

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GORALS IN THE SLOVAK-POLISH BORDERLAND¹

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Abstract: *V príspevku sa venujem problematike identifikácie sa obyvateľov slovensko-poľského pohraničia s goralskou kultúrou. Reprezentácie, ktoré sú prítomné v týchto spoločnostiach sa nazývajú v sociálnych vedách esenciálnymi a konštruktivistickými. V štúdiu sa venujem analýze týchto reprezentácií a prítomnosti autostereotypu gorala v tomto areáli z pohľadu kultúrnej antropológie a súčasných teoretických rámcov, ktoré sa vzťahujú k tejto problematike. Zároveň prepájam emický a etický pohľad na tieto sociálne reprezentácie, čím sa snažím vytvoriť čo najkomplexnejší pohľad na spôsoby identifikácie sa goralov s vlastnou sociálnou a regionálnou skupinou.*

Key words: *gorali, identifikácia, autostereotyp, Slovensko, Poľsko*

Introduction²

The identification issue, dealt with by my study, is currently one of the hot topics of the social sciences³. Research of the Goral culture and history is a popular topic, in the Polish science and literature in particular. The Gorals living in the Slovak-Polish borderland attract many scientists from various scientific branches – ethnology, history or linguistics⁴. The Gorals are in terms of ethnology deemed

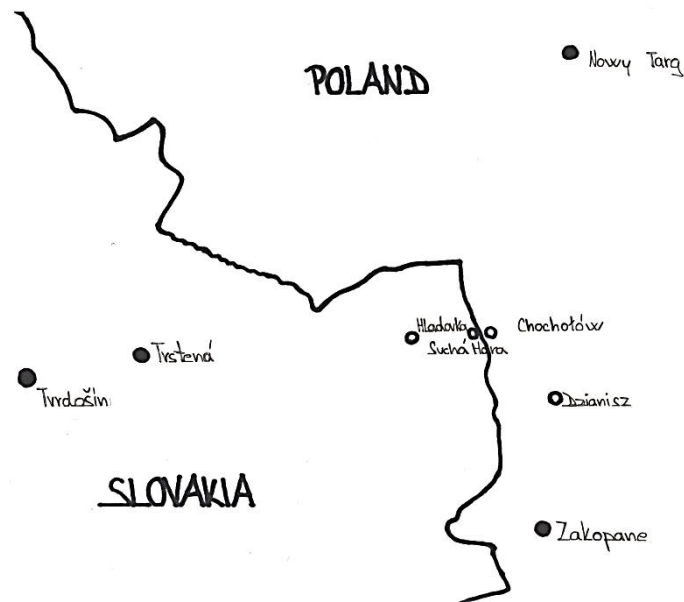
¹ The study is based on the author's diploma work *Goral Identity – Impact of the State Border*, defended at the Department of Ethnology and Museology of the Comenius University in 2014, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Kornélia Jakubíková, PhD.

² I do not use the commonly used English word *highlander* (sg.)/*highlanders* (pl.) to denote inhabitants of the highlands. I prefer the Slovak word *Goral*(sg.)/*Gorali*(pl.) used by the inhabitants of the studied areas to denote themselves. The word has an equivalent in the Polish language *Góral* (sg.)/*Górali* (pl.).

³ In the last decade, dozens of social science publications on the identity issues have been published. A number of the publications are referred to by R. Brubaker and F. Cooper in the work *Beyond „Identity“* in its part called *The „Identity“ crisis in the social sciences*.

⁴ At present, the research is focused mostly on the issues of cultural identification of the inhabitants, globalization processes in the region as well as the issues of the Goral dialect. The Goral regions belong to the areas with a live dialect which is in terms of linguistics linked to the Malopolska dialects and in which the features of the Slovak and of the Polish language are intertwined, with the Polish prevailing. As an example we may refer to a series mapping folk culture of the Gorals in Poland. The series is published by U. Janicka-Krzywdą. Published so far: *Kultura ludowa Górali*

an ethnographic group with members living on both sides of the Slovak-Polish state border. (Luther 2005). Within Slovakia they live in the regions of Kysuce, Orava, Liptov and Spiš. In Poland, the Gorals inhabit the area of the Slovak-Polish state border along almost its entire length. The study is targeted on the Gorals living in the upper Orava and the Polish Podhale. An intensive colonization of the studied area based on the Wallachian law started in the course of the 15th century. Until the first half of the 20th century the inhabitants were occupied predominantly by animal farming and forest works. The most radical changes in the life style of the Gorals came with the WW2. Social conditions changed in both countries and the Slovak side was hit by industrialization and collectivization of the agricultural sector. The traditional life style of the Slovak Gorals was significantly disrupted.



