

ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE STATE: SPATIAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF STATE AUTHORITY. THE CASE OF THE POLISH-CZECH BORDER DEBT

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Abstract

The article constitutes an attempt at explaining the issue of the so-called border debt which emerged in Polish-Czech relations and the manner in which the administrative authorities of each state compete for the preservation of their own prestige. The lives of ordinary citizens resident on the lands debated by Prague and Warsaw unfold betwixt two states engaged in a territorial wrangle, and thus amid an interstate dispute about the course of the border. Awareness of the consequent threats evolving among the residents of the currently negotiated area has triggered a grass-roots social protest movement which now is an important element of the political game. The resultant sovereignty conflict between the local authorities and the central government resident in the capital city has led to the latter's capacity being to some extent questioned, as its competency with respect to the demarcation of state borders has come under criticism.

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W artykule podjęto próbę naświetlenia problemu tzw. długu granicznego, który powstał w polsko-czeskich relacjach oraz tego, w jaki sposób administracje obu państw toczą grę o zachowanie własnego prestiżu. Pośrodku międzypaństwowego sporu o terytorium – a w związku z tym o przebieg granic, toczy się życie ludzi żyjących na ziemiach będących przedmiotem sporu Pragi i Warszawy. Rodząca się wśród mieszkańców negocjowanego obecnie pogranicza świadomość zagrożeń – uruchomiła oddolny ruch społecznego protestu, który stał się istotnym elementem politycznej gry. Powstały w ten sposób konflikt suwerenności władzy lokalnej i stołecznej doprowadził do częściowego zakwestionowania tej ostatniej poprzez poddanie krytyce jej kompetencji w zakresie kształtowania granic państwa.

Key words: state anthropology, border debt, state authority, local authority.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of shifts between the centres of authority and changes in relationships within the central authority – local government – local community triangle belong to the classic problems investigated in the framework of political anthropology. Its continually increasing thematic scope makes political anthropology a crucial interpretative frame encompassing “identity politics, the state, gender, war and conflict, leadership, postcolonialism, globalization, and probably much more” (Lewellen 2003, p. 224). In Abner

Cohen's interpretation, "political anthropology is nothing other than social anthropology brought up to a high degree of abstraction" (Cohen 1979, p. 81, quoted by Lewellen 2003, p. 106). Its main theme, in turn, is a narrative about power, and more precisely about how the state authority destroys the native, or simply local, population. The fundamental premise of political anthropology is that subordinate groups (for instance the lower classes) may only either submit to authority or rebel and behave passively in an alternating cycle. Lewellen remarks that this view is in many cases correct; yet "anthropologists increasingly pay attention to the ways in which people fight back, nonviolently or violently, with whatever weapons they have at their disposal" (Lewellen 2003, p. 113). At the same time, Lewellen observes, political anthropologists must be open to new tendencies, especially globalisation, since they "simply cannot treat power as they did in the past, as manifest at purely local or state level" (2003, p. 224). The role of the state, which is currently undergoing far-reaching changes, and the emergence of new forms of political activity open new fields to anthropological exploration. This text focuses on a pilot project carried out in the Polish-Czech borderland, the aim of which was to capture the process of changes in the local perception of state authority, as well as transformations in the social contract regarding the competency of state authorities with respect to the delineation of state territory and precedence in governing this territory.

THE POLISH-CZECH BORDER DEBT

The so-called border debt emerged in the year 1958 as a result of a correction in the course of the Polish-Czech border demarcated in the first years after the Second World War. On the strength of a settlement signed by both states, the People's Republic of Poland handed over 1200 hectares to Czechoslovakia, receiving 840 ha in return. This disparity has since then been referred to as the "border debt". In order to regulate the problem, the Permanent Polish-Czech Border Commission at the Ministry of the Interior in Warsaw (Stała Polsko-Czeska Komisja Graniczna przy Ministerstwie Spraw Wewnętrznych w Warszawie) was instituted in 1992. First reports of the purported Czech plan to hand over to Poland land which would settle the border debt appeared in 2011 (Świątek 2012). The problem of the border correction, and the consequences thereof to local authorities and residents of the borderland area, provided Dr Jakub Grygar¹ and myself with a direct inspiration to construct a research project.

