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KINSHIP, ETHNICITY AND LANDSCAPE: THE CONTEXTS OF ETHNIC BOUNDARIES IN SOUTHERN SIBERIA, MONGOLIA AND INNER MONGOLIA[1]

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The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the processual nature of the formation of ethnic boundaries. In reference to Fredrik Barth's concept of the social organization of difference, the author examines three case studies (southern Siberia, Mongolia and Inner Mongolia – China) and shows how ethnic boundaries are interacting and being reshaped within such diverse fields as: nationalism, identity, kinship, space and landscape. The example of southern Siberia shows how the collapse of the Soviet Union has resulted in "closing" the ancestral affiliations of Altaians, Tuvinians and Khakass within the administrative boundaries of the autonomous republics. In Mongolia, differences within one national group are constructed politically, ideologically and discursively as a result of political transformations. In Inner Mongolia, social differences at the ethnic level can be understood as consequences of diverse perceptions on the landscape and "separated" participation in space by the Mongols and Han Chinese.

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Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na procesualny charakter formowania się granic etnicznych. Autor odnosząc się do koncepcji społecznej organizacji różnic Fredrika Bartha, analizuje 3 studia przypadku (południowa Syberia, Mongolia, Mongolia Wewnętrzna – Chiny) i wskazuje, jak granice etniczne krzyżują się na tak różnorodnych polach jak: nacjonalizm, tożsamość, pokrewieństwo, przestrzeń i krajobraz. Przykład południowej Syberii pokazuje, jak po upadku Związku Radzieckiego przynależność rodowa Ałtajczyków, Tuwińczyków i Chakasów została „zamknięta" w granicach administracyjnych republik autonomicznych. W Mongolii różnice w obrębie jednej grupy narodowej są konstruowane politycznie, ideologicznie i dyskursywnie w wyniku transformacji ustrojowych. W Mongolii Wewnętrznej społeczne różnice na poziomie etnicznym są konsekwencją różnego postrzegania krajobrazu i „oddzielnego" partycypowania w przestrzeni przez Mongołów i Chińczyków Han.

K e y w o r d s: identity, ethnicity, ethnic boundaries, landscape, Southern Siberia, Mongolia

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Ethnicity has for many years been the subject of research within the social sciences. Different disciplines have developed methods and tools enabling them to interpret and analyse the phenomena falling within this category. In political science the instrumental approach dominates, designed to predict ethnic processes, construct models of relationships and create a typology of phenomena. Within sociology and anthropology, ethnicity refers to broadly defined "otherness", yet both disciplines have had some problems with defining their research domains with respect to it. In anthropology, until the mid-twentieth century, there were, in principle, no such categories as "ethnic" or "ethnic group". The sociological understanding of these terms was in turn dominated by the concept of "race" or the concept of social distance determining the interaction between majority and minority groups (applying the Bogardus scale).

The crucial decade for ethnicity studies proved to be the 1960s. Sociology abandoned the term "race", politically coloured with colonial connotations, and anthropology introduced into its vocabulary the term "ethnic" as an equivalent to what had until recently been treated as "tribal" (Fenton 2003). In the case of anthropology, the impact of the Manchester school proved crucial. Anthropologists remaining under its influence became interested in the contexts of the existence of groups hitherto referred to as tribes. It was mainly the matter of colonialism and modernisation, which fundamentally changed the ways of life of communities previously considered as "tribal". The idea of a "tribe" as a relatively autonomous group living on the periphery of the modern world proved impossible to sustain in a modernising world. Intensive contacts between different groups and the flows of information and ideas between them abolished the myth of the existence of isolated communities that keep developing regardless of the external conditions that prevail. By the end of the 1960s the category of "tribe" was being substituted with "ethnic group" in anthropological terminology (Banks 1996, 24–25).

This change was triggered largely by the book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,* edited by Fredrik Barth (1969). This empirical case study – apparently forgotten by Polish ethnographers – in a sense charted the directions of later ethnographic studies devoted to ethnic groups. In an interesting and theoretically important introduction, the author suggested that anthropologists take up the issues of borders and the social organisation of differences. In the light of Barth's proposal, social science scholars conducting research on ethnic groups were advised to focus on studying the borders themselves rather than the morphology of what is comprised within them (Barth 1969). The adoption of this kind of perspective had profound consequences – it treated ethnicity as a process whose essence is the continuous construction of borders.

The question I wish to address in this paper – despite prevailing trends – is how far this classic concept proposed by Barth more than 40 years ago can serve today as a useful tool in the analysis of ethnic boundaries. It should be noted that despite the importance of Barth's theory, many scholars are still trying to build theoretical

models based on definitions of an ideal type. In doing so, they emphasise the essentialist character of ethnic cultures. Such a static approach makes it possible to describe consistently the "morphology" of a given group but fails to capture the invisible relationships within different ethnic communities. That is how constructs of "ethnic" or "national cultures" are formed. Their creators – by reifying the subject of their research – treat each group as an isolated island. Barth rightly notes that too much importance is attached to the sharing of a common culture[2]. And the latter is, after all, more of an effect or result rather than a primary and defining feature of the way the ethnic group is organised (Barth 1969, 11–12). Unfortunately, many researchers still focus in their ethnographic and sociological studies on classifying the observed features into "ethnic cultures". I believe the thesis formulated by Barth that ethnic groups should be treated as a form of social organisation of differences, will lead to some interesting conclusions in the context of the contemporary identification and ethnicity phenomena in Central Asia.