Despite the fact that research of the Goral ethnographic group has been paid a significant scientific attention, there are topics which have been left almost untouched so far. One of them is a comparative research of the Goral identification along the both sides of the Slovak-Polish state border that is the subject of my study. I understand identification in compliance with R. Brubaker and F. Cooper as being individual and contradictory to a generalized determination of specific social groups. According to the authors, identification is a social phenomenon perceived both objectively and subjectively while being the basic condition of the functioning communities' existence. The inhabitants declare their identification through representations. Representation is a collection of certain ideas and values

Babiogórskych (2010), Kultura ludowa Górali Orawskich (2011), Kultura ludowa Górali Spiskich (2012), Kultura ludowa Górali Zagórzańskich (2013).

of an individual or a community. In this context the term refers to two meanings. Dan Sperber (1996) differentiates between a mental and a public representation. The mental representation is a personal representation, present only in the mind but not in the communication process. The mental representations themselves are not significant for the research but it is rather their spreading, distribution and their acquisition in the social groups which have the expected significance. However, this type of representation is not a social phenomenon. It becomes a phenomenon only after the representation is communicated, when it becomes accessible in a social relation. This is when the mental representation transforms to a public one and becomes a part of the communication process.

The key assumption of my research was that the individual representations of identifications would exhibit significant generational differences. I also assumed that the essential representations of identifications would be shared mainly by the older generation and the constructivist principles of identification would be shared mostly by the young generation. I assumed the middle generation would be sharing both principles of identification in various degrees. My research questions were targeted on three areas. The first question was: in what extent the Goral auto-stereotype was present in the representations of the Gorals and what its expressions were like. My other questions inquired which representations refer to the principle of essentialism and which are related to the principles of constructivism.

My study treats the issue of auto-stereotype of a Goral, principles of essentialism and constructivism in the Goral identifications while interpreting the research data through the theories of R. Brubaker and F. Cooper. The theories address the current identity issues. The theory released in the book *Beyond „Identity“* (2000) interprets data related to the issues of essentialism and constructivism in the Goral representations. I also refer to the theory of F. Barth and his work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). I draw on the empirical material that I collected during my field research in the Slovak Upper Orava villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka and the Polish villages of Chochołów and Dzianisz which are located in the Polish region of Podhale. I conducted my research in the course of eight weeks on the sample of 115 respondents of the Slovak and Polish origins. The research was divided into three stages⁵. 36 respondents of 14 to 92 years of age were interviewed in Slovakia (men – 14 to 92 years old, women – 18 to 88 years old). In Poland, 79 respondents of 19 to 92 years of age (men – between 25 and 92 years of age, women – between 19 and 90 years of age) were interviewed. I used the method of unstructured and semi structured interview, participative observation (religious and family feasts) and the vignette method.

The researched terrain is a borderland, demarcation line of which was changed several times during the 20th century⁶. In 1918 the line was changed for the first

⁵ In January 2013 I spent one week in Suchá Hora, from August till September 2013 I spent five weeks in the village of Chochołów and Dzianisz and in the following February 2014 I conducted a two weeks research in the villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka.

⁶ Until 1918 the border was dividing Poland from Hungary. Between 1772 and 1918 the Podhale represented an administrative part of Halič, as a result of the Austrian annexation of the Polish territory.

time due to the fall of the Austro Hungarian Empire and establishment of the independent Czechoslovakia and Poland. The issue was finally fixed and resolved by the council of ambassadors in Spa by which the disputed territory was annexed by the Polish Republic against the will of majority of the inhabitants in 1920 (Šimončič 2003). Consequently the border was changed in 1924 when the villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka were again annexed by Czechoslovakia.

In 1938 the villages of Hladovka and Suchá Hora became the reason to dispute between Poland and Czechoslovakia. It resulted from the disappointment of the Polish government of the consequences of the Munich negotiations. On November 1, 1938 the Poles claimed annexation of some villages in Spiš, Kysuce and Orava. The researched Orava villages were among them. The Polish efforts resulted in annexation of Suchá Hora and Hladovka. The annexation lasted until September 1, 1939 when the Slovak and German troops entered the villages and reintegrated them again with Czechoslovakia.⁷ During its temporary disappearance the villages belonged to the Slovak State. The villages were annexed by the Czechoslovak Republic until the Slovak “military” State ceased to exist. The latest change in the area was implemented in 1993. Although the demarcation line was not altered, the border was due to the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic officially changed from the Czech-Polish to the Slovak-Polish state border.