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The initial aim of the project² was to attempt a scholarly enquiry and analysis of the issues associated with the so-called border debt, as well as the responses to it among the local communities on both sides of the border. We wanted to understand the reasons for the difficulties in relations between the Czech local community and the state administration representing this community; to investigate the mechanisms of negotiations between the two sides; to demarcate and analyse the already-evident spheres of discord and *loci* of conflict, and to uncover the hitherto concealed ones. Although the problems in Polish-Czech relations described herein are situated in the context of border disputes, they exceed the range of topics and issues embraced by the anthropology of borders and frontiers. The correction of the border and the resultant border debt proved a catalyst for entirely new phenomena, which opened a new research space to me. Methods of negotiating the debt revealed attitudes of treating the border itself, and any proposed changes of its course, in patriotic categories, as well as attitudes that focused on seeking a practical way out of this already decades-old trouble by attempting to appraise the debt itself. What drew my particular attention is the fact that a debate between the representatives of both capital cities was joined by the Czech local community motivated by a feeling of being slighted and ignored. This is especially interesting in the context of the ongoing process of re-formulating the functions and implications of borders in the contemporary European Union (Wilson, Donnan 2005) and in the Schengen Area, where, as it turns out, a local community is able to negotiate the course of the border. Thus, the community changes from an unaware object of negotiations into their conscious participant demanding access to the decision-making process which is to result in an alteration of the Polish-Czech borderline. Due to its place of residence, the Czech local community seems to be the most predestined to participation in such debates, while its protest constitutes an interesting manifestation of local activity. Standing between two international entities, this community wants to – and does – have a genuine influence on the demarcation of the border. This situation constitutes an innovation in Polish-Czech relations and concurrently reveals a new role played by communities living on all types of borders and frontiers. The process of grass-roots negotiation of the course of the border (the Polish-German one), which was in a sense similar, although based on entirely different mechanisms, was reported in another publication of mine (Ładykowska, Ładykowski 2013). What follows here is

² Participants of the research project “On the periphery of the state: spatial and social dimensions of authority. The case of the Polish-Czech border debt” were Dr Paweł Ładykowski with students of the Chair of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Szczecin (Daria Maras, Aleksandra Żółkowska, Agnieszka Słońska and Patryk Potomski) and, from the Czech side, Dr Jakub Grygar with students of the Department of Sociology at the Charles University in Prague (Marie Kubatová, Tomáš Samec and Jana Hrková). Research carried out during fieldwork (26th April to 5th May 2012) embraced residents of Czech villages of Kukolice, Kurnatice, Heřmanice, Horní Řasnice, Bulovka, Dolní Oldříš, Srbska, and Polish villages of Miłoszów, Grabczyce Górne, Miedzianka and the outskirts of Bogatynia.

a presentation of the chronology of events related to the emergence of the Polish-Czech border debt, and an attempt at an analysis of this phenomenon in the framework of the anthropology of borders and frontiers and political anthropology.

GREAT QUARRELS OVER SMALL TERRITORIES. THE ANATOMY OF PRESTIGE

The issue of the so-called border debt in Polish-Czech relations is an example of a debate over national imponderables, which are administrated by the state and which determine its prestige. In this case, the symbolic aspect dominates over the strictly material one, as the size of the debated territory is rather small; it seems not to justify such a considerable expenditure of effort and emotions as has been devoted to it. The current Czech border debt involves the area of 368 hectares. It is comparable to the slightly, but not much smaller area, dispute over which inflamed hearts and minds in the Polish Galicja (Galizien) and the so-called Upper Hungary in the late 19th and early 20th century. A Hungarian-Galician dispute over Morskie Oko, the famous lake in the Tatra Mountains, emerged in the final years of Partitions of Poland and was finally settled in 1902. It referred to a relatively small area (c. 350 ha) located in the Rybi Potok valley. According to Jerzy M. Roszkowski, the debate was “very dramatic, since to Poles the place was ‘the loveliest spot of their land’; therefore it became the focus of interest of the public opinion in all three partitions and in emigration” (Roszkowski 2011, p. 69).³ Historical border conflicts with Poland’s southern neighbours gained strength in the period after 1918, when Poland was reconstructing its statehood and Czechoslovakia was being founded. Orava and Spiš were the main bone of contention between Poland and the Slovak part of the newly constituted federation, while Teschen Silesia – with its Czech part. In the debate regarding the course of the border, both sides resorted to similar argumentation, but interpreted it differently. Arguments of historical, ethnic and ethnographic nature were considered the most important. Antiquity of the rights to the disputed land was to be confirmed by historical evidence, the older the more credible.

The resident population’s declaration of national identity was considered to be the most important “proof” of the frontier lands’ Polishness, Slovakness or Czechness. The status of the population was decided upon by specialists, for instance non-professional ethnologists.⁴ As a result of endless border squabbles, local people were often arbitrarily divided, and with them their lands, homesteads, often families. In many cases the achieved state of affairs was not final, since the border was corrected several times.

³ All quotations from Polish-language publications have been translated solely for the purpose of the current article (translator’s note).

⁴ As, for instance, in the case of the Polish requisitions in Orava and Spiš. Paramount importance of the ethnic and cultural aspect was emphasised by Zborowski; he was above all an amateur ethnologist and referred to historical rights to a lesser extent (Roszkowski 2011, p. 269).

