

TERRITORIALISATION AND DE-TERRITORIALISATION OF THE BORDERLANDS COMMUNITIES IN THE MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: MORLACHIA AND LITTLE WALLACHIA

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The area of research refers to the Croatian - Bosnian and Herzegovinian borderlands, the contact area of three different imperial traditions in the Early Modern period; Ottoman, Habsburg and Venetian. That was the meeting place of East and West, Christianity and Islam and maritime and continental traditions. Frequent border changes were followed by migrations and introduction of new (other) social and cultural communities. The Borderland represents an area of multiple contacts and a multicultural environment. Historical maps reveal the process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the Borderland communities, as well as the process of construction and deconstruction of spatial (regional) concepts. Spatial concepts of Morlachia and Little Wallachia, constructed under the distinct social-political conditions of the threefold border, were dissolved by the change in these conditions.

Key words: *Borderlands, Early Modern period, Morlachia, Little Wallachia, Croatia, Bosnia- Herzegovina, regional identity, history of cartography*

INTRODUCTION: THE SPATIAL-TEMPORAL CONTEXT

The Early Modern period in the history of Croatia and its neighbouring countries was burdened by frequent changes in the borders between three great imperial systems, and by diverse religious and cultural traditions. During three centuries - the 16th to the 19th – that was a territory defined by the border areas of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic. Consequently, the borders were highly significant, both in the political sense and in the social, cultural and populational sense.

The threefold border region conditioned the emergence of an authentic multicultural surrounding. It was the site of encounter between the Western and the Eastern world, between Christianity and Islam, and maritime and continental traditions. Frequent border changes were accompanied by migrations of greater or lesser proportions, and the introduction of new (other) social and cultural groups. Thus, the border region became the site of multiple ethnic and religious contacts, and various traditions and ways of life. Awareness of these differences, and the perceptions of the uniqueness and *Otherness* of individual border social groups, connected with territorial nature, conditioned the creation of the spatial image and led in the end to construction of spatial (regional) identity.

Research into former spatial perceptions and images from historical maps is of particular interest in multicultural environments, where diverse cultures, religious systems and complex ethnic structures meet. Border regions are typical areas of that nature in which the multiplicity of such contacts reflects and produces a multiplicity of perceptions and images.

The research area in this paper relates to part of the broad Croatian-Bosnian-Herzegovinian border space, which was an area of contact for three empires (Fig. 1.) in the Early Modern period. That contact gave rise to complex movements and intermixing of various social groups. The perceptions of the difference of *Others* in such a multicultural environment are recorded on the historical maps of that time. Through time, the perceptions or images acquire their spatial reflection through the process of territorialisation of social groups, and become spatial (regional) concepts. Historical maps noted in various ways the

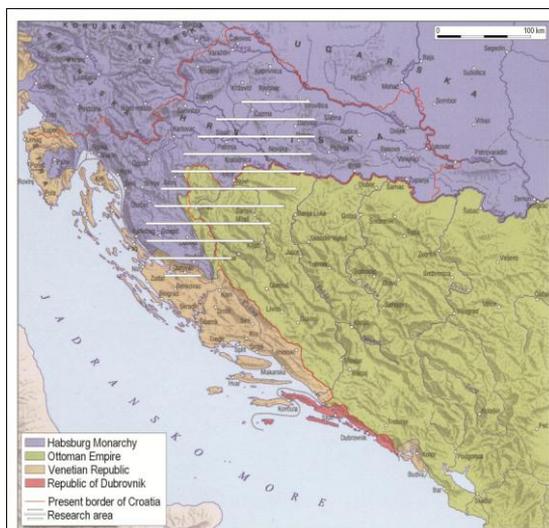


Fig.1. Croatia and the threefold border, 18th century

Source: Regan (ed.), 2003

process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation of borderland societies, and the process of construction and deconstruction of spatial (regional) concepts. The symbolic meaning and/or symbolic strata of historical maps guide us in the process of uncovering images and conceptions of the past, and open up the richness of various perceptions of the multicultural borderland region.