The historic events had significantly determined identification processes and interpersonal relationships among the inhabitants of the Slovak-Polish borderland in the past. At present we can observe tendencies of a “memory revitalization” and development of post memory narrations, i.e. memory of the remote generations which have not witnessed the events.

These refer to the issue of the Polish annexations which has influenced construction of the local identities within this region. They reflect in the Goral auto-stereotype itself, as well as in the principles of essentialism and constructivism which are present in identification of the Gorals with the local group and culture (Bagin 2014).

Auto-stereotype of a Goral in the Slovak – Polish Borderland

The research of identifications is accompanied by the issues of stereotypes present in the researched community. E. Krekovičová (2005) defines stereotype as a standardized idea of certain human groups. It is a simple model for representation of an intricately complex and heterogeneous “mass” which refers to a limited number of attributes of all its members. It deals with human ideas/perceptions of themselves, their own group and of members of the other groups.

The first category of stereotypes refers to hetero-stereotypes that are spontaneously created and functioning pictures with a significant inclination to ambivalence. These are the stereotypes of the other individuals or groups. They are characterized by insufficient knowledge of “the others” but also of “the in-group members” and of the whole (e.g. ethnic, regional) group. The second category of stereotypes

⁷ The route was used by the troops conquering the Polish territory for the Third Empire.

refers to stereotypes of one's own group. These stereotypes have usually positive connotations. An auto-stereotype is created by a group and individuals through comparison of oneself to the others, through emphasizing the positive features of oneself and one's own group which tend to be perceived as contradictory to the features of the other individuals or groups.

The crucial research questions of the Goral identification is the question of the Goral auto-stereotype. My research implies that hetero-stereotypes do not form identification of the Gorals to the extent that the auto-stereotypes do. Therefore the focus of my study is exclusively the Goral auto-stereotype.

The auto-stereotype has been influenced by different social and historical circumstances along both sides of the border. However, it is present in Podhale as well as in the Slovak Orava. To discover the reason for the construction of the Goral auto-stereotype in Podhale we need to analyze the existence of the Goral myth in this region. The term "Goral myth" is a construct that had originated in the environment of the Polish intelligence and it has been significantly reflected in the science of ethnology⁸. It refers to substantially auto-stereotypical and positively hetero-stereotypical thinking of members of the Goral ethnographic group. As the research was conducted on the Slovak as well as the Polish side of the state border I could recognize significant distinctions in representations of the Gorals related to the topic. In order to understand the existence or non-existence of the Goral myth thoroughly we need to analyze the situation in both researched regions separately.

The Goral myth had been constructed in the course of the 19th century in Zakopane and its surroundings. Zakopane, located in the Polish Podhale was, in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, a center of tourism in Poland. Apart from the noble inhabitants of Poland the town was visited also by the Polish intelligence searching for physical and mental perfection of the local people following the spirit of J.G. Herder's ideas. The local culture was considered a relic of the ancient Polish culture which has been preserved in the forest environment, away from the civilization until nowadays. They deemed the local Goral culture a cultural relic (Pisera 2013). The Polish intelligence planned to spread the Podhale material culture via art and literary works to the whole territory of Poland and to build a center of the Polish national activities under the Tatras. Although the plan was never been fully fulfilled a unique architectural style based on the folk art of Gorals in Podhale has been created. These cultural activities attracted to the region under the Tatras many visitors from the entire Poland. Making hikes in the Tatras became a trendy spending of the free time. The Tatra "expeditions" organized by Tytus Chalubiński became the most popular. The walks were joined by dozens of people. These were not only the visitors to Zakopane, but also the

⁸ The publication of Janina Radziszewska entitled *Biblioteka opowieści – Wizerunek górali tatrzańskich w piśmiennictwie polskim XIX wieku*. Wrocław. 2009 presents various materials proving that the Goral myth was being created already in the 19th century by means of literary texts. The Goral myth has been recently studied by Małanicz-Przybylska, M. in her study *Góralczyzna istnieje...?* (2013)

locals – mountain guides, local musicians and dancers. The walks took several days and the nights were spent in tents. The experience with the mountain guides and musicians accompanying visitors from all over of Poland, who were extremely physically proficient and bound to the nature gave birth to the myth of the Goral. The locals, with the exception of the above mentioned persons, did not go to the mountains. Visitors thus used to meet only a small group of the local inhabitants. Upon their behavior and characteristics they generalized on the rest of the local inhabitants (Pisera 2013).

