

I. REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY EASTERN EUROPE

BELARUSIAN-POLISH-LITHUANIAN BORDERLANDS: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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The paper presents opportunities of the phenomenological approach towards the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. Such approach is based upon the principles of understanding of social reality elaborated in phenomenology (E. Husserl, M. Heidegger) and phenomenological sociology (A. Schutz) and presents a different view of the borderlands as compared with the traditional (classical) sociology. The social and cultural space of the borderlands is reflected in the modes of distance (close – distant), temporality (now – then) and the “presence of the Other” (local – stranger), as well as their interrelated modifications. It helps to understand the degree of the acquisition / alienation of various cultural and political phenomena of the historical past and the present-day life. The historical events and personalities, as well as existing monuments of culture in the borderlands are reflected in “our / alien” dichotomy. This results in the representation of the identities of the borderlands as liquid and plural constructs and the matters of interpretation.

Keywords: borderlands, border studies, boundaries, identity, phenomenology of borderlands, sociology of borderlands.

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Introduction

In this paper I am going to discuss the phenomenological approach towards the study of the borderlands with the emphasis on its ethnic structure and identity. The phenomenological approach is presented as complimentary to objective sociological and other inquiries to the borderlands areas and is regarded as the way which provides “another glance” upon the issue. This approach seems to be fruitful in the study of the identification process in the bordering areas, which is usually described as contextual, unfinished, and liquid. In the cases of cultural assimilation of the minorities, inexplicit cultural boundaries, linguistic homogeneity of the local population of the borderlands, ethnic identity often seems to be “hidden”, “unclear”, “non-obvious”, “non-evident”, etc. In such cases phenomenology provides methods, which help to better understand the identities of the border people as constructed and contextually interpreted.

The ethnic structure of the Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands gives enough evidence for various types of identification in the area, both traditional, primordial, sub-conscious, and changeable, situational, even instrumental, as well as helps to comprehend cultural background for the identity continuity and change.

Borders, frontiers and borderlands: definitions and approaches. Theoretical background

Over the last two decades borderlands have become the subject of numerous and profound studies. The analysis of the research literature indicates that there are at least three main methodological perspectives of the study of borderlands, each depending on the way of understanding of the very phenomena of the borders and borderlands: (a) territorial; (b) socio-cultural; (c) post-modern.

The *territorial* or *spatial* approach is the domain of *the border studies*. Rooted in physical and political geography and having passed a long way towards the present-day post-modern interpretations of the state borders (Kowalska 2007; Newman 2001; Paasi 1999), the border studies consider borderlands primarily as the territorial category. Located along the *state borders*, borderlands are defined as “boundaries cultural landscapes” (Minghi 1991: 15). Using the term *border*, we do not join the lasting discussion concerning the meanings of the notions of *border*, *frontier* and *boundary* (see Ranklin, Schofield 2004) and share the definitions of Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson (Donnan and Wilson 1999). According to the modern understanding of the border studies’ subject, “borderlands are expanded from the geographical framework and are applied to social areas and boundaries in which disjuncture and discontinuities are evident” (Alvarez 1996: 149) and are used as an important analytical tool in the study of various aspects of life of *border people*. To Malcolm Anderson, borders are both institutions and processes. As institutions, borders are markers of identity, and have played a role in this century in making national identity the pre-eminent political identity of the modern state. This has made borders, and their related narratives of frontiers, indispensable elements in the construction of national cultures (Anderson 1996: 1–3). Often borderlands are described as “border regions”, “socio-cultural systems”, “living realities”, characterized by “an inner coherence and unity which is essential to their nature” (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 4). Donnan and Wilson claim that almost all that occurs in the everyday lives of people in the modern world can and does occur in its borderlands. This makes borderlands interesting to social scientists, but not necessarily special. However, *some things can only occur at borders* (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 3).