APPROACH AND METHOD: MAP DECONSTRUCTION

A map represents much more than an illustration of the Earth's surface and an inventory of its space. Understood as a social construct of reality, a map contains numerous interpretational levels or strata, including a symbolic one. Thus, a map is a vehicle of meaning, a message and a conception of the world, not only of the individual cartographer but also of collective social and cultural values. It uncovers what we could call the spirit of the time: worldview and a political and general socio-cultural context (Harley, 1989).

Consequently, if we understand a map as a social construct and/or as an image of space and time, it is clear that it can serve in that way as a means of placement and dissemination of (political) messages of power and control, as a medium for shaping spatial identities and, on the other hand, as a source for research into the conceptions of space, territory and

society in the past. Examining the multiple semantic strata of historical maps in this research gave us an insight into the distinction of the Vlach and Morlach groups, linked to their different system of belief, way of life, and their territorialisation and de-territorialisation and construction of spatial (regional) identities and conceptions.

The dualism of the maps as images and as replicas of reality juxtaposes subjective and objective spaces, *unreal* and *real* geography, and mental images and cartographic representations. As a geographic representation, a map is generally regarded as being realistic, although that geographic *reality*, according to Philips (1993), is not detached from conceptions, which are subjective by their very nature. *Reality* is also a construct; it is conventional and a reflection of the corresponding spirit of the times. One should enquire here into the *indisputable* scientific objectivity of the cartographic depiction in general, and examine the meaning of a map as *a mirror held up to reality* (Fuerst-Bjeliš, 2012). Contemporary research indicates the divergence between the cartographic model as a channel of communication and cartography as constructed knowledge (Crampton, 1996, 2001).

For their part, foreign iconographs and iconologists are also examining the subjectivity of conceptions and images (Phillips, 1993). They are not mere mental representations, but can be read off as explicit social (or political) texts. According to Panofski (1983), iconography defines an image as a semiotic system within a social level.

Although certain authors anticipated even earlier the idea of a map as a socially constructed image (Korzybski in: Wright, 1942), it was only J.B. Harley (1989, 2001) who formulated the general strategy of understanding maps as documents of a particular time. In his key work on the deconstruction of maps, Harley (1989) states that deconstruction - as analysis of a discourse - demands a much more detailed and profound reading of a map as text that includes searching for alternative meanings, reading *between the lines* and *on the margins of the text*. On the basis of the iconographic studies of E. Panofski (1983), Harley defined several semantic strata in maps, among which the symbolic stratum often contained ideological connotations. What has been of particular significance in the context of this research has been that very analysis of the symbolic stratum of maps, with the objective of identifying the existing distinction of the social groups and systems of belief as *Others*. Thus, the map uncovers images that reflect social identification and territorialisation as comprehension of dissimilarity, uniqueness and *Otherness*. These concepts, built into the maps, finally lead to the construction of the spatial (regional) notion and identity (Fuerst-Bjeliš & Zupanc, 2007a; Fuerst-Bjeliš, 2011).

Research into the territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the borderland communities was based, primarily, on the deconstruction of semantic strata of the maps of Croatia and neighbouring countries, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. The key elements of analysis were the geographic names, which were equally connected with both the material world that can be seen and measured, and with the indiscernible social world. The maps used in the analysis were from the funds of the Croatian State Archive, the National University in Zagreb and the Croatian Historical Museum, and, as published facsimiles, from a large number of historico-cartographic monographs (Marković, 1993, 1998; Kozličić, 1995; Maleković, 1992).

BORDERLAND COMMUNITIES: VLACHS/MORLACHS

Under the circumstances of the existence of a threefold border and its frequent changes, the borderland region was a region of fluctuation and rotation of social groups. Generally speaking, insecurity does not suit a sedentary lifestyle, and the farming population largely leaves, moving to safer areas. The borderland region became the destination of mobile stock-raising groups from the Dinaric mountain area. Those social groups are usually called Vlachs, or as Fortis (1984) termed them in the Venetian tradition, Morlachs and/or Morovlachs.