The objective of my article is to identify the different levels of the existence of boundaries within the ethnic communities of southern Siberia, Mongolia, and China's Inner Mongolia. As the phenomena that interest me involve groups living in three different countries, I have decided on an ethnological perspective within which – I hope – it will be possible to compare individual cases and understand the local contexts of organising the social differences. The factors linking the inhabitants of southern Siberia, Mongolia and Inner Mongolia are: history, experience of life in Communist-state structures, types of economy (nomadic or semi-nomadic, and today a semi-settled lifestyle), and the steppe and mountainous "landscape". The borders I refer to in the title of this chapter intersect at such diverse levels as identity, kinship, space and landscape. To justify this thesis, I will present three case studies: the reproduction of clan divisions within the federative republics in Russia's southern Siberia, the problem of common identity of the Mongols, who have been arbitrarily divided by national borders (Russia, Mongolia, China), and the conceptualisation of space and landscape as a significant category in maintaining ethnic boundaries between the Chinese and the Mongols (in northern China). I will base my observations on ethnographic research that I conducted in the republics of Altai, Tuva and Khakassia in the years 1993–1999 and in Mongolia (2008–2012). In addition, I will also be referring to research conducted by Uradyn Bulag (1998) in Mongolia, and by Caroline Humphrey (2001) in China respectively.

[2] It should be recalled that ethnographic research papers drawing attention to this aspect appeared previously, but they did not deal with it in the idiom of ethnicity. Edmund Leach (1954), when describing the relations between Kachins and Shans in northern Burma, stressed that social organisation played a much more important role in those relations than "culture".

SOUTHERN SIBERIA

In a geographical sense, Southern Siberia[3] includes the Russian Altai range and the northern and southern slopes of the Western Sayan. These are areas within the administrative borders of the republics of Altai, Tuva and Khakassia, formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ethnologists and scholars of oriental studies point to the one of a kind, unique cultural complex which "evolved" over the centuries on the area of the taiga "borderlands" of Siberia and the mountainous Great Steppe (Kałużyński 1986; L'vova *et al.* 1989; Łabęcka-Koecherowa 1998; Sagalayev 1992). It is no coincidence that I have used the phrase "cultural complex" here, as it perfectly reflects the morphological character of the descriptions of particular communities. This implies that there are some "cultural resources" that are shared by "all" members of the given ethnic community. At a later stage in this chapter, I will demonstrate that this approach is too superficial and does not get to the root of the problem.

The most numerous "indigenous" peoples of southern Siberia are Altaians, Tuvinians and Khakases. Despite their current nomadic or semi-nomadic/settled or semi-settled lifestyles representatives of these nations consider themselves to be the "indigenous" population of the Altai and the Sayan mountains. They also stress that their languages belong to the Turkic family, arguing that their shared linguistic ancestry and the ancient and medieval history of southern Siberia, legitimise their membership in the broad historic and cultural community which includes the ancient Huns and Scythians as well as the modern inhabitants of these lands.

Of key importance for the current situation – not only in the Altai and the Sayan Mountains but also in the whole of Siberia – were the political changes that took place in Russia in 1991. The former Soviet autonomous republics (Yakutia, Buryatia and Tuva) and autonomous districts (Khakassia and Gorno-Altai) were transformed into new federative republics of Russia: Sakha (Yakutia), Buryatia, Tuva, Khakassia, and Altai. As a result of their democratic transformation they received a number of prerogatives that enabled them to follow a relatively independent regional policy: a tripartite separation of powers, the right to be active in the international arena, as well as the ability to conclude economic contracts with other countries. In addition to political prerogatives, each republic has its own flag, emblem and anthem. Each of them is governed by a president and each has a local parliament. As a result of the decentrali-

[3] In Poland, Siberia is usually treated as one historic and geographic entity, occupying the area between the Ural Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. In scholarly publications the geographical criterion often appears, and it is divided into western Siberia (West-Siberian Lowland) and eastern Siberia (Central Siberian plateau and the mountain ranges extending east of the Lena). The boundary between these two lands is the Yenisei. In Russian ethnographic literature, the Far East also appears as an ecologically and culturally separate province, coinciding with the basin of the Amur (Manchuria) and southern Siberia, of interest to me here.

zation of the state carried out 20 years ago, with the approval of the most important political centres in Moscow, the Siberian communities received, for the first time in their history, broad autonomy. Today, they have a large measure of control over their own internal policies, education, and in some cases even foreign policy (Halemba 1996; Lipiński 2011; Nowicka and Wyszyński 1996; Smyrski 2008; *Wielka Syberia* 2000).