As Julian V. Minghi writes, the key concept of borderlands studies, alongside with *the state border*, is *the border paradox*: “The boundary creates its own distinctive region, making an element of division also the vehicle for regional definition. This paradox is at the core of the borderland concept” (Minghi 1991: 15). The border paradox concept is assumed as the theoretical tool of study of interdependence of identification structure and the state borders’ dynamics. In the frame of this concept borderlands “tend historically to be the zones of cultural overlap and political instability where the national identity and loyalties of the people often become blurred”, – maintain Minghi

and Dennis Rumbly (Rumley and Minghi 1991: 3). The study of these issues brought to life the anthropology of borderlands focused on the configurations of bordering culture and identity paradoxes (Zoe Bray, Peter Sahlins, etc.). In many aspects concerning the phenomena of locality, local cultures and identities the anthropology of borderlands is based upon phenomenological methods of study.

The enlargement of EU and the formation of “New Europe” exacerbated new questions concerning its frontiers, borderlands and identities. According to Małgorzata Kowalska, “New Europe appears as a space of moving, changing and more and more complex frontiers. The frontiers between nations-states are losing their importance in favour of supra- and sub-national (ethnic, religious, social) borderlines <...>. It seems true – for New Europe in the broadest sense – that we live more and more often not between borders, on a safe territory, well delimited, but on a frontier, rather, on many frontiers at the same time” (Kowalska 2007: 12–13). From this point of view the very notion of *frontier identity* drawn out by Kowalska, seems to be one of the most topical in the context of the present-day border studies. At the same time the Belarusian-Polish borderland demonstrates the reverse tendency of transforming frontiers as transitional areas into tough borders. This tendency, as we shall see later, is crucial to the process of the formation of the state Belarusian identity as the identity of the Western border of Eastern civilization.

The sociology of borderlands is highly developed in Poland (Grzegorz Babinski, Antonina Kloskowska, Wadzimierz Pawluczuk, Andrzej Sadowski) and in some other countries and is another significant perspective in the study of borderlands. Its main area of research is *ethno-cultural borderlands* as the place where *neighbouring cultures* meet (Kloskowska 2005: 278). According to Sadowski, the ethno-cultural borderlands include three basic elements: (a) the space presented by several ethnic groups coexisting over time, (b) sustainable forms of interrelations between groups, (c) specific type of personality simultaneously belonging to different cultures (Sadowski 1992: 5–6). The sociology of borderlands makes difference between territorial and ethno-cultural borderlands. The last ones are arranged alongside *cultural boundaries*, which “separate different worlds of meaning”, while the principal characteristic of state boundaries is that “they are marked in geopolitical space” (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 11). Sociology of borderlands emphasises the variety of *cross-cultural contacts* as its key concept. The essence of cross-cultural contacts lies in the crossing of ethnic boundaries and depends on objective linguistic, religious, behavioural or other cultural differences and on the way how these differences are perceived and constructed by the actors of cross-cultural interactions. Thus cultural peculiarities become the building material for the boundaries of identities (Barth 1996) which are maintained and manifested deliberately and symbolically (Lamont, Molnar 2002). Anya Peterson Royce wrote about double boundaries separating ethnic groups, “the boundary maintained from within, and the boundary imposed from outside, which results from the process of interaction with others” (Royce 1982: 29). The crossing boundaries play the crucial role in formation, maintaining and manifestation of ethnic identity. At the borderlands this process may occur in the situations of separation, assimilation or partnership and is affected by the center / periphery

relations, by the positions of neighbouring national states, etc. As soon as in many cases cultural boundaries do not overlap with the identity boundaries of ethnic groups, the new aspects of the problem of ethnicity and ethnic identity, such as “ethnicity without culture”, “symbolic ethnicity”, “symbolic identity”, “creolised identity”, etc., become topical. These aspects are discussed in the categories of constructivist and interpretative approaches based on phenomenology.

The post-modern borderlands as a subject of study essentially differ from territorial and socio-cultural borderlands described above. The post-modern approach is based upon the assumption of the universal character of the borderlands, which exist everywhere and are the result of the presence of the *otherness*. The notion of the otherness, essential in the post-modern discourse, reflects any possible cultural difference (Paul Ricoeur, James Clifford, Arjun Appadurai). As Appadurai claims, its “main value is the universal heuristic character emphasising similarities and differences among various social categories” (Appadurai 2005: 24). De-territorialization and delocalisation of post-modern borderlands transform this concept into the universal construal (Gupta, Fergusson 2004) homological to the identity of post-modern subject which is described as de-fragmentated, hybrid, pluralistic, deliberately represented (Hall 1996: 342–345).

