypes in social contacts. In the constant process of comparing oneself and one's group with the outside groups, cultural differences (objective, real, but frequently also imaginary) play an important role (Kantor 1977:67-85). Cultural elements and their differentiation are perceived and undergo evaluation. Culture has always been, more or less explicitly, the same cornerstone of the group's self-definition, but it has to be reiterated that cultural differences (usually, to be sure, exaggerated) would become the basis for such a self definition at special moments: it time of danger, conflicts, political and

socio-economic changes. It was precisely in such situations that agents external to the group become especially active. Their objective is to make a given group embrace an ethnic, political or any other option, favourable from the point of view of the external decision-maker.

BETWEEN ETHNIC/NATIONAL AND REGIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF ORAWA

I wish to complement the above discussion with some concrete, topical material, relating to the phenomena going on in the Polish-Slovak borderland, or, more precisely, one section of it - the Orawa region. I feel that my long-time research activity in that region and, more importantly, its typical features of a borderland area, justify this choice.

Polish Orawa, that is, the part of the region - seen as a kind of geographical and historical entity - situated within the Polish borders (I will not deal here with its remaining part, situated in Slovakia) is objectively homogeneous ethnically. The area in question became populated by settlers of undoubtedly Polish provenance - coming from the lowlands of Lesser Poland and from the region of Zywiec, with a small admixture of Valachian population (Semkowicz 1931: 144-152; 1932:passim). The inhabitants of Polish Orawa (and a dozen or so Orawa villages situated outside Poland) speak a dialect which is undoubtedly one of the southern dialects of the Polish language. It takes indeed a lot of ill will to call it a mixed or borderland dialect and label it *highland* - as opposed to Polish. All suggestions that Orawa's population is bilingual constitute a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, the same Orawa region, despite its unambiguous (in terms of objective facts) ethnic status, has been - and will probably continue for many years to be - the scene of a conflict between two opposing tendencies, two contradictory ways of defining one's ethnic and national identity: Polish and Slovak, combined with a reluctance to make a nationality statement of any kind, in place of which the inhabitants declare a regional - *Orawian* - ethnicity.

The history of the formation of ethnic and national consciousness among the inhabitants of Orawa - and in particular, the type and impact of factors influencing these processes - explain the current split in the consciousness of the population.

As an ethnographic region, Orawa differs considerably from the adjacent areas, especially from Podhale, marked by an exceptional cultural dynamism. Various factors contribute to such a state of affairs, one of which is a long-time orientation of economic and cultural contacts towards the south. Nevertheless the culture (and economy) of Orawa contains no essential element that could not be found in the neighbouring regions, inhabited by other Polish ethnographic groups. Even the type of peasant hut with a characteristic balcony, called *wyżka*, mentioned every now and then in the ethnographic literature, is not "typical" or "characteristic" of Orawa, as it appears in a much wider area. The Orawa dialect, differing in some respects as it does from the Podhale dialect (which it otherwise closely resembles), fits perfectly into the pattern of southern Polish dialects and provides neither an objective, nor subjective determinant of an ethnic group, although, of course, it does so for an ethnographic group. One can conclude that the Orawa region (speaking all the time about Polish Orawa and several villages in Slovakia right across the border) acquired its distinctness not so much due to its specific culture as to historical developments (Kantor 1980:passim). Separated from Poland by the northern border of Hungary, economically linked to the so-called Orawian State, oriented towards the south, the region developed - or, should we rather say, bearing in mind its civilization and social backwardness, subsisted - under different conditions and along different paths than the neighbouring

regions in the north, inhabited by population originating from the same ethnic stem.

The inhabitants of Orawa - let us introduce at this point the distinction between Upper Orawa, ethnically Polish, and Lower Orawa, ethnically Slovak (what we call Polish Orawa is the part of Upper Orawa within the present-day borders of Poland) - had no ethnic, to say nothing of national, consciousness almost till the end of the 19th century. They did have some sense of local or regional distinctness and awareness of religious differences (between themselves and their Protestant neighbours inhabiting Lower Orawa). Likewise, they retained some more or less hazy recollection of their Polish origin (in the sense of the geographical direction from which their ancestors came as settlers) and a Polish presence in the region - in the persons of missionaries during the Counter-Reformation, when Upper Orawa was reconverted into Catholicism, after a period when the harsh *cuius regio eius religio* law had imposed Protestantism on the traditionally Catholic population (Gotkiewicz 1959:188-129).