The departure from the Communist ideology in politics and public life, and the weakening of the Marxist paradigm in the social sciences, have contributed to the rise of ideas, attitudes and behavioural patterns that are defined by representatives of the peoples of Siberia as the "national revival". Supporters of objectivist theories have interpreted it primarily as a consequence of the overall social situation in Russia brought about by the political and economic transformations that occurred over the last dozen or so years (Tishkov 1994). According to this paradigm, the "national revival" was a reaction of the non-Russian communities to the nationalities policy of the Soviet state, aimed at the ideological unification of ethnic communities. In turn, representatives of the Siberian peoples, the ethnic leaders who were directly involved in the "national revival", saw it as an ethnic movement aiming to boost their "national dignity". They treated it as a genuine moral revival – of both individuals and entire "indigenous" national groups. From the point of view of the participants in the process, the "rebirth" was a movement that arose at a particular moment in history, and sought to consolidate (and often build from scratch) the sense of national identity among the members of the Siberian peoples.

One of the key themes of the "national revival" phenomenon – in addition to constructing national history and national symbols, and dealing with the demands of universal education in the "ethnic" languages – was the restoration, or rather reformulation, of the clan systems in the realities of post-Soviet Siberia. A clan in southern Siberia most often denotes a group of people who derive from a real or imagined common ancestor and have a common ancestral hill, animal and territory (cf. L'vova *et al.* 1989; Sagalayev 1992; Smyrski 2008). In Soviet ethnography, a narrow definition of clan was predominant, according to which it was viewed as a kinship group and an exogamous form of concluding marriages (cf. Levin 1956).

Clan relations in southern Siberia remained under the influence of various external factors: economic transformations, reorientation of the political and military systems, or changes of boundaries, but they retained their local variety and character. The basic concept of the Altaic ancestral terminology is *söök*, which means bone[4]. During the Soviet period in Altai, kinship ties played an important role both in the collective memory or in specific events of everyday life (for example. during the dividing of meat or giving mutual assistance in grazing) as well as in situations connected with family rituals (especially marriage ceremonies). In Tuva, on the other hand, clans

[4] *Söök* is translated into Russian as a clan.

did not play such a significant role in an individual's identification as they did in Altai and Khakassia. In the Tuvinian language, the word *söök* is also used to denote a clan, but often – especially in central and southern Tuva – it indicates only territorial rather than ancestral affiliation. In Khakassia, *söök* serves both as the word for a clan and as a surname. Thus the same term, depending on the local context, may have different meanings.

Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the issue of clan affiliation – as has already been mentioned – was associated primarily with the belief in common ancestry and the rules of family life stemming from it. In Soviet scholarly discourse it was treated as a cultural relic from the epoch of the feudal society of Tsarist Russia. From the standpoint of this article, it is extremely important that individual clans were not then assigned to any particular administrative territory (though of course there are certain regularities (Köbök or Sagal *sööks* occur mainly in places where Telengits live) and people belonging to the same clan might live in distant valleys, mountain ranges or collective farms. The Soian, Irkit, Kypchak, and Kyrgys clans are to be found in many places in southern Siberia, regardless of whether the people belonging to them declare themselves as Altaians, Telengits, Tuvinians, or Khakases.

A characteristic feature of each *söök* is that it has its own story of its "mythical" beginning. These stories, depending on local conditions, may be different, but always consistently explain the origins of the clan. Members of individual *sööks* show great reverence and respect for the clan's mountain, which they regard not only as their guardian but also as a close relative. Such a mountain has power – it impacts on people's thoughts and behaviour, and also protects them from harm. Altai shamans boast that they received the drum – the basic attribute of rituals, indispensable during the rites of *kamliyane*[5] – from their ancestral mountain. Thanks to this instrument they are in a position to perform rites for members of their clan. The sacred mountains were, and still are, regarded by the people of the given *söök* as special places. One must not climb them, or hunt on their slopes; it is also forbidden to pick berries at their foot or fell trees growing on their slopes. Women cannot come near their husbands' ancestral mountains bareheaded and are also prohibited from climbing them or even saying their names aloud. The clan mountains are often regarded as unusual "central" places, places where the first humans appeared in this world, and are also considered to be the life-giving sources of special energy, equipping people with strength and stamina.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, clan issues in the republics of southern Siberia received a brand new, never encountered before, "modern" dimension. After the fall of the communist state and abolition of the system of collective farms, the ethnic leaders looked at the "rebirth" of clans as an opportunity to resolve the problems

[5] *Kamliyane* is a rite carried out by the shaman. It comes from the word *kam* (Altaian: shaman).

connected with the economic crisis and local-government structures. In Tuva there emerged an idea[6] of setting up independent and self-sufficient clan farms based on the multi-generation family and embracing entire circles of relatives bearing the same name, of common ancestry and from historic clan territory. The search for new rules for the society's self-organisation in Tuva's post-Communist realities involved, among other measures, the institutionalisation of clans. The individual "families" received the legal status of ancestral associations. As a result, they had to take care of the financial situation of all its members, education of the children, as well as the protection of single mothers and destitute members of the clan.