The situation did not favour social or economic stability in the border area and caused tangible losses to the locals.⁵ The Polish-Czechoslovak dispute over Orava and Spiš in the early 1920's brought permanent chaos and uncertainty due to unresolved border issues. According to Roszkowski, residents of some villages discovered to which state they would ultimately belong only in 1924. At the same time, Czechoslovak authorities repeatedly attempted to discourage the locals' allegiance to Poland: access to fields, pastures, forests and mountain meadows located on the Czechoslovak side was limited or blocked off; agricultural produce could no longer be sold on previously accessible markets; payments of cash from bank accounts held in Czechoslovak banks were obstructed (2011, pp. 326–327).

The local population's worsening position made it abundantly obvious that the disputed area must be finally embraced by a state border. Numerous peasant delegations began to appear in the antagonistic capitals, appealing to the authorities not to leave their village, or the entire region, in the neighbouring country (2011, p. 260). It seems, therefore, that the outcry of the local population held hostage to large-scale interstate politics was at that time the most audible. And even though this movement was (perhaps cynically) exploited according to the current or strategic needs of the state, it was certainly a new, grass-roots, non-institutionalised element in the dialogue regarding the postulated line of the border.

Subsequent phases of the dispute pertained to the line of the Polish-Czechoslovak border and the related issues of access to natural resources, the size of the population involved and the size of the area settled by this population. With time, however, the interstate rivalry came to focus on a different key element: the prestige of the state, viewed as a symbolic dimension of power and state domination, as well as a guarantee of being respected by the public opinion both in the country and abroad. The value of this prestige increases especially in the case of emergent or newly reconstituted states. State and national mythologies which are to justify the inalienability of rights to the disputed territory are thus not a weapon in a fight for the sometimes minuscule area, but in a struggle to maintain the symbolic prestige. Both the dispute over the Morskie Oko Lake and, for instance, for Spiš Javorina have all the characteristics of such struggle. This village and its environments encompassed the area of only 86 km²; yet, as Roszkowski comments, the dispute over it “proved relatively complicated, and above all triggered strong emotions on both sides” (2011, p. 295). This was because the Polish society saw its inclusion “into the borders of the Second Republic [...] as indispensable not only because of the local economic and social issues, but also because of the

⁵ As, for instance, in the Spiš and Orava local government district (*starostwo*) instituted in reconstituted Poland; Czechoslovak authorities created various difficulties with regard to access to fields, meadows and forests located on their side of the border, and thus the local population “found itself in a worse situation than before the war” (Roszkowski 2011, p. 333).

desire to return to Poland's pre-Partitions border and concurrently its natural border, running along the European watershed, i.e. mainly the crest of the Tatra Mountains. The campaign to rebuild the Polish state's authority, much damaged by disastrous decisions of the Conference of Ambassadors, was also not without significance. Satisfaction of Warsaw's postulates with regard to Spiš Javorina made it possible for Poland to emerge from a whole string of failures brought by relations with Prague up to that time, with its honour intact. The crux of this aspect of the Javorina problem is aptly described by the phrase 'Javorine – Prestigine' coined by the well-known jeerer Adolf Nowaczyński" (2011, p. 295).⁶ The current dispute over the so-called Czech border debt also seems to fit perfectly in the trend of solutions referring to the broadly understood prestige of the state.

DEBATES OVER TERRITORY AND NEW STATE BORDERS. EMERGENT FRONTIERS AND THEIR TYPES

The course of Poland's borders demarcated after the Second World War markedly changed the character of Poland's ancient borderlands. This character was summed up by Mariusz Skrzypczyk (Skrzypczak 1996, p. 86) as a "carpet" one, the term referring to "ancient" areas, where the *continuum* reached deep into the past and communities endured in their homes for generations, shaping the complex mosaic of borderland relationships. According to Skrzypczyk, the so-called "Eastern Wall" of Poland, which after the Second World War witnessed relatively small migration movements (with the exception of Operation Vistula and relocation of the Lemko people) is an example of such an area. A different situation emerged along Poland's new border with Germany, as well as in the southern stretch constituting the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. Autochthonous German population was deported⁷ from the Western Territories, acquired by Poland at the expense of Germany, and from the Czech Sudetes borderland, seized again by the Czechoslovak administration, to Germany, then occupied by the victorious Allied forces. As Mariusz Skrzypczyk notes, "[t]he traditional Polish-

⁶ In Polish: Jaworzyna – Prestiżyna. The suffix-yna being relatively frequent in forming place-names, the pun conveys the meaning: small village, great prestige (translator's note).