A conflict situation occurred towards the end of the 19th century, when three forces (we could call them external agents, obviously representing distant decision-making centres) began, almost simultaneously, to contend for the souls of the inhabitants - by awakening their ethnic and national consciousness and implanting in them a sense of loyalty to the state. These were the Hungarians (who controlled the state administration and school system, but whose alien language and culture practically deprived them of chances for a final success), the Slovaks and the Poles - neither of whom had their own nation-state at the time. The history of their struggle could make up a large volume, which perhaps will be written one day. Here, suffice it to say that the party that emerged as winners in the territory in question were the Poles. The population of the part of Upper Orawa which became incorporated in 1920 into the reborn Polish state has acquired, at least in part, a Polish national consciousness - which, however, turned out later on to be rather superficial. The Polish part of Orawa underwent systematic polonization, just like the part incorporated into Czechoslovakia became slovakized.

During the period between the two world wars, Polish Orawa attracted - unlike today - a lot of interest not only on the part of scholars and patriotic organizations, but also of the state administration. This was very important for the development and consolidation of the ethnic and national consciousness of the inhabitants of Orawa. At this same time, however, it was a time when the cultural differences between Orawa and the adjacent regions, especially Podhale, were artificially minimized. emphasized were those aspects of culture which unequivocally linked the region with Poland, while other elements were being disparaged, which detracted from the tradition and cultural heritage of Orawa. It is obvious that the part of the population which had acquired a Polish national consciousness - no doubt a majority - based their self-identification on those elements of culture which were generally associated with Poland. A particularly great role in this respect was played by the school, unambiguously Polish in character.

Slovak occupation during World War II changed that situation diametrically. The replacement of the old institutions with new ones (Slovak clergy, schools, administration) disrupted the linear progress of formation and consolidation of ethnic and national consciousness among the region's inhabitants. Slovak influence grew considerably, as a result of which the attitude of some part of the population to many elements on culture and their place in the system of values was changed. Among other things, the Slovak authorities succeeded in convincing the population - with the help of the schools - that the Orawa dialect was Slovak by origin and character. Of course, this kind of propaganda had effect only on some people, who were, however, influ-

ential enough to go on disseminating such views - not without success - even after the end of the war, when Orawa returned to Poland. Thus despite the short duration of the Slovak occupation (1939 - 1945), its consequences were far-reaching. It was - we know it now - an important point (some would like to say a turning point) in the over-a-hundred-year long history of the formation of ethnic and national consciousness of Orawa's population.

The post-war period differed greatly from the years 1920-1939. The Polish state - I will not examine here the question of whether it was really Polish, that is, of the extent to which it protected the national interests of the Poles - gave ground, at least in the Orawa region, to the Slovak national option. Nothing demonstrated this more plainly than the imposition of Slovak-language schooling even on those who were not interested in it. Nevertheless, and despite the close economic links of Polish Orawa with the south, which until recently absorbed a large part of surplus labour from that overpopulated region - at the price of forced nationality declarations on the part of the workers - Orawa has not become totally slovakized. Only some proportion of the inhabitants declare today a Slovak national consciousness, which, incidentally, only seldom combines with a knowledge of the Slovak language and participation in Slovak culture.