In the Republic of Altai, in turn, the division of the Altaians into *sööks* became an inspiration for laying the groundwork for selecting the local authorities on the basis of the symbolic kinship criterion. In organisational terms, the establishing of local ancestral "self-governments" required recreating the structure of local authorities from the period preceding the October Revolution. This would involve, among others, the restoration of the post of *zaisan* – the clan leader. But this raised the problem of equipping the holder of this post with real prerogatives and responsibilities necessary for him to exercise power. The controversy concerned the decision whether the title of *zaisan* should be hereditary or its holders should be elected in a democratic election by members of the respective clans. There was also disagreement as to whether *zaisans* should have all the necessary administrative powers of attorney (so they would become de facto authorities of the republic), or rather should only play the role of social activists whose work would be mostly of symbolic significance. What is really interesting is that the clans in Altai became legal entities, regulated by the Republic's law "On the clan commonwealth (*zaisanstvo*) of Altaians". This act defines a clan community as

> "*zaisanat,* an autonomous and independent organisation of citizens linked by ties of blood and common interests, created to preserve and develop the traditional forms of lifestyle, culture, economy, and use of nature's riches by the clan community and to protect the rights and interests of the indigenous peoples (...). A *zaisanat* is a historic organisational form of local self-government in Altai" (typescript of the bill 1997).

Tuva's ancestral associations (operating as business entities), Altai's *zaisans* (having legal personality) or Khakassia's network of relatives (having communal bank accounts), are examples of a new dimension in ancestral ties within the "modern"

[6] In 1992, the "concept of state development" for the Republic of Tuva was put forward, bearing the name of *The Family – the Clan – the State.* Its aim was to restore the role played by kinship ties among Tuvinians before the nationalistion of the land, and to raise the economic level of Tuvinian households after the collapse of collective farms. The originator of this concept was a medical doctor, Aibek Soskal, representative of the Tiuliush clan. The project was warmly supported by Tuvinian academic "authorities", among them the historian and Speaker of the republic's parliament, Manna-Ool, and ethnographer Kenin-Lopsan.

nations of southern Siberia. It should be emphasised that the notion "clan" has changed meaning. An analysis of clan issues points to a shift of emphases. In scholarly discourse, descriptions focused on the morphology of clans (their "inner content") such as ancestral histories or ceremonial activities associated with the worship of ancestral mountains still dominate. They appear too external, however and do not get to the heart of the matter. Inspired by Fredrik Barth's proposals, we should look more closely at the actions undertaken by individual clan communities, and how they make use of the legal solutions that appeared in the last decade of the twentieth century. That is why I have suggested looking at the clan issues in southern Siberia from a different perspective – as a form of social organisation of differences. Membership in a clan is not a static creation lying dormant in research reports or studies but it is a dynamic process. Particularly important is the fact that there has been a change of "borders" enclosing individual clans. Clan relations, which – as I mentioned above – used to freely span mountain valleys, after the collapse of the Soviet Union were enclosed physically within the state-administrative boundaries (the Republics of Altai, Tuva and Khakassia) and mentally within the limits of imagination. The inhabitants of this part of Siberia began to talk of "Altaian", "Tuvian" or "Khakassian" clans. Thus, clans started to be "reproduced" within individual nations building their identities in the realities of the post-Communist and post-colonial Russian state. In the "new" political realities of the Russian Federation, clans ceased to be a way of classifying people; they became evocative "national symbols", and – most importantly – were enclosed within the borders of the federative republics of Russia.

MONGOLIA

The existence of boundaries at different levels and their ensuing divisions are an interesting issue when it comes to ethnic relations in Mongolia. Contrary to popular opinion, the Mongols are not a homogeneous nation. Marked differences between groups of Mongol origin became evident during the political transformations initiated in the 1990s. Undoubtedly, Mongolia (the former Mongolian People's Republic, previously also known as Outer Mongolia), was hostage to its geopolitical position between Russia and China (Lattimore 1940). As a result of historical events, the numerous conquests and migrations and above all the political expansion of neighbouring states, the Mongolians living in different countries do not form today what Anderson (1983) described as an imagined community. And yet until the mid-twentieth century Mongols perceived one another – regardless of the country they lived in – as fellow countrymen. All were legitimate Mongols and thus understood the idea of "Pan-Mongolism" evoking the concept of a Great Mongolia – the country which was to embrace all Mongolian communities: both the smaller groups living in what is now

Outer Mongolia and the Mongolians living outside the contemporary Mongolian state. Writing about the different Mongol groups, I have in mind mainly Buryats from the Republic of Buryatia in Russia, Khalkh Mongols and Oirats from Mongolia, and the Mongols from Inner Mongolia in China.

In the period preceding the Communist revolutions in Central Asia, the contacts between these groups were close. The proof of this closeness was the numerous marriages between representatives of the clan aristocracy from different Mongol groups which took place and the pilgrimages to the most important monasteries of Tibetan Buddhism undertaken. As totalitarian ideology began to dominate in the countries in question, these mutual contacts weakened. Clan leaders were murdered, thousands of Buddhist monks lost their lives as a result of repression, and borders were closed. During the Communist period, in the second half of the twentieth century, the belief began to spread in the Mongolian People's Republic that it was the Kalkhas who were the "true" Mongols. They were supposed to represent the quintessence of everything Mongolian.