Myth of the Goral which originated in the environment was accurately entitled by Ludwik Kamiński (1992: 3) a myth of a „free son of the Tatras“, an independent, hardworking, proud, joyful, courageous, smart and reasonable man. Thus the myth of a „good savage“ in the local environment of Poland has been constructed (Małanicz Przybylska 2013: 172). Domestication of the myth was in the 19th century emphasized by fact that cultural activities performed by the Polish intelligence were perceived and processed by the local inhabitants. They figured out that their local culture, usual and common, was by some of the groups of the natives deemed unique⁹. We may assume that the locals had not paid any extra attention to it at the beginning. But in the course of the many decades the Polish intelligence has constructed the contemporary perception of the region, the Gorals and their world. A Goral is even today a favorite hero. It is necessary to point out that if compared to the past, the perception is less frequent¹⁰. The Podhale inhabitants had felt for and believed in the culture constructed by the Polish intelligence which had a great impact on “awakening” of the Gorals. Due to the above mentioned reasons it is possible to state that the contemporary Goral culture is a construct created within specific circumstances and with respect to specific goals. (Małanicz- Przybylska 2013: 173). My research implies that the reflection of the myth with the Podhale Gorals tends to argue that it includes a real reflection of the Goral culture. The historic and cultural memory that is handed over as a part of the family tradition often refers to a constructed past (Bačová 1996: 9).

The Slovak Goral villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka have never constructed a Goral myth of the Podhale type. The reasons may be various. One of the main ones might be the fact that Gorals did not appear as the heroes of the literary works in the 19th century in Poland¹¹. We may agree with K. Laučíková Dugast (2013: 203), who claims that one of the reasons might be the fact that in Slovakia a strong mythization and idealization of a highway man, an abstract lad from under the Tatras (not referring to a Goral though) which was recorded by the Slovak literature in the same period as the mythization of Gorals in the Polish literature prevailed. It was caused by many circumstances. Apart from the others, also by the fact that

⁹ The Gorals' views on their own culture are traceable in many itineraries and ethnographic records. Majority of them are released through the works of J. Radziszewska (2009).

¹⁰ Especially in comparison with information from itineraries from the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.

¹¹ Many materials on the process of the construction and maintenance of the Goral myth can be found in publication of Janina Radziszewska entitled *Biblioteka opowieści – Wizerunek górali tatrzańskich w piśmiennictwie polskim XIX wieku*. Wrocław. 2009

the area was in the 19th century not particularly attractive for the Slovak national representatives. They mentioned Gorals only occasionally, mostly with respect to the local dialect.

All the collected facts imply that in contrast to the Polish Podhale where the myth was constructed and has survived until today, in the Goral areas of the Slovak Orava area it does not exist.

A Goral myth construction assumes its reflection not only in the national culture but also among the Gorals themselves. The reflection manifests through an appellative auto-stereotype of a Goral that is present on both sides of the border.

The Goral auto-stereotype in Podhale was constructed, apart from other factors, also under the influence of a Goral myth. Geographic location of the areas inhabited by the Gorals, i.e. location under the Tatras, is one of the factors. According to H. Ehrlich (1973) a stereotype of this type can be perceived as one of the aspects of the community members' collective consciousness. Auto-stereotype is a part of the common heritage that is handed over from generation to generation. Adoption of the stereotype is according to H. Ehrlich a subject to existence in a community.

Categories, referring to the Goral auto-stereotype are identical on both sides of the border. They draw on everyday life emphasizing phenomena such as hard work which are shared but exist also as individual convictions on the characteristics of one's own group raising awareness of one's own value in the community. The mechanism results in the feeling of opposition against the "others" or "alien" (Miluska 2007: 16).

The research conducted in the Slovak-Polish borderland proves that Gorals often describe how they differ from the others in what way their world views differ from the views of the *ceperi*¹² or *lords*. Usually it was not necessary to raise this question directly. They reported on the issue anyway. It proves that perception of their own group is one of the key issues of their lives. I think that it might be caused by the tourism in Podhale and the frequent contacts with the others which make them define and point out specifics of their own group. On the other side of the border, the Gorals often get in daily contacts with the non-Gorals as there are only two Slovak Goral villages here against which they define by auto-stereotypical perception of their own group.

The auto-stereotypical perceptions of one's own group have many common features along both sides of the border. The Gorals see themselves mostly as hardworking people and they demonstrate it by many examples from their everyday life in the past and at present. The Podhale Gorals refer to themselves as hardworking in comparison to the tourists or people from the town¹³. On the other side, Gorals from the Slovak Orava stress their diligence as opposed to the characteristics of inhabitants from the non-Goral villages: „*The Gorals have always been hard-working people. Life here has never been as easy as in the lowlands. A work had*

¹² *Ceper* – in the Goral dialect refers to a non-Goral.