The studies of borderlands, taken generally, are diverse thematically and methodologically, including various methods of sociology and cultural anthropology and tending towards the interdisciplinary perspective. In any case, spatial borders and cultural boundaries, which constitute various types of borderlands, possess common structural and functional characteristics. Borderlands are the areas of (a) *partition* of the neighboring and contiguous social entities (borderlands as “barriers”, “lines”, places of “closeness”); (b) their *coexistence* (borderlands as the place of “transition”, “transgression”, “openness”); (c) *revealing of identity* of the actors due to permanent presence of the otherness (borderlands as “a mirror” for us and them). In this framework phenomenological approach of borderlands seems to be topical, because their structure and functions are perceived and interpreted differently by border people, by outsiders and by scholars of borderlands. It is quite vivid in the case of Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands.

Phenomenology of borderlands: some methodological issues

Phenomenological approach is based upon the principles of understanding of social reality elaborated by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Alfred Schutz. It is based on the following assumptions: (a) social reality is the product of social construction of two types: scientific “ideal” constructs and constructs of inter-subjective conscious of border people; (b) the social and cultural space of the borderlands is reflected in the modes of distance (close – distant), temporality (now – then) and the “presence of the Other” (local – stranger; we – us – significant Other) and their interrelated modifications; (c) it helps to understand the degree of the acquisition / alienation of various cultural and political phenomena of the historical past and the present-day life and results in the representation of the identities of the borderlands as liquid and plural constructs and the matters of interpretation.

Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands: “objective” and phenomenological structures

Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands meet the discussed above criteria of the territorial and ethno-cultural bordering area. To a certain extent, it may be regarded in post-modern terms. First, it is located alongside the state border of the Republic of Belarus with Poland and Lithuania, which was “closed” during Soviet times, tended towards “openness” in the 1990th, and is “closing” step by step since the middle of the first decade of the third millennium. Over two last decades, speaking metaphorically, the border people of this area experienced a double shift of the state border – from a wall to a bridge, and from a bridge to a door with a very strict passing regime. Nevertheless, this experience helped the entire generation of the Belarusians, especially young people, to understand who they are, what differs them from others and what is common between them and the rest of the Europeans. In other words, the state border experience as acquaintance with political and cultural otherness in various ways stimulated the maintainance of the Belarusian state identity.

Phenomenology helps to explicate and explain some of the paradoxes of Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. The first one is *the paradox of location*. Located in the geographical center of Europe, the very phenomenon of “Europe” is not centered in the inter-subjective consciousness of border people as the place of their location. Belarusian-Polish border is the border of “Europe”, which starts just over the Western border of Belarus. “*To visit Europe*”, “*to return back from Europe*”, “*to follow European standards*”, etc. are the typical phrases of everyday speech of border people and the quotations from the local newspapers. Are Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands “out of Europe”? In non-reflexive consciousness of the border people we would find a definite positive answer to this question because of the explicit cross-border cultural and political otherness. The Belarusian-Polish border divides everyday life into two worlds – “our world”, which is not exactly defined, but which is located here, which is habitual, clear, predictable and is opposite to “Europe”. “Europe” as a cultural construct accumulates *other* states and their institutions, currencies, prices, languages, traditions, norms, values, symbols and senses. At the same time the border transgression for thousands of the inhabitants of Grodno Region has been almost an everyday experience (and a source for living for many of them). And each of them has his (her) own image and sense of “Europe” depending on age, profession and personal life experience. Though “Europe” is located next to the border and is very familiar to Belarusian border people, it is constructed and interpreted by means of the category of the otherness. The exception is the Belarusian-speaking Western-oriented people (predominantly young intellectuals) who consider themselves as “the Europeans” and construct “Belarusian way to Europe” historically and culturally as their motto.