So how did it come about that the Khalkha, representatives of one of several Mongolian groups, became the dominant group? This was probably because the territory of the modern state of Mongolia partly overlaps with the area historically associated with Khalkha. It is not without significance that most inhabitants of the Khalkha territory declare themselves as Khalkha. Nevertheless, it appears that it was state discourse that contributed significantly to the spread of the idea of ranking the Khalkha above the other Mongols. Mongol researchers (themselves derived from the Khalkha) have presented a series of "proofs" pointing to the central importance of the Khalkha in the history of Mongolia. They argue that Mongolian territory today ,in fact, coincides with the area once inhabited by the ancestors of all Mongols (Gongor 1970). In accordance with an interpretation of the Mongolian rules of succession, it was the Khan's youngest son who was entitled to inherit the ancestral land (*homeland*). It is worth noting that he is the one associated with the hearth (Mongolian: *golomt*); the elder sons leave home and settle in new areas. The symbolic concept of the hearth denotes a genealogical continuity and centrality (Mongolian: *gol*) – after all, it is the youngest son who is the master of the ancestors' yurt. Thus the Mongolian homeland managed by Tolui was called *Golijn Uls* ("core" or "central nation"). It is also mentioned in the *Secret History of the Mongols* (Bulag 1998, 71; *Tajna Historia* 1970, 177, paragraph 269).

Of key importance for the problem of ethnic boundaries in Mongolia were the events surrounding the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in the seventeenth century. Mongolia was then divided into two parts: eastern Mongolia (Khalkha) and Western Mongolia (Oirotia). In Khalkha historiography, written by Khalkha scholars, Oirats (who indeed played a big historic role, as it was their descendant, the famous chieftain Amursana, that raised arms against the Manchu) are consistently marginalised and portrayed as residents of peripheral areas far from the centre of Mongolia. It is also significant

that in Mongolia there is almost no mention of a third significant Mongol group – Khorchins – who live in Inner Mongolia in China[7].

In post-socialist Mongolia, thanks to Khalkha historians, the concept of the Khalkha "centrality" took on an even greater significance. There are several theories that justify the special location of this land. The proponents of one of them argue that the construction of the Erdene Zuu Monastery[8] was an attempt to build a symbolic – political and religious – centre, around which all Mongols could unite. According to another theory, Khalkha's central position was to have been confirmed by the location on its territory of the residence of Zetsundamba Khutugta, the religious leader of all Khalkha Mongols. The residence was to have been located on the site of the former seat of the youngest sons of subsequent khans, whose task it was to guard the family hearth (Bayasgalang 1991). A linguistic hypothesis also appeared indicating the similarity of the words *khalkhai* ("touching something hot", "touching fire") and the *Khalkha* ethnonym. In this interpretation, the word *khal* is synonymous with *gal* (fire), and its author argues that the main task of Khalkha Mongols was to protect the central part of the country, the homeland of all Mongols (the symbolic kernel and hearth – *gal golomt)* (Badral 1994, after: Bulag 1998, 75).

Uradyn Bulag, a Mongolian anthropologist born in Inner Mongolia, who has closely followed debates of this kind, believes that the trend of attributing to Khalkha Mongols a central role in the country's history and casting them as guardians of the state's *gal golomt,* is relatively new. Its characteristic feature is that it applies the contemporary ethnic situation to events from the distant past[9]. Bulag argues that Khalkha historians have for years been trying to invent a vision of history that would show beyond doubt it was the Khalkha who had become the most important group of Mongols, and that they had played a major role in the history of the state (Bulag 1998, 77).

The symbolic position which the Khalkha assign to themselves has had the effect that the representatives of other Mongolian communities tacitly recognise them as the core of all Mongols. Mongols from other groups believe that they share strong kinship ties with the Khalkha and they derive their genealogies from the territories overlapping with the areas of contemporary Khalkha. However, within contemporary Khalkha

[7] Inner Mongolia is a vast province in northern China, which was incorporated into the Manchu state in the first half of the seventeenth century. In view of the fact that it was part of Manchuria, and now of China, it is commonly referred to as Inner Mongolia, as opposed to Outer Mongolia (the former Mongolian People's Republic, Mongolia today), which is outside the administrative borders of China.

[8] Erdene Zuu is one of the most important Buddhist monasteries in the history of Mongolia. It is located near the ruins of Karakorum, the historic capital of the Mongol Empire founded by Genghis Khan.

[9] This type of instrumental treatment of history is characteristic of the theory of invented traditions. "Invented traditions" appear frequently in situations where a rapid transformation of the society weakens or destroys its social patterns on the basis of which the "old" traditions were designed, and this phenomenon takes place where there are substantial and rapid changes in the range of the state's actions (Hobsbawm 1983).

discourse, this relationship is viewed differently. Its participants hold without doubt that the Khalkha are the only "true", "indigenous", Mongols. Those who subjectively consider themselves to be Mongols but are derived from other groups, are treated by "Khalkha nationalists" as half-Mongols.