¹³ An interesting testimony states: „*The tourists today are not what they used to be. They all like to sleep until noon and then they are to ask if they manage to conquer the Červené vrchy (Red Mountains) or Morské oko (Sea Eye)! (Resp.: a female, 67 years, Dzianisz)*“

to be done on the field. It's all rocks here and the fields are small. It's not like down there.¹⁴“ An interesting report states that the village community had its own evaluation criteria on these facts: „A Goral never puts the gloves on, not even in winter when working with frozen chains. That would be a shame“¹⁵. Similar tendencies are reflected also in the fact that “even when the winter was the strongest, it would be a shame to tie up my *serdak*¹⁶, one had to resist that winter!¹⁷“

Apart from the fact that Gorals consider themselves for hardworking people they also declare to be physically strong men and women who can take any challenge or adversity: „Gorals are people whipped up by life who can make it through any situation.¹⁸“ The auto-stereotypical perception is understandable since a lot of my respondents had to go over a number of harsh situations and they did so “with their heads up”. Justification comes from both sides of the border in many numerous examples. They refer to the WW2 in Podhale and the last year of the war in the Slovak Orava when the front stopped near the villages for a couple of weeks and the battles between the Soviets and the German troops took place as well as to the era when the cooperative was founded in Suchá Hora and Hladovka¹⁹.

Work is the main factor forming the auto-stereotype of a Goral on both sides of the border. It is related to the living conditions of the Gorals in the past and at present. I would like to point at another auto-stereotype element present in the reflection of the Gorals' typical attributes. Gorals often claim that they are *honorowy*²⁰ people. The attribute is on one hand perceived as a positive, on the other as a negative. The difference stems from the word's semiotics. The older generation claims that Gorals are not *honorowy* people because they understand the word in the sense of an excessive self pride, stubbornness or assertiveness at any cost. The middle and younger generation within its reflection of the attribute acknowledges that Gorals are *honorowy* people while as an example they use behavior of the older generation in certain life situations. They declare the attribute a positive as it had helped Gorals to overcome various hard life situations. The reflection of the attribute includes comparisons which present Gorals as courageous, fearless and proud *nation*. A comparative approach to the occurrence of the myth along the both sides of the border shows that its form in Podhale is the same as in the Slovak Orava.

¹⁴ Resp.: a female 73 years, Suchá Hora

¹⁵ Inf.- a male, 81 years, Suchá Hora

¹⁶ *Serdak* – part of the traditional male costume. It is a vest form the sheep skin and wool, decorated with embroidery in rich.

¹⁷ Inf. – a male, 81 years, Suchá Hora

¹⁸ Inf. A male, 65 years, Hladovka

¹⁹ The era of the establishment of the cooperative in 1976 was a critical period in Suchá Hora and Hladovke history. A Suchá Hora inhabitant says: „It was like a war here! (Inf.- a male, 68 years, Suchá Hora)“ The locals protested against the cooperative. Many of them protected their fields with their own bodies by lying down in front of the tractors leveling the metes between the fields. Mortality of the older inhabitants went up. According to my informants, the people were dying of sorrow as they deemed their fields the heritage from their ancestors and fulfilled the meaning of their lives. They could not imagine a life without *ojcovizne*.

²⁰ *Honor* – in the Goral dialect it has more connotations, most of which designate honor and pride.

I would like to point at the generally known image of Gorals as of deeply religious people. However, Gorals themselves reflected this fact very little. Faith and religiosity were not mentioned on a frequent basis. It does not mean that they are not a religious community. The opposite is true. The depth and intensity of the religious life of Gorals which shapes their lives could have been observed by means of participative observation of various holidays not only in the churches or other official places but also in families along both sides of the border line. I think that religiosity was not referred to as a typical characteristics of the Gorals because it is considered an ordinary and obvious issue, so no reflection is needed. I have come to this conclusion because these were mostly representatives of the middle and younger generation who marked religiosity an inherent attribute of Gorals, those who due to their general experience and knowledge understand the uniqueness of preservation of the religious life related to the Catholic faith.

The above mentioned facts imply that the Goral auto-stereotype is present in the reflections of Gorals on both sides of the border in similar connotations. The key difference is occurrence of the Goral myth reflection in Podhale that is not present in the Slovak Orava. It is a consequence of a different role of the region in Poland in the 19th century. Existence of the Goral myth determined construction of the Goral auto-stereotype in Podhale. The auto-stereotype of a Goral in the Slovak Orava was influenced by the perception of the hard life situations that Gorals have gone through in the last decades which are reflected by the inhabitants due to memory and the phenomenon of post-memory.