⁷ In Polish specialist literature, the German exodus is described as "a planned relocation organised by the state". In the German tradition, the episode has been described with a strongly emotionally charged term 'expulsion', which in Poland is perceived as an improper exaggeration and an expression of historical injustice. In my opinion, the truth lies in the middle, since the relocations were definitely forcible, often badly organised and chaotic, and they inflamed negative emotions (already abundant in that post-war period) among the Germans included in the relocation. Trauma caused by an administratively forced and almost immediate departure from family dwellings left a feeling of unearned distress that continued for years and may be perceived plainly as an expulsion.

German borderland, which used to have a distinctly confrontational character, was erased. The ‘young’ borderland began to emerge in entirely changed social and political conditions. The Polish-Czech borderland is mostly just as ‘young’. It has a distinctly linear character, only in places a carpet one; this is linked to the fact that almost the total of the Polish-Czech border was demarcated anew” (1996, p. 87). In my opinion, this term can be applied, with some reservations, only to the latter half of the 1930s, that is to the period when tension between the two states began to increase under the influence of the German Nazi ideology, which often translated into a worsening of interpersonal relations between members of the two nations. The history of the “carpet borderland” (to use Skrzypczyk’s phrase) covers nearly a millennium; this goes against the assumption that its character was confrontational. The area of that borderland is also difficult to delineate reliably, since German and Polish colonisation combined not only in the western borderlands, but also in the south (Teschen Silesia, Orava, Spiš and the entire Carpathian Plateau) and east, for instance in Volhynia in the southern Galicja, today in Ukraine.

I propose to assume a different approach to the post-war Polish-German borderland, and to apply different analytical categories in the description of the state of affairs. These categories exceed slightly the “old”/“new” and “carpet”/“linear” divisions. In my opinion, the crucial difference in the character of borderlands described by Skrzypczyk with the use of the above terms has one more dimension, a chiefly spatial and symbolic one. This dimension is aptly rendered by the English terms ‘border’ and ‘frontier’. While a “border” is a demarcation line between two states, symbolically marked by guard-posts and border signs, the “frontier” is a perceived “front line” – sometimes shifting, sometimes stable, located in an “empty” space and devoid of the dividing or linking aspect. In Polish, both terms are rendered by one word, ‘granica’, but their English etymology and usage point to crucial differentiating nuances, the existence of which has found confirmation on the theoretical level (cf. Wendl, Rösler 1999; Turner 1994 [1893]); Lamar, Thompson 1981; Giddens 1987; Ładykowska, Ładykowski 2013). Existing typologies signal differences in the relations between the state and the local community. Anthony Giddens (1987, p. 49), for instance, refers to the achievements of political geography, where ‘frontier’ means either a special type of border between two states (or more), or a borderline between a settled and non-settled area within a single state. To Giddens, a “frontier” is a space on the periphery of a state, where political authority of the central government is blurred or poorly represented. Borderlands of this type emerge when a state expands towards new territories settled by a native population or not settled at all. A “border”, on the other hand, is a line clearly demarcated in space, which links or divides two states (or more). A “frontier” is therefore a line which clearly marks the ultimate reach of state sovereignty. In contrast to the line of the “frontier” type, the line of the “border” type is manifested clearly through military guard-posts, the presence of border guard etc. (1987, p. 49).

The difference between these two terms, which in contemporary English are used to a certain extent interchangeably, has its roots in etymology (cf. Wendl, Rösler 1999, p. 3), which explains the semantic shift crucial to the theoretical differentiation.

“Both terms «frontier» and «border» are respectively of Latin and Frankish ancestry and convey a different range of implicit meanings. Both found their way into English through Middle French, and both are finally rooted in the perceptual experiences of the human body... The frontier (Latin *frons* or forehead) is always “in front of” the subject. It denotes a flat, horizontal view from an absolute, anthropocentric body-based standpoint... The border, on the other hand, derives from the Frankish “bord,” literally the two wooden sides of a ship, or the fringes of textiles (German “borte, French “bordure”). It denotes a bird’s-eye view, with the observer not bodily involved, but rather looking down at the outline of objects on the ground. In today’s English, to some extent, both terms are used interchangeably... It seems however, that the notion of “frontiers” is more elaborated, popularly as well as scientifically, in the American than in the British imagination. The reason for this... comes from the American expansionist experience of moving west. While in British English the term “frontier” also refers to remote backwoods regions... that differ significantly from areas of metropolitan refinement, it is used in American-English speech and thought without these negative attributions. Here, it rather has come to mean pioneerism, dynamism and advancement (1999, p. 3).

This semantic shift, although not immediately obvious in everyday usage, in specialist literature appeared in the year 1893, in *The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays*, Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic study of frontier society. To depict the mounting wave of pioneers and later settlers who colonised America, Turner used the image of an anonymous force that swept like a slow tidal wave from east to west across North America, bringing with it smaller waves. First pioneers then settler communities (1999, pp. 3–4). A later, refined definition by Lamar and Thompson (1981, p. 7) described a “frontier” as a “a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies”, in which sense the term began to be applied in the description of hybrid cultures of post-colonial societies. It seems that the latter meaning is the closest to what Skrzypczak describes as the “carpet” borderland.