The Vlachs/Morlachs primarily represented a socio-economic category of the population (Rogić, 1976), defined by their way of life that included mobile stock-raising and transhumance, often combined with military service. Mirdita (2009) pointed out that the Vlachs were not organised either territorially/administratively or ecclesiastically; they were a people without a state. Croatian Mediaeval sources record different forms of their name: *Morovlasi*, *Morablachi*, *Morolacchi*, *Morolakorum*. These names generally denoted the population of the Dalmatian hinterland in the 14th century, who were engaged in keeping livestock, producing milk and cheese, in trade and in military service (Novak, 1971). Right up until the 20th century in Dalmatia, the term Vlach was used for inhabitants of the Dalmatian hinterland. Venetian sources from a later date regarded the Morlachs as refugees or immigrants from the region of the Ottoman Empire, settled along the Venetian-Ottoman border. At the time of the Venetian-Ottoman wars, the Morlachs/Vlachs were highly regarded as brave and skilful warriors (Modrich, 1892; Novak, 1971), while their heroism was celebrated through rich folklore (Fortis, 1774; Lovrich, 1776).

The Morlach/Vlach communities partly settled spontaneously in the borderland region, combining stock-raising with military service, while they were also settled there in part within the framework of the combined Venetian Republic's and Habsburg Monarchy's official policies in order to secure the borders with the Ottoman Empire (Fuerst-Bjeliš & Zupanc, 2007b).

TERRITORIALISATION: MORLACHIA AND LITTLE WALLACHIA

The image of the westernmost border region of the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic and the Habsburg Monarchy is connected with the conception of the Vlach/Morlach community as *Others*.

One finds the toponyms *Morlaccha* or *Morlacchia*, along with their numerous variants such as *Morlacca*, *Morlacha*, *Murlacha* and *Morlakia* on the 16th century maps (Fuerst-Bjeliš, 2000) (Fig. 2.).

Due to the significance given to it in typography, Morlacha was a very important regional concept. On the Bonifačić map¹ (Fig. 2.) it is in the same semantic rank as the regions of Licha and Corbavia. One hundred years later, its significance on the Coronelli and Nolin maps from 1690² (Figs. 3 and 4) is considerably higher than that of the regions referred to, both on the depicted part of Croatia (*Croacie*) (Fig. 3.), and in the title of the map in the cartouche, where it is mentioned in the same category together with Bosnia (Fig. 4.).

¹ B. Bonifačić: *Zarae, et Sebenici descriptio*, 1573.

² V.M. Coronelli i J.B. Nolin: *Le Royaume de Dalmacie...*, Paris, 1690.



Fig. 2. Bonifacius's Map of the surroundings of Zadar and Šibenik with the region of Morlacha, Licha and Corbavia, section, 1573, facsimile

Source: Marković, 1993.



Fig. 3. Representation of Croatia and the region of Morlaquie on Coronelli's and Nolin's map, section, 1690, facsimile

Source: Marković, 1993.



Fig. 4. Cartouche of Coronelli's and Nolin's map of the Kingdom of Dalmatia, 1690, facsimile

Source: Maleković (ed.), 1992.

The derived toponymic forms of the original Venetian term for the social group became the general name for the borderland region through the more than three-hundred-year existence of the threefold border of the empires.

During those centuries, the name Morlach was linked with the corresponding territory in which they settled, and was gradually given spatial meaning (Fuerst-Bjeliš, 2000, 2011, 2012). Territorialisation is a reflection of the perceived *Otherness* of the Morlach and Vlach communities, primarily through their different social organisation, religious affiliation, way of life and customs in relation to the dominant population. The perception of difference and uniqueness was the basis of regional awareness and identity, which finally led to the construction of the regional concept of Morlachia.

The image of the Vlachs as *Others* can be read off clearly on the P.R. Vitezović³ (1699) (Fig. 5.) map of Croatia and the G.C. da Vignola⁴ (1690) (Fig. 6.) map of Slavonia. The text that Vitezović entered along the border: *Terra deserta olim nunc a Valachis habitata* [once desert land, now inhabited by Vlachs] indicates that the Vlachs were regarded as *Others* in the sense of social and religious differentiation (Fuerst-Bjeliš & Zupanc, 2007a; Fuerst-Bjeliš, 2011).