Essentialism and Constructivism in Social Sciences

At present we can reflect two social science approaches to identification. The first one is essentialism²¹ (primordialism), which was the dominant trend of the identification interpretation in the past. Identification is perceived as closely linked to culture of a specific community while the ethnic units are considered independent cultural units defined by the characteristic cultural features which are deemed objective. Theories of essentialism recognize existence of objective criteria. One of the most important thesis of essentialists is that respective cultural units have clear borders (Ferencová 2005: 34). This means that it does not matter how the respective members of the nations, states or regions identify themselves but it is possible to attribute certain identification to them according to certain objective criteria. The approach had been applied and relevant until the Norwegian anthropologist F. Barth published his book: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969).

F. Barth has defined the basic principles of constructivism which has become the dominant approach to the issue of identities. The key Barth's postulate is that social organization of a community is based on self-identification and identification by the others. It means that it is not possible to attribute an identification to

²¹ One of the latest studies on essentialism in the Slovak anthropology refers to Maur, N., 2014 *Pragmatické a esencialistické identity v usudzovaní o sociálnych skupinách medzi vedcami*. 'Slovenský národopis' 62, s. 7-29.

someone unless he/she identifies himself/herself within categories compliant with the identification. According to F. Barth it is not sufficient if an individual identifies with a group or a nation but it is necessary that he/she gets identified as a member of the group by the community he/she lives in.

Another important theoretical basis is the theory developed by R. Brubaker²² and F. Cooper in their study *Beyond „Identity“* (2000). The authors consider identification to be individual and contradictory to the generalized definition of specific social groups. According to them, identification is a social phenomenon that is perceived both objectively and subjectively while it is the basic condition for the existence of functioning communities. R. Brubaker and F. Cooper understand identification as a consequence of specific social and political activities. Identification is natural to all members of the community while the individuals define their identification by making comparisons with the community members. The thesis states that identification is a consequence of self-defining and self-declaring of the collective affiliation.

The theory of constructivism does not deem identification an objective but a subjective reality. I agree with R. Brubaker (2004: 79), that the elements of identification as ethnicity or group affiliation exist only in people's minds as they daily identify themselves with it and interpret or value the world or people around us through these categories. Affiliation with certain ethnic or regional group is not an objective reality. R. Brubaker further points out that people tend to describe their world through exactly given categories. The categories are usually identical with the categories of the society that the individual lives in and belongs to.

There are no exact cultural borders at the Slovak – Polish borderland and the cultures blend smoothly one to another. A homogeneous culture is a construct of the mind but not an objectively observable phenomenon (Ferencová 2005: 35). The thesis gets justified in the observed area. Various phenomena of the local culture such as the Goral dialect or the folk costume can be used as proofs as they differ in the Polish Podhale and the Slovak Orava villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka very little. There are however several differences in understanding of the individual and collective identification which prove Barthe's thesis that social borders among groups persist despite the fact that people cross them. (Barth 1969: 9).

At the analysis of identification of Gorals in the researched borderland it is important to consider that there exist certain schemes of thinking which help the inhabitants to categorize individual and collective identification in some frameworks especially in the frameworks of a regional affiliation. R. Casson (1983) points out that the schemes are structures which represent and categorize certain knowledge. They are not immediately visible but they report on the people's perception of the world and interpret their own identification (Brubaker 2004: 74).

The above mentioned theoretical bases are crucial to the analysis of the Goral identification issue in the specific Slovak-Polish borderland which I focus on in the following part of the work.

²² I refer also to other publications of R. Brubakera *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (1996) a *Ethnicity without Groups* (2004).

Principles of Essentialism in Identification of Gorals

The Slovak-Polish borderland distinguishes in specific representations demonstrating the relation between individual identities and principle of essentialism as well as constructivism defined by the social sciences. Essentialist statements assume existence of an essence as an attribute that people are not able to describe in details but they reflect it in their representations. Ethnicity of the inhabitants was understood as something deeply rooted in human nature, as an awareness of otherness based on objective indicators. According to them it was possible to determine people's ethnicity regardless of whether or not they sense it. (Luther 2005: 47). It is necessary to stress that the classification of representations is a scientific classification and was not confronted with the inhabitants of the researched regions.

Essentialist representations of identification are present mostly with the older and less so with the middle generation of the inhabitants of the researched areas. What are then the representations that are linked to the region's resident – a Goral? The most usual classification is that a Goral is just a man who was born as a Goral. Within the Slovak-Polish borderland circumstances the statement takes on several meanings.