In my analysis, I would like to point out the aspect of interpenetration as much as on the aspect of settling a new (previously vacated) space. In my description of Polish-German borderland in the period 1945–1980 (cf. Ładykowska, Ładykowski 2013), I applied analytic tools proposed by Turner (the image of a shifting front line) and by Giddens (a front as the remote, non-settled periphery) in the analysis of the spatial dimension of borderlands. New territories, annexed by Poland after the war, had been cleared of people who lived there previously, but material traces of the earlier settlers: houses, buildings, factories etc. did not disappear. As a result of this, constructing identity in relation to the new place (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 2004) proved especially problematic to Polish settlers colonising those areas. In the case of Polish-Czech borderlands, I am also of the opinion that analytic categories of “border” and “frontier” are better suited to the depiction of relationships between the residents’ identity and the inhabited space than such typologies as “old”/“new” and “carpet”/“linear”. This is

underscored by the fact that in the past, the population of this area repeatedly proved impossible to define unambiguously according to ethnic or linguistic criteria; also, residents of some villages many times did not know to which state administration they belonged or would belong. This indicates that, in the case of the Polish-Czech borderland, the “front of the incoming wave” did not mean the residents, but quite the opposite – the changing state authority making its *début* as the central power. That some time later local social partners spontaneously joined the discussion on the course of the new borderline is a consequence of this process. Originating straight from the negotiated borderland, they assumed that they had a valid (or more valid) mandate to decide about how the border can and should run after the correction. Yet the administrative *début*, as an issue of international prestige, automatically meant the emergence of a sovereignty conflict – not only with regard to the decisions of both centres considering themselves to be legitimate, but also a conflict of moral authority to hold a just power over the given territory.

Another aspect evident in Giddens and Turner’s model is the image of spatial void, of which vacated social space is a variant. The Polish-Czech borderland, which was interesting to me due to my research topic, and especially its new (at least in the Polish tradition), “post-German” part, turned out to be the most problematic aspect of Poland’s relations with its southern neighbour.

EMERGENCE (?) OF THE BORDER DEBT

The Polish-Czech border debt resulted from the necessity of correcting the course of the border. The fact of the correction was not publicised by either state for fear of a violent eruption of social emotions. The Czech section of the new border between Poland and Czechoslovakia encompassed the Teschen, Upper-Silesian and Lusatian stretches. The Slovak section was limited mainly to Spiš and Orava. The Combined Polish-Czechoslovak Commission for State Border Demarcation (Polsko-Czechosłowacka Komisja Mieszana do Wytyczenia Granicy Państwowej), instituted in 1946, was responsible for its regulation.

A distinctive feature of the part of the border with Czechoslovakia that was inherited from the Germans was its historical origin. It emerged in the latter half of the 18th century as a result of the Silesian Wars fought by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria and Frederick II Hohenzollern known as the Great, the king of Prussia, over Silesia, Lusatia and some other lands. The Treaty of Hubertsburg, signed in 1763, which confirmed the course of the borders, remained in force until 1945; only the post-war geo-political situation in the region necessitated the corrections. In the changed circumstances, the old border no longer fulfilled the requisites of being “modern”; hence the aim was to bring it where possible to a natural line of a river, to remove deep enclaves in the borderline,

to adjust it to communication routes, to respect natural economic links, and to adjust the border to the requirements of its protection (Szczepańska 2011, p. 335). The border demarcated in the 18th century was ambiguous in places, which resulted in altercations between states. Its meandering course caused difficulties in maintaining control, which made the job of the border guards extremely difficult, especially considering their fight with the smuggling of people and goods, which increased sharply after the war. Finally, conservation works aimed at clearer marking and neatening the borderline were proclaimed to be unavoidable, and they were set to begin in 1952.