As far as “Europe” starts in Poland, the perception of this country seems to be the first step of the acquaintance with “Europe” and the reason for self-determination. At least, there are several types of such perception: (a) positive: “*the country with a very interesting culture*”, “*culture which is influenced upon our culture*”; (b) pragmatic: “*the country where one can earn money*”; (c) neutral: “*just a neighbouring state*”; (d) negative: “*the appendix of the USA*”, etc. Negative connotations of Poland and “Europe” are not determined by personal experience of border people of Grodno Region, but are rather the result

of anti-Polish (and anti-Lithuanian) stereotypes of Russian mass-media. A researcher often comes across different perceptions of Poland by local Belarusians and by local Poles despite cultural commonalities of these groups. The descriptive analysis of the essays “Us and them”, written by the students of Grodno high schools and the Universities, indicate that Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands are neither “Europe” nor Russia and are located somewhere “in-between” Western and Eastern worlds.

The second paradox is the *paradox of distance*. The “objective” distances between Grodno and Bialystok, Moscow, Warsaw, Vilnius and other cities have subjected to changes in inter-subjective everyday consciousness of border people due to the changes of the state border status. Vilnius, the nearest to Grodno capital city (165 km), after the collapse of the USSR has become distant and practically unknown to the Western Belarusians. Druskininkai is kept in the nostalgic memory of the mature generation as the place where “*we often used to go just to drink a cup of good coffee*”. At the same time Moscow and S.Petersbourg, though geographically distant (1000 km), are still very accessible and considered as not distant due to the lack of visa regime and common linguistic space. Bialystok has become a well-known and familiar city to every inhabitant of Grodno. The distance paradox leads to the “official” distance absurd: all the countries are distributed as “near foreign” (Russia, Kazakhstan, etc.) and “far foreign” (Poland, Lithuania, etc.) to Belarus. Everyone who stayed in Grodno hotels is acquainted (and amused) with the three types of segregation prices – for the Belarusians, for “near” and “far foreigners”. So the guest from Druskininkai or Sokolka as a “far foreigner” has to pay more than a guest from Kamchatka and Sakhalin as a “near foreigner”.

Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands meet the criteria of the internal ethno-cultural borderlands as well. Ethnic composition of Grodno Region is much more complicated than of any other region in Belarus and is inhabited by the peoples belonging to Eastern Slavonic (Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians) and Western (Poles) Slavonic groups, Baltic (Lithuanians) group with shrinking Germanic (Germans), Semitic (Jews, very considerable up to the World War II) and Turkish (Tatars) enclaves. According to the 1999 National Census of Belarus, it is inhabited by the following national and ethnic groups: Belarusians (62,3 per cent), Poles (24,8), Lithuanians (0,2), Tatars (0,2), Jews (0,1). All these national and ethnic groups have been coexisting in Grodno Region for centuries and consider this area as their homeland. The Russians (10,1) and the Ukrainians (1,8) are mostly newcomers of after IIWW migration waves and their ancestors. Notwithstanding new immigration from the Post-Soviet States (Azers, Georgians, etc.) over the last decade increase the heterogeneity of this area, and the share of Poles, Russians and Ukrainians diminished (correspondingly to 1,1, 0,6 and 0,2 percent since 1989 Census) its ethnic structure tends to be rather stable. The ethnic groups of the region are attached to different cultural heritage, symbols and artefacts possess specific norms, values and identities.

Ethnic heterogeneity of Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands coexists with a strong tendency towards cultural, first of all, linguistic homogeneity. The official sources present a more detailed picture of the linguistic situation in the area including three main indices: identifying a language as a mother tongue; a language spoken at home; the ability to speak a language. Different languages are spoken in the region: Russian, Belarusian,

both literate and dialects, Polish, Lithuanian, Yiddish. Among the total population of the region 53 percent use the Belarusian language at home (mostly spoken), 39,4 percent use Russian. Among the urban population the usage of the Belarusian language at home decreases to 35,8 percent, while Russian is spoken by 65 percent (Population of the Republic of Belarus 2000: 159). The undoubted domination of the Russian language in public sphere makes the official bilingualism rather symbolic. At the same time Belarusian is declared as the mother tongue by the majority of Belarusians (87,9), Poles (65,1), relatively high percentage of Tatars (51,4), Lithuanians (25,1) and Russians (11,8). The percentage of those who fluently speak other languages varies from 11,6 percent among Poles to 3,9 percent among Belarusians. Traditionally Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands are heterogeneous from the point of view of religion and are presented by Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Greek-Catholicism, Lutheranism, Judaism, and Islam.