The older generation shares the opinion that the core criterion for being a Goral is to be a child of Goral parents. The criterion often spreads out to grandparents or even great grandparents. Many Gorals claim that they are Gorals „z *dziada, pradziada*.“ . These strict classifications are currently more or less exceptional and it is not possible to generalize on them. The precondition of having both parents of the Goral origin is however present also with the middle generation. The essentialist approach to the origin and to the Goral identification is further limited to expressions implying that the real Goral can have a non-Goral parent. The limitation has several reasons. One of them states that the tradition can be passed on only in certain families and this tends to be considered one of the most important roles in the child rearing. Only in those families where both parents speak the Goral dialect and have positive relation to the folk costume children can be properly taught and brought up in the same manner. Another reason of this categorization is the fact that the regional origin and identification with the term “Goral” is linked to an essence related to a number of emotions on both sides of the border. Analysis of the statements implies that to be a Goral is an honor not granted to anyone. It is a matter of pride, an awareness of the cultural heritage left to the current Gorals by their ancestors. The thesis of Bačová (1996: 9) according to which defining oneself is always more impressive and more effective when supported by arguments and explanations from the past, gains its momentum. The essence is expected to be present with the Gorals of the older and the middle generation along both sides of the border.

The other fact I would like to focus on is the significance of the space and its representation in the statements of Gorals along both sides of the border. Perception of the space is exceptional in the case of the Podhale Gorals. The researched localities are located in the region of the so called Skalné (Rocky)

Podhale²³. Local inhabitants especially the older and middle generation emphasize that *prowdziwy*²⁴ (the real) Gorals live under the Tatras in the region of Skalne Podhale. It implies that these Gorals link their existence to a narrowly defined area. It is a unique, blessed piece of land (Olejnik 1996: 46), the space inhabited by their ancestors since of old, „*od dawn*“. Through their living space they feel certain continuity of their lives with the lives of their ancestors.

The Slovak-Polish borderland distinguishes by an interesting space representation. The space is determined by the central point – the Tatras. The space representations present in Podhale and the Slovak Orava imply that the real Gorals are those who live under the Tatras. A Suchá Hora local stated: „*The closer to Tatras the Gorals live, the more real Gorals they are!*“ Majority of the older inhabitants in Podhale considers Gorals only those inhabitants who live in Suchá Hora, Hladovka and the so called Skalne Podhale. The Suchá Hora and Hladovka inhabitants are primarily considered Orava people and secondarily classified as Gorals, eventually as the Orava Gorals. The area under the Tatras and the mountains themselves can be in compliance with the thesis of Anthony Smith (2009: 283) considered some kind of a “holy” place that forms and locates a community in space. The measure of the essentialist classifications of individual identification proves that the process enables the inhabitants of the researched localities to differentiate themselves from the others and take their position in the social space (Jawlowska 2001 :53).

The Principles of Constructivism in the Goral Identification

Constructivism is another social science principle of classification of the identification. In the Slovak-Polish borderland the constructivist representations occur in all generations while the comparative approach shows more significant differences as opposed to the essentialist classifications. Constructivism can be better understood through the thesis of R. Brubaker (2004) according to which ethnicity is not an objective fact but it exists only in the human mind. It is then a highly subjective phenomenon which cannot be objectified. Empirical data prove the fact. Regional identification or identification through designating oneself a Goral is a subjective selection constructed in one’s own mind. The selection is determined mostly by upbringing and influences of the local community. Apart from Brubaker, Fredrik Barth (1969: 15) also endorses that the ethnic identification has a subjective character and depends on individuals. With respect to the current situation in the Slovak-Polish borderland the statement is crucial. This refers mainly to the representatives of the younger and middle generation who perceive their identification with the Goral culture as one out of many options and not as

²³ Skalne Podhale – mountain area of the region of Podhale between the river Bialka (eastern border), confluence of Dunajec and Orava (western border) and the Tatras (southern border). The northern border of the Skalne Podhale is not clearly given. The territory of Podhale from the borders to the Gorce mountains is called Lower Podhale.

²⁴ *Prowdziwy* – a word in the Goral dialect. Translated as: real, authentic.

an objective fact given by the place of birth or by the parents' origins. The model of perception is a contemporary one, it is not given from the "top" but it is a subjective selection from more options (Małanicz-Przybylska 2013: 175).

The above mentioned ideas can be proved by representations which the younger and the middle generations associate with the concept of "a Goral". In contrast with the essentialist approach we can observe that the generations perceive their identification as a matter of choice. They indicate that to be born in a Goral area to Goral parents does not automatically make us a Goral. The young generation appreciates the possibility of a free choice. They do not feel obliged to own a folk costume and speak the dialect.