“To undergo works was a 450-kilometre section eastwards from Nysa Łużycka, up to Złoty Potok. In 1954, the government of Poland put forward the proposal to finally demarcate the Polish-Czechoslovak state border and, in agreement with German Democratic Republic, the meeting point of the borders of Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany” (2011, p. 331). Taking the existing state border as a starting point, the Warsaw government proposed to introduce only small corrections that would take under consideration the interests of the local population and the economy; the Prague government took a similar view (2011, p. 331). Another reason was the desire to avoid an escalation of fear among the residents of the still new Polish-Czech borderland. The planned exchange of land caused a particularly great anxiety. Members of agricultural cooperatives in Łaziska wrote letters to Władysław Gomułka complaining against the loss of such a very fertile land. “The 1st Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signalled that the local population was disoriented and anxious about the border delimitation. Many were certain that the outcome of the proceedings would be to Poland’s detriment. The embassy reported that after the 8th Plenary Conference of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party some locals were convinced that a part of Czechoslovakia was to be incorporated into Poland” (2011, p. 337). Administration of the ex-German lands was already difficult enough, due to their being split by the state border. For instance, farmers from around Głubczyce and Racibórz, where the border split their fields (both on the Czech and the Polish side), experienced many problems. After the war, the authorities restricted the use of such fields; for instance, cutting fresh grass was allowed, but bringing hay to a barn located on the other side of the border was not. The case of the grain or potato harvest was similar. Such difficulties kept being created by both sides until 1959 (Strauchmann 2007; Szczepańska 2011, p. 333).

As a result of the border documentation works carried out from 1955, the Polish side initially proposed over twenty corrections of the borderline, while the Czech side attempted to minimise the necessity of introducing so many changes. Yet the longer the shared inspections of the border territory continued, the more proposals of corrections were being submitted by the Czechs. A year later members of the Czechoslovak commission were already postulating for the correction to cover 120 hectares; this was the sum of nearly 61 local corrections which were proposed. Considering the present-day consequences of that correction, it is worth emphasising that the reluctance of the

Czechoslovak side was caused especially by those situations, where private land would need to be handed over to Poland (2011, p. 335). It was then that legal controversies arose between the state and the owners of particular plots assigned to be handed over to the Polish side; those controversies evolved to the current problem, which I describe as a sovereignty conflict. In the mid-1950's, legal issues arising from land ownership proved the most serious obstacle on the path to regulating the border's new status. While the exchange of state- or cooperative-owned land was a marginal problem, privately owned land usually constituted an inviolable entity and the state did not have any legal mechanisms to relinquish ownership in the name of the true owners (2011, pp. 335–336).

The preparation and then signing (on 29th April 1958) of the joint record demarcating the new borderline revealed the territorial discrepancies. The commission took pains to avoid dividing villages; another success was that the border did not run in the nearest vicinity of settlements and constituted a natural extension of communication routes. As a result of 85 corrections of the border, Czechoslovakia received 1205 hectares of Polish land, handing over 837 hectares to Poland in return. In keeping with the intentions of both sides, the border was somewhat straightened and shortened from 1390 to 1309 km (2011, p. 338). At the same time, Czechoslovakia undertook to balance the surplus of 368 hectares resulting from the border correction.

The process of land exchange proved more complex than it has usually been assumed afterwards. It included many actions which were logistically difficult and often costly (e.g. renovation of exchanged houses, resettling families with their movables and animals, search for comparable farms and homesteads in the new location). The greatest amount of negative emotions on both sides was caused by the handing over (in exchange) of private plots of land, the expropriation of which the state conducted as the first. In the areas assigned for exchange property or crops were often destroyed or forests felled. At that point, a decision was taken in Czechoslovakia to cede the assignation of land for exchange to local authorities, who were aware of the local economic conditions. Still, it must be remembered that in that period both the Czechoslovak and the Polish state were constructing a new political and social régime and in reality all matters were settled by small cliques entrenched in central governing bodies of Prague and Warsaw.

After the competences (and, in fact, the entire border issue) were shifted to the local authorities, all proceedings halted. The lack of political will in Prague, and the reluctance and unreadiness of the Czechoslovak local authorities to conduct the operation, froze the entire issue of the so-called border debt for decades. After the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, its obligations were taken over by the Czech Republic, which “was to hand over the 132 hectares of land belonging to State Treasure until June 2008. Finally it agreed to hand over 1.2 ha of land (mountain wasteland) located in the Bílá Voda commune adjacent to the commune of Złoty Stok near Kłodzko” (2011, p. 342). After more than a decade of negotiations, this was a meagre success.

THE SOVEREIGNTY CONFLICT

In 2010 the Polish media began to broadcast information that the Polish-Czech negotiations on the so-called border debt were to be reopened. The headings were sensational: “Poland to be larger. The Czechs will give us a piece of the Sudetes” (jen 2011), “Bohemia to give back a piece of Poland” (jen 2011a) or a more ambiguous one, “The Czechs want to move the border” (Strauchmann, Hanys 2007). The same press releases reported that the unresolved border debt burdening Polish-Czech relations since 1958 conceals a far more complex and serious problem, which has already been mentioned here: the wrangle between the central and local authorities regarding competencies in administrating the acquired area.