The promotion of "pure", "indigenous" Khalkha is therefore both a reflection of today's version of Mongolian nationalism and a deliberate reconstruction of history performed, among others, at the request of the Soviet protector (Bulag 1998, 78). After all, the intention of the Soviet ideologues was to break all ties between the Mongol groups living in the Soviet Union, Mongolia and China. It is worth noting that in the 1920s the Russians strongly intervened with the Mongol ties of the Buryats living in the Soviet Union. They launched a political campaign, as a result of which these people started to define themselves not in terms of the Mongol idiom but according to the notion of Buryat national identity. The Mongol script was prohibited and replaced with the Buryat "official" language, written in Cyrillic, based on the Khori dialect and difficult to understand for Mongols. Mongolian vocabulary, in so far as it was possible, was eliminated from the "new" language. The Selenga dialect, widespread since time immemorial on the Russian-Mongolian border (and closest to the Khalkha dialect), lost its importance. These practices made it difficult for Mongols from Mongolia and Buryats to communicate – their dialects are no longer as mutually comprehensible as they were before.

Efforts to separate the Mongolian and Buryat identities were also undertaken in other fields. Until the 1950s, Soviet archaeologists kept making discoveries that attempted to prove that the two main Buryat groups, the western and eastern Buryats, had different ethnogeneses. They argued that the western Buryats were not a Mongolian group but were of Turkish origin, and had throughout history been subjected to intensive Mongolisation. A crucial moment in the creation of the "new" Buryat identity was the year 1958. It was then that the adjective "Mongol" was removed from the administrative name of the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In this way, the Soviet Buryat Republic was established, and the Buryats officially became a separate nation. According to Bulag, the Soviet wizards of ethnic engineering spared no effort (in Russia, Mongolia and China) to deprive the people of their common Pan-Mongolian cultural and ethnic background. They effectively hampered their mutual communication and prevented situations in which representatives of various Mongol groups in different countries might unite for a common cause (Bulag 1998, 77–78).

The problem of the existence of a state border blocking contacts between the representatives of Mongolian groups is particularly evident in the relations that exist between the Mongols living in Inner Mongolia in China and Outer Mongolia (the Mongolian People's Republic). Despite the border existing for 300 years, the "internal" Mongols still strongly identify with Mongolia, which they treat as their historic and emotional homeland. They feel a lot more attached to it than to the Chinese state, of

which they are citizens but which they view as "foreign". For many of the Mongols from China the very existence of an independent Mongolia has always been a point of reference – Mongolia was their vision of the ideal homeland, which for political reasons they could not visit. In the days of Communism, many Mongols living in China felt an almost mystical need to be close to their lost homeland. Therefore, after 1990, they began to visit the country in large numbers, treating it as their native land. For some, it was a kind of religious pilgrimage to their roots, while others wanted to renew the bonds of kinship and culture. After the Mongolian-Chinese border was opened, they discovered to their great surprise that this attitude was unreciprocated. The Mongols from Outer Mongolia did not, and still do not, feel such a strong bond with their compatriots from the south; they not only see no need for contacts with them but even look at them as inferior and not quite legitimate Mongols. Such a negative attitude has provoked frustration and regret. Uradyn Bulag experienced such emotions because, even though he feels himself to be a Mongol and treats Mongolia as his homeland, he realised after his stay in Ulan Bator during his first visit to Mongolia in 1990 that he was not a "Mongol" but an "internal Mongol", a citizen of China. With regret he felt he was being treated by his compatriots from the north as Chinese (Bulag 1998, 5). It was as harrowing an experience for him, as it must be for other Mongols from China who, after crossing the state border, feel equivalent feelings.

Thus the Khalkha have effectively monopolised the right to "Mongolian identity". It is now enclosed within the borders of the state which, according to them, is a worthy, and the only, successor of the old Mongol Empire. What is more, in the public domain the state brilliantly promotes the image of national and historical unity. However, this national unity does not extend beyond the national borders. A foreigner visiting Mongolia, from the first hours of his stay, is left in no doubt that he has arrived in a country in which "Mongolian culture" plays an important role for its inhabitants. At each step the newcomer comes into contact with "traditional Mongolian folk culture", listens to "traditional Mongolian music", buys genuine folk artefacts cheaply, or pictures showing scenes from the life of nomads, painted using the "traditional" technique. At the same time, he is continuously being bombarded with references to the medieval past. In the urban iconosphere, in the media and in publications, there is constant emphasis on the links between the modern state of Mongolia and Great Mongolia and its historic ruler. When travelling by taxi from Genghis Khan airport one passes the statue of Genghis Khan standing in front of the parliament building, and in a restaurant one may have some *Genghis Khan* beer or a glass of *Genghis Khan* vodka, and then pay for the privilege with banknotes bearing the image of Genghis Khan. Tourists coming to Mongolia are impressed by the Mongols' attachment to their country. It is harder for them to notice, however, that as a result of a specific alliance of socialist and national discourse, the Mongols outside Mongolia find themselves on the periphery of "Mongolian identity". Thus, the Mongols living in Mongolia are "pure",

"genuine" Mongols, while the Mongols from China are deprived of this privilege and are at best treated as half-Mongols. The above examples show that these differences are constructed politically and discursively. They do not refer to subjective categories or the cultural "morphology" of particular groups, but are conceptualised as a result of changing political, ideological and state configurations.