The analysis of identity and cultural boundaries in the North-Western part of Belarus indicates that there is no overlap of cultural and identity boundaries. In objective categories this situation is estimated as the result of strong cultural (primarily linguistic) assimilation of Belarusians and Poles. According to the language, one can hardly distinguish “who is who” in this area. Nevertheless, even in the situation of cultural assimilation national and ethnic groups still preserve their identities.

Phenomenological approach and interpretative method of analysis help to understand various backgrounds of identity of the local population, which are differently interpreted in cultural context. We propose the following ideal types of the frontier identity of Belarusians: (a) *traditional*, based upon primordial attachments (locality, Belarusian “*tuteishast*”); (b) *cultural (essential)*: “*Every conscious Belarusian must speak Belarusian language*”; (c) *symbolic*: “*We are the Russian-speaking Belarusians, but we have our national language and culture; they are Belarusian and differ us from Russians*”; (d) *religious*: “*We are the Orthodox, so we are Belarusians, not Poles*”; (e) *state (civic)*: “*My mother is Belarusian and my father is Pole, and my nationality is Belarusian because I was born in Belarus and it is my native country*”; “*My mother is Belarusian and my father is Russian. I am Belarusian, and my only motherland is Belarus, which I wish to see an independent state both from Russia and Poland*” (f) *indifferent*. These ideal types exist in the variety of *transitional* (from being Polish or Russian to Belarusian and *vice versa*), *bilateral* (Belarusian-Polish), *latent* (declared Belarusian and feeling Pole or Russian) real forms. So the ethnic structure of Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands analysed from the point of view of constructivism seems complex, dynamic and has a general tendency of its evolution form tradition and local type towards civic and state identity.

Conclusions

Belarusian-Polish-Lithuanian borderlands belong to both state and ethno-cultural types of bordering areas. Phenomenological approach towards the study of this area depicts the dynamic and pluralistic picture of the identification processes occurring under the influence of changes of border status and internal cross-cultural relations. Dissemination of traditional identity based on primordial ties seems to be the mainstream tendency leading towards the variety of frontier identities of Belarusians and other groups inhabiting this area.

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BALTARUSIŲ, LENKŲ IR LIETUVIŲ PASIENIO RuoŽAI: FENOMENOLOGINĖ ANALIZĖ

Mikalai Biaspamiatnykh

Santrauka

Apmąstomos fenomenologinio metodo galimybės, tyrinėjant baltarusių, lenkų ir lietuvių pasienio ruožus. Šis metodas grindžiamas socialinės tikrovės pažinimo principais, plėtojama fenomenologijoje (E. Husserlis, M. Heideggeris) ir fenomenologinėje sociologijoje (A. Schutzas). Fenomenologinės sociologijos metodu gauti tyrinėjimo rezultatai skiriasi nuo gautųjų tradicinės (klasikinės) sociologijos metodais. Socialinė ir kultūrinė pasienio ruožų erdvė apmąstoma iš vietos (artimas – tolimas), laiko (dabar – tada), „kito akivaizdos“ (vietinis – ateivis) ir jų santykių modifikacijų perspektyvų. Tai padeda geriau suprasti įvairių istorinei praeičiai ir nūdieniam gyvenimui būdingų kultūrinių bei politinių reiškinių panašumus ir skirtumus. Istorinius įvykius ir asmenybes, kaip ir tam tikrus kultūros paminklus, aptinkamus pasienio ruožuose, straipsnio autorius aptaria remdamasis dichotomija *savas – svetimas*. Prieinama prie išvados, kad pasienio ruožų tapatumai gali būti traktuojami kaip tam tikri kaitūs ir sudėtiniai konstruktai, reikalingi filosofinės, sociologinės ir istorinės interpretacijų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: pasienio ruožai, pasienio tyrinėjimai, sienos, pasienio ruožų fenomenologija, pasienio ruožų sociologija.

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