Czech local authorities currently experience many problems caused by the unregulated status of a part of the land, which has the shape of small plots that for many years have been reserved as potential compensation originating from the border debt.⁸ As a result, many construction and development enterprises in the borderland districts are blocked. By prolonging the process of developing the strategy of solving the border debt issue, the Prague authorities are doing nothing to alleviate tensions in the region. They are concurrently trying to resort to international and national negotiations, but with no tangible results. The Czech public opinion was outraged by Prague’s proposal to yield to Poland, as compensation, plots of land belonging to Czech citizens or, as an alternative, ones belonging to Polish citizens but located in the Czech Republic, often as enclaves. As a consequence, the conflict on the central government – local government axis, originally caused by neglecting the desires of both the local community and the local authorities that represented it, escalated.⁹ Local authorities of borderland

⁸ Cf. reports of Mlada Fronta Dnes: “[t]he change of the border will limit, at least to a some extent, the problems of Czech local authorities with the ‘Polish’ land, which in reality have no owner or their owner remains unknown. Members of the local government from communes adjacent to the border complain that the absence of an owner hampered, among others, construction of the sewage system by making it necessary to alter its planned course. In the village of Bílá Voda, it proved impossible to erect a television transmitter mast in the optimum location, because this turned out to be a former Polish plot; a new location had to be found. In Vidnava, a new housing estate and the town’s playing field are located on ‘Polish’ plots whose owners are unknown; hence the town is unable to sell flats in the blocks to their residents. Also, with the ownership issues unresolved, Vidnava did not receive a subsidy to lay synthetic turf on the playing field” (Strauchmann and Hanys, 2007).

⁹ The mayor of Horní Řasnice Mr. Radek Haloun, quoted in the Czech Internet portal iDnes.cz, was outraged by the fact that his commune stood to lose 14 hectares in the village of Srbska: “We had been given assurances that the government would not go behind our backs. The truth turned out the opposite” (psm 2011). Mayor Romana Šidlová from the Bulovka commune, where the losses to Poland’s benefit are to be the largest, i.e. 32 ha in the vicinity of the village of Dolní Oldříš, added: “The state was not concerned with our protests” (*Ibid.*, 2011). According to one of the conceptions, the Interior Ministry in Prague is intending to hand over to Poland a section of Liberec District located on the so-called Frýdlant Point, between Świeradów-Zdrój and Bogatynia. Regional and local authorities oppose the idea: “[t]he voivode of Liberec Mr. Stanislav Eichler proposed that the land erroneously ascribed to the Czechs be

communes accuse the Czech Interior Ministry of ignoring them and hampering the flow of information along the central government – local government line. The criteria of selecting the land to be yielded, which have been imposed on the local authorities, are also questioned.

The Czech borderland community has initiated the process of developing a new perception of justice in relation to the Prague authorities, and the local authorities' involvement on the side of the residents has reversed relations on the periphery – centre line. An informal alliance of communes, initiated in 2010 in the village of Bílá Voda, has evolved into a durable platform on which a joint negotiation strategy in debates with the Prague authorities is worked out. On 11th May 2011 at a meeting of presidents of the borderland communes of Heřmanice, Bílá Voda, Píšť, Třebom, Česká černá Horní Řasnice, Bulovka, Královec, Velká Kraš, Mikulovice, Machovská Lhota and representatives of small towns Javorník and Vidnava, the following resolution has been passed: “The above-mentioned communes, in whose area located are the plots of land selected by the Interior Ministry of the Czech Republic and intended for the compensation of the land debt, hereby present to the government the proposal to organise a joint meeting in order to resolve the following problems: 1. respecting negative views of councillors from village communes; 2. balancing the losses incurred by local farmers due to expropriation of the land they had cultivated (payment of compensation for the resultant impairment to estate); 3. prohibition against giving away high-quality land and forest plots; 4. payment of compensation to communes losing the plots; 5. reduction of cadastral fees for communes losing the plots (due to a permanent reduction of those communes' income)”¹⁰. There exists an analogy which permits us to interpret the phenomenon described here as a kind of a *continuum* of the so-called peasant rebellions known from the past and current history. Those rebellions were caused by the feeling of injustice and economic oppression or occurred when (as in the current case) the central government's actions made it lose both its international prestige and the social respect and authority comprising its mandate. Objection to those actions of the authorities which are perceived as oppressive, albeit hardly spectacular, has been the foundation of peasant resistance, which is one of the most effective forms of protest. The state of affairs presented by James C. Scott in *Weapons of the Weak*, such resistance is a continuous, day-to-day process, by means of which peasants fight exploitation of any kind. “Resistance may be more or less organized, but it is not linked to any wider political movements or ideologies. This runs counter to the more commonly held view of peasants as alternating between mindless eruptions of violence and passive acceptance of their fate; peasants have never really been quiescent, but their protest may take place, almost unnoticed, day in and day out” (Lewellen 2003, p. 115). The

bought out. – We are the smallest district when it comes to area. Hence we were arguing that if any reparations are to occur, they should concern the Moravia-Silesia region or other, larger districts” (*Ibid.*, 2011).