CHINA

In Inner Mongolia, the northern province of China, the most numerous national communities are Mongols and Han Chinese. The presence of the latter, however, has only become particularly evident since the Cultural Revolution and the policies of sinicization, noticeable in all parts of the People's Republic of China. The two communities differ in almost every respect, but what I find particularly significant is that the Mongols and the Chinese living on the same territory "see" different "landscapes".

The principles of the social organisation of differences in Mongolian-Chinese relations will become easier for us to understand when we consider an example from the vicinity of the Mona Uul mountain range in Inner Mongolia. The Mongols are herdsmen[10] who until the 1960s lived in scattered groups, leading a mobile, nomadic lifestyle. The Chinese, on the other hand, are predominantly settled farmers, who live mostly in villages. The Mongols are mostly Buddhists, while the Chinese are rather indifferent to religion, even though their ancestors were followers of Taoism. Despite participating in a shared space, the Mongols and the Chinese from the Mona Uul rarely interact with each other. Although they live in spatial proximity, their different lifestyles and different worldviews perpetuate the deeply rooted differences between the two groups, which have persisted despite centuries of living on the same territory.

To present in more detail the process of conceptualising ethnic borders in the context of landscape, I will refer to a study by the British anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (2001), who at the end of the twentieth century did fieldwork in the vicinity of the Buddhist Mergen Süm monastery, just north of the bend of the Yellow River. At a distance of 25 km from the river (and parallel to it) rises the rocky range of the Mona Uul. An external observer will easily discern here a series of contrasting ecological zones: a range of high mountains with steep, craggy peaks, inaccessible caves, and numerous springs; extending behind them are sandy steppes, then stony pastures, and finally the fertile fields in the valley of the Yellow River. The Mongols, who for hundreds of years have roamed the area with their herds, are particularly sensitive to the environment that surrounds them. They are aware of the dynamics

[10] The local Mongols recognise the areas north of the Mona Uul as the historic homeland of Mongolian shepherds.

of the physical location and experience directly the changes in the terrain, weather conditions and strong winds in the area. Climatic factors directly affect the perception of the space in which people graze herds. That is why certain ritual objects, such as stone mounds – *ovoo* – or Buddhist suburgans, are located in specific places. They affect the weather conditions, "restrain" or even "turn back" inclement weather, and influence supernatural forces. Such a dense network of various "ritual" spots stems from the fact that the mountains, caves, rivers, trees, streams, steep rocks and stones are treated by the Mongols as the seats of invisible forces and "ghosts". The Chinese and the Mongols imagine the spiritual aspects of the natural world differently, and even if there is some overlap (members of both nations in the region worship the surrounding mountains), their ritual practices and the whole conceptualisation of worship are different (Humphrey 2001).

An important edifice located directly south of the Mona Uul and strongly linked with the conceptualisation of space is the so-called White Wall – the remains of a barrier built a long time before the birth of Christ. The White Wall consists of a double line of large boulders, the space between filled with hard-packed whitish earth. Near the flowing river, the wall is broken and there are elevated quadrilateral structures on either bank, which seem to have served as forts and signalling posts.

Not far from the wall, on the "Mongolian" side, stands the Mergen monastery, plundered by the Chinese army in 1913[11]. Another military occupation of the monastery buildings, this time by the Chinese Communist army, took place in 1960. The monastery was occupied by the People's Liberation Army during the Sino-Soviet conflict. Military commanders decided to turn the monastery into a forward base for operations against the USSR[12]. Thereupon, a decision was made to build a radar station on top of Shar Oroi – the highest peak of the Mona Uul, a sacred mountain worshipped by the Mongols. To make room for the installation, the soldiers tried to blow up the upper section of the peak to be able to deploy the equipment. But the attempt to blow up the summit ended in failure and the death of several soldiers. As a result, the military command decided that the base should be built on a nearby mountain, whose shape was better suited to installing the radar. The Mongols living in the vicinity had no doubt that the death of the Chinese soldiers was a consequence of the wrath of the Mona Chan deity, the "host ghost" of Mount Shar Oroi.

In 1983, another event connected with the monastery took place, which the local Mongols describe as "supernatural". One day, a powerful gust of wind knocked down the front part of a wall built around the base by the Chinese army. For a few old monks who lived in nearby villages, it was a clear sign from the heavens. For reasons known only to themselves, they had anticipated that something unexpected like this

[11] The military operation was a consequence of the local monks proclaiming loyalty to Outer Mongolia.
[12] At that time, the Red Army troops were stationed in Mongolia, near the border with China.

could happen. As soon as the wall collapsed, they took with them some sacred objects – sacred ash urns owned by the last, the eighth, reincarnation of Mergen Gegeen (whose seat had been this monastery) and forced their way through a hole in the wall into the monastery, ignoring the protests of the stupefied soldiers. The lamas placed the ash urns in what had been the Temple of the Ash Urns and walked away. Nine years later, the military command decided to close down the radar station, and in 1994 the army vacated the monastery, although nominally the complex remains army property until today (Humphrey 2001, 58–59).