³ Pavao Ritter Vitezović: Regni Croatiae Totius, 1699.

⁴ Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola: Parte della Sciavonia....abitata da popoli Slauini..., Roma, 1690.



Fig. 5. Vitezović's Map of the whole Kingdom of Croatia, section, 1699, facsimile

Source: Marković, 1998.

On the other hand, G.C. da Vignola (1690) points primarily to the religious differentiation of the borderland Vlach communities: *Wallacchi Pop. Di Rito Greco*⁵ (Vlachs, people observing the Greek rite) in the region of today's western Slavonia, to be called Minor Wallachia – *Valachia Minor* on Mueller's map of Hungary⁶ (1709), *Petit Valaquie* on the Ottens map of the Kingdom of Dalmatia⁷ (1740), or even *Kleine Walache* on von Reilly's map⁸ (1790) in the following century.

The westernmost border of the Ottoman Empire with the Habsburg Monarchy was primarily a border between Islam and Christianity. That fact notwithstanding, the Orthodox Christians were also perceived as *Others* among the dominant population of Roman Catholic affiliation in (Habsburgian) Croatia. Their territorialisation led to the construction of the regional concept of Little Wallachia as was recorded, for example, by Mueller, the Ottens brothers and von Reilly in the 18th century.

DE-TERRITORIALISATION

With the end of the wars against the Ottoman Empire and the fall of the Venetian Republic at the beginning of the 19th century, coupled with the disappearance of the circumstances connected with the borderland region of the three empires, the context of the importance of the Morlach/Vlachs also came to an end. Administrative measures and the disorientation under peacetime conditions led to the impoverishment and transformation of the Vlach/Morlach communities (Modrich, 1892). Their descendants were assimilated by the other inhabitants, primarily through religious affiliation. That change is clearly visible in



Fig.6. Da Vignola's map of Slavonia, section, 1690, facsimile

Source: Maleković (ed.), 1992.

⁵ Eastern Orthodox Christians. The prevailing religious affiliation is Roman Catholic.

⁶ J. Chr. Mueller: *Mappam hanc/regni hungariae/propittis elementis fertilissimi/cum adiacentibus regnis et provinciis...*, 1709.

⁷ *Nouvelle carte du Royaume de Dalmacie...*, Amsterdam, 1740.

⁸ Franz Johann Joseph von Reilly: *Das Koenigreich Sklavonien und Herzogthum Syrmien*, Wien, 1790.

the disappearance of toponyms connected to the Morlachs/Vlachs. Constructed in the multicultural borderland environment from the 16th to the 19th century, they vanished from the maps together with the circumstances that had created them. Monitoring the change in the maps' rhetoric, we can clearly read off the process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the borderland societies. The comprehension of the social and cultural difference of the *Others* simultaneously with (de)territorialisation, led to the (de)construction of spatial (regional) concepts.

CONCLUSION

The image of the westernmost border region of the Ottoman Empire with the Venetian Republic and the Habsburg Monarchy, was linked to the comprehension of the Vlach/Morlach community as being that of *Others*. The perception of the difference of the *Others* in such a multicultural environment was recorded on the historical maps of that time. Understood as a social construct of reality, a map contains numerous interpretational levels and/or strata, also including a symbolic one. Monitoring the changes in the maps' rhetoric, we can clearly read off the process of territorialisation and de-territorialisation of the borderland societies. Territorialisation is a reflection of perceived difference, the *Otherness* of the Morlach and Vlach communities, primarily through their different social organisation, religious affiliation, and way of life and customs in relation to those of the dominant population. The perception of difference and uniqueness is the basis of regional awareness and identity, this finally leading to the construction of the regional concepts of Morlachia and Little Wallachia, but also in the same way to their deconstruction with the fading away of the socio-political circumstances in which they had emerged.

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