¹⁰ Based on the Polish text translated from Czech by Dr Jakub Grygar. Documentation with the records of the Bílá Voda meeting are in the author's archive.

state aims at retaining its monopoly on the use of violence and holds the exclusive right to conduct foreign policy as its prerogative; yet it turns out that other forms of pressure may be equally effective and powerful. According to Lewellen, “if power is defined as the ability to affect the decisions and actions of others, then there are many forms of power available to the people at the bottom of the state hierarchy. Some of these forms of power may be individual, as in hiding from military conscription or deserting an army; or they may be well organized, as in Gandhi’s or Martin Luther King’s nonviolent protests” (2003, p. 113). An analogous effect is achieved by the self-government administration when it is defending the interests of the local population against the central authorities (with the proviso that those interests are identical with the interests of that administration). In a contemporary state, local communities must develop new strategies for cultural survival and individual autonomy with regard to the issues most vital to them. Writing about the strategies of survival, Peter Skalniak suggests that one of those is based on collaboration: “Another tactic is to collaborate with the state and actually use the state’s own policies against it – as did the Malaysian *negris*, who accepted British-imposed party politics and then created pro-*negri* parties that prevented the colonial power from carrying out its policies” (1989, pp. 9–11, quoted by Lewellen 2003, p. 114). The events in the Frýdlant Region, where a form of an alliance between representatives of local self-government bodies was forged in the village of Bílá Voda, evince strong analogies. The local government, which is after all an organ of state power and is appointed in order to represent the views of the central authority, began to favour the position of the local community (which is administratively subordinate to it) and to support the community’s threatened vital interests. As a result, the stance of the local state administration has become identical with the stance of the local people threatened with the loss of property. What emerged is a coalition that stands in an opposition to the actions of the central state administration.

CONCLUSION

State-centric systems with the dominant power vested in national governments are currently in decline, bound for an inevitable demise. “The idea of the nation-state is a recent invention, dating back only a few hundred years”, writes Lewellen, “and in a very real sense it was always a myth. The term combines two almost contradictory concepts: *nation*, which refers to a people with a common culture and heritage, usually speaking the same language; and *state*, which is the government of a bounded territory” (Lewellen 2010, p. 220). The hitherto legitimacy of the nation-state, based on maintaining control and powerfully supported by national mythology, is unavoidably getting blurred by modern-day transnationalism. Constantly arriving waves of immigrants and tourists, as well as multinational business corporations, whose activity is favoured by contemporary globalisation processes, further the process of deterritorialisation of the

state. “Both multinational corporations and global economic institutions assume many of the powers over the economy once concentrated in state hands” (2010, pp. 220–221).

The Czech local government’s endeavour to seize the initiative with respect to the demarcation of the borderline is, in fact, an attempt to change prerogatives hitherto reserved strictly for the state, these being the policies of state border formation. It is an element of an evident ongoing transformation of the earlier formula of the state’s activity. This gradual delegation of decision-making power “bottom-wards”, to the most interested parties (that is to the local community), has been forced by a grass-roots effort, and it makes the central authorities in Prague no more than an acceptor of decisions worked out at the grass-roots level. This constitutes an entirely new dimension of democracy. Until now, competencies of the provincial self-government embraced tasks focused on repairs to field drainage systems or roads, construction of schools etc. That it could effectively take the floor in matters pertaining to the land it governs, and especially to the land which concurrently constitutes the state’s border, seems to be an unprecedented event. In the new role, local authorities take over the burden of negotiating with the landowners (who may stand to lose on the border correction) and also, after public consultations, they independently select places where the border may eventually be corrected, thus securing the local residents’ interests and also their own. What is more, local authorities participate in the negotiations with the central administration on the matter of financial compensation for the decrease of their area. This example confirms that “identity with the larger territorial political entity occupies a separate sphere from local or ethnic identity, a sphere reserved for national holidays, periods of external threat, national elections, or rites of unification such as the funerals of a statesmen. State boundaries are more secure today than at any time in the past; cross-border wars for the purpose of aggrandizing territory are extremely rare [...] the nation-state seems to be a structure quite amenable to globalization, although it needs to be reconceptualized in the sense that it is no longer the center of power it once was (or was thought to be), but rather one of a number of nodes of power that reach both above and below – to regional and global institutions, and to grassroots nongovernmental organizations” (2003, p. 221). Sovereignty conflicts between the central and peripheral centres of power within one state no longer come as a surprise. The very definition and analysis of those conflicts, in turn, may broaden our knowledge of the process of transforming power centres and the formula of the entire state, as well as of mechanisms governing the emergence of new forms of democracy.

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