The story above perfectly illustrates how differently certain structures can be perceived by representatives of different national groups. Evidently, "walls" have different meanings for the Mongols and the Chinese. In tourist publications on China, a frequent theme is the Great Wall. This historic structure, which is permanently inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, is often interpreted as a boundary separating the barbaric North from the world of civilization identified with the Middle Kingdom. For the Chinese people living in the vicinity of the Mona Uul, the barely visible White Wall fits well into the concept of a wall as a frontier or a borderline. However, they do not have in mind the famous Great Wall, but certain spatial systems denoted by the term *kou-li* (within the gate) and *kou-wai* (outside the gate). The "gate" does not refer to a particular passage in a wall, but is a spatial metaphor that best captures the belief that certain regions were "inside" the real China, and others were "outside". For the Chinese, walls and gates mean order, security and control, regardless of where they have been placed. The Mongols are very well aware of this, identifying the fall of a wall as a clear sign of supernatural intervention in the local social order, and that is why the event in question reverberated so strongly among them.

The Mona Uul mountains are clearly viewed by the Chinese as outside conceptual China. The Han Chinese (despite the existence of the White Wall and other such local structures dating back to the 3rd millennium BC), perceive the whole region as a border area, awaiting economic development. As a confirmation of this view we can point to the different names given to the same villages, depending on the ethnic affiliation of the callers. The Chinese call the local villages Heliangdi ("wetlands"), emphasising their usefulness for economic activity (mainly growing crops). This can be contrasted with the Mongols' belief that it is their native pastoral land, which they call San-ding Zanfang ("Three Yurts").

For the Mongols, the White Wall is also relevant, but attention is also paid to aspects of another kind. For the Chinese the wall is about whether something is "inside" or "outside" a given space, while the Mongols perceive it in spiritual terms. They draw attention to the fact that the wall was built at such a frantic pace that many builders died daily, so for them the bodies of the dead are its foundation. Mongolian residents claim that the whitish earth, after which the structure was named, is no ordinary earth but has medicinal properties. They believe that the small stones from

the wall, pounded into powder and drunk with water, are an effective cure for paralysis of the body (Humphrey 2001, 59–60).

It is worth pointing out another major difference concerning the conceptualising of space. While the Chinese try to fence in individual buildings or to separate territories, the Mongols leave them unfenced. The places which are important for them are located in a kind of "open" space. According to the local Mongols, the Mergen monastery is protected not by the erected wall but by the path *Gorio* along which pilgrims walk around the buildings while saying *mantras* and setting their prayer wheels in motion. Similarly, the Mongol mounds *owoo* – important elements of the Mongolian landscape – must not under any circumstances be enclosed, but instead must stand "out in the open", clearly visible from a distance. Their protection is not a physical fence, but a "sacred barrier" built on prayer and the laying of offerings by the faithful walking round the stone "altar".

The "Mongol space" is thus living and dynamic, while the "Chinese space" is static and fenced in. It seems thus that one can talk about the differing geographies of the Mongols and the Chinese. In the aforementioned example, the Chinese people's military and strategic as well as economic relations with the earth collided with the Mongols' "landscape" in which symbolic and supernatural relations prevail. These two conceptualisations met on the occasion of a gust of spring wind. What was crucial was the political and social context of the event. This example captures perfectly the nature of the social organisation of the differences between the communities of the Mongols and Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have adopted the theoretical concept proposed by Fredrik Barth, in order to focus in my study of ethnic boundaries on the problems of the social organisation of differences rather than on the morphology of individual groups. I believe that this approach, despite the passage of time, can still be a useful analytical tool when dealing with ethnic issues. Barth suggested that the researcher should not focus on constructing definitions of an ideal type or on creating yet another typology of groups, or models of social relations. Instead, he proposed an analysis of the processes that contribute to the formation and continuance of ethnic groups. In this way, he shifted the centre of gravity from the study of morphology and history of the various groups towards studies on ethnic borders and their persistence (Barth 1969, 10). And it is this kind of perspective that I have used in the interpretation of empirical data derived from ethnographic research. By analysing individual case studies, I have been able to expose the multifaceted nature of the ethnic boundaries that exist in southern Siberia, Mongolia and northern China.

As far as southern Siberia is concerned, I have described what is being done within national groups by members of various clan communities. I wanted in particular to show the dynamics of changes associated with the clans. The "borders" of individual clans have changed: clan membership, which was not limited to certain mountain valleys, was "enclosed" after the collapse of the Soviet Union within the territories of the given administrative republics. In the context of Mongolia, I was interested in how differences within a national group are constructed politically, ideologically and discursively, and how these distinctions are conceptualised when political transformations take place. In the case of northern China, on the other hand, I have tried to argue that the social differences on the level of ethnicity are the result of perceiving landscape differently, with the Mongols and Chinese having "separate" participation in the space.

Referring to such categories as identity, kinship, space and landscape has allowed me to go beyond the stereotypes and superstitions which usually predominate in studies on issues of ethnicity. An analysis of the above-mentioned issues – in the spirit of Barth's theory – can better contribute to understanding the mechanisms of constructing and maintaining ethnic boundaries in different parts of the world than hermetic definitions of an ideal type.

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