Nowadays the indigenous population of Orawa can be divided into three groups with respect to ethnic consciousness. The first group comprises the inhabitants who unequivocally declare a Polish national consciousness. They form a large majority, in my opinion, ca. 60% of the population, or some 20,000 people. This contradicts the claims of Slovak activists, who represent the Slovak minority in Poland. The second category is made up by inhabitants of Orawa who consider themselves Slovaks and are members - at least some of them - of the Association of Czechs and Slovaks in Poland. According to my knowledge, this group accounts for not more than 10% of the region's population. The remaining part - some 30% - avoid making a straightforward nationality declaration, claiming a regional affiliation instead. They call themselves *Orawa inhabitants* (*Orawci, Orawiaci*). Some people from this group express no doubts about their Polish ethnic background, but they believe that ethnic consciousness takes precedence over national consciousness. The latter divides people while the former should unite them. In reality, this is a pragmatic standpoint, aiming to play down the evident, decades old conflict between advocates of the two national options. It is an attempt to calm the emotions and channel them towards joint efforts to improve the economic and civilization situation of the region.

I do not think that this kind of approach, which assumes the priority of regionalism over national issues, is likely to succeed. In my opinion, regional consciousness - extremely important, as it is - cannot in any respect replace national consciousness: the two notions refer to different phenomena, different types of links with the territory one lives in, the heritage of the past, and culture. The way to national consciousness does not lead, in this case, through regional consciousness, as some observers appear to believe.

It seems to me, on the other hand, that further development of national consciousness among the inhabitants of Orawa is inevitable and will be a one way process. The number of people declaring a Slovak national consciousness will be diminishing, while the proportion of the Orawa population embracing the Polish national option will be steadily growing. Such a situation results, on the one hand, from the weakening of the inhabitants' ties with Slovak employers and, on the other hand, an increasing activity of Polish organizations working for the re-polonization of that part of the population which - for various reasons, sometimes of material type - developed a Slovak identity at some point in the past. These factors will be enough for the process to

continue, even if the state administration remains inactive in this field, which is very likely.

Symptoms of this process can already be easily observed. For instance, the attractiveness of Slovak instruction in schools has decreased sharply in Orawa. Simultaneously, one can expect that regional consciousness will be on the increase - no longer as the "substitute" form of consciousness, but as an expression of the inhabitants' ties with their region and its tradition. It is also a consequence of the growing tendency towards decentralization of government - passing on the power to the local communities.

The processes referred to above will probably take a long time to complete. For many years to come, the ethnically and culturally homogeneous inhabitants of Polish Orawa will keep declaring different national options or refusing to admit any affiliation except regional.

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NACIONALNI PROTIV REGIONALNOG IDENTITETA: SLUČAJ ORAWE

Sažetak

Poljska Orawa, jedna od pokrajina na poljsko-slovačkoj granici, etnički je sasvim homogena. Pokrajina je naseljena između 15. i 18. stoljeća doseljenicima nedvojbeno poljskog porijekla - došli su iz nizina Lesser u Poljskoj i iz pokrajine Zywiec, s neznatnim miješanjem migracijskih stočara vlaškog porijekla. Stanovnici poljske Orawe (tj. dijela Orawe unutar današnjih poljskih granica) i nekoliko sela preko granice - u Slovačkoj - govore dijalektom koji očito pripada grupi južnih poljskih dijalekata. Ali, unatoč ovom nedvojbenom porijeklu i očitim lingvističkim i kulturnim vezama sa susjednim poljskim etnografskim grupama, kao što su stanovnici Podhale, pučanstvo Orawe predstavlja dvije suprotstavljajuće nacionalne opcije: poljsku i slovačku. Ima čestih primjera individualnog odbacivanja nacionalnog identiteta bilo koje vrste, u prilog regionalnom prihvaćanju - očitovanje *oravskog* etniciteta.

Autor želi prikazati proces formiranja etničke i nacionalne svijesti kod stanovništva Orawe unatrag stotinu godina, i pri tome je posvetio posebnu pažnju vanjskim čimbenicima koji su utjecali na ovaj proces. Protiv ove pozadine, učinjen je pokušaj da se objasni sadašnje stanje podvojene svijesti pučanstva poljske Orawe i predvidi, što je dalje moguće, budući razvoj nacionalne svijesti u pokrajini. Zahtjeva se da se nacionalna svijest može nadomjestiti *zamjenom* u očitovanju regionalnim identitetom samo u iznimnim uvjetima i na kratkoročnoj osnovi.

Prevela Ljubica Katunar