Some of the representations entail that a man becomes a Goral not only due to his/her origin but mainly due to his/her involvement in favor of the Goral culture. The involvement includes: *membership in the local folklore ensembles, wearing the folk costume more than twice a year, use of the dialect in everyday communication, membership in the local association of Związek Podhalean*²⁵. The statements present a significantly contrasting opinion to the essentialist approaches to identification. A man can become a Goral during his/her life: *"There are those who were not born here. They still are Gorals. They have their costume and wear it more often than some in-borns. They also speak the dialect. Many people have moved out of here. Some of them are stuck to the tradition for the nostalgia of home. The others do not have any attachment to what they have left behind. They are not Gorals anymore. They don't even teach their kids!"*²⁶. R. Brubaker claims that identification with a group is not a static category but it is constructed through individuals. F. Barth (1969) thesis states that identity is perceived not only as a category for an individual to identify with, but the environment should associate an individual with a group based on their individual behavior and acts. It is possible to conclude that a Goral identification can be lost if an individual quits identifying with the Goral culture and traditions. This however happens mostly behind the regional border. The constructivist identifications in the Slovak-Polish borderland differ on the two sides of the border mostly in frequency of occurrence. It is related to the willingness of the Gorals to respect identification of non-Gorals with the Goral culture. The level of respect differs among those who have moved in due to a marriage with a Goral man or a Goral woman. The Slovak side of the border – the villages of Suchá Hora and Hladovka distinguish in higher level of respect for these individuals. It results from a more active involvement with the Goral culture: *"She was not born here but she cares for the ensemble so much that she has become a Goral."*²⁷ The individuals either get involved with the Goral culture or are appreciated by the community for their human or professional qualities. It may also result from the fact that the Slovak villages report far more mixed marriages not only from the surrounding Slovak villages but also from a more remote destinations. Podhale reports less mixed

²⁵ Inf. a man, 25 years, Dzianisz.

²⁶ Inf. a man, 30 years, Chochołów.

²⁷ Inf. a woman, 72 years, Hladovka.

marriages but the number is growing. Young people study in university towns all over Poland. The other factor is emigration for work. Young people who meet up and get involved with each other are from the same country but not from the same region. Perceptions of the living space also differ from the essentialist representations. The constructivist representations include living space reflections of a mountain area as such, not exclusively of the territory under the Tatras: „*The Gorals live all over the world. Not only under the Tatras. They are in Orava, in Spiš but also in Tibet. Where mountains are, Gorals are too.*”²⁸ The categories are on the two sides of the border perceived differently. It results from different meanings of the term in Slovak and in Polish. In Slovak the word „goral“ refers to inhabitants representing the Goral ethnographic group. The Slovak word „horal“ refers to inhabitants of any mountain area and is not related to a specific ethnographic group. The Polish word „góral“ refers to inhabitants of any mountains including the ethnographic group of Gorals living in the Slovak-Polish borderland.

A specific problem of the Goral identification that I dealt with in my research is focused on evaluation categories used for identification of the inhabitants who have moved out of the region for work. An interesting issue is how the community views identification of children who are born in this environment. The analysis of the statements implies that these children are Gorals but only if their parents bring them up in compliance with the Goral traditions. Should the child be born to a mixed marriage, he/she can become a Goral in the course of the upbringing process.

The above mentioned examples prove the R. Brubaker’s thesis (1996: 21) that identification is a category of practice, it is a contingent event or incident. The empirical material implies that the role of the collective identification recedes into the background at the expense of individual decision on declaring oneself a Goral, a member of the local Goral community. Identification is with respect to the above mentioned representations deemed individual, contrasting the generalization of the social groups (Brubaker, Cooper 2000).

Conclusions

My study is focused on the Goral auto-stereotype in the Slovak-Polish borderland as well as on the identification of the local inhabitants with the local group and culture which manifests through essentialist and constructivist principles.

The goral auto-stereotype is present on both sides of the Slovak – Polish state border. However the determining factors differ to a certain extent. The Polish stereotype has been substantially determined by the Polish past when the Goral culture was idealized not only on the regional but also on the national level. Such idealization of the Gorals and their culture has never been present in Slovakia. On the other hand the Goral auto-stereotype has been formed also by some common factors. These include harsh living and material conditions of the Gorals in the past. Thus the auto-stereotype involves glorification of diligence and assertiveness

²⁸ Inf. a man, 65 years, Suchá Hora.

that is called the Goral honor *honor*. Sharing of the auto-stereotype by the two neighboring communities has been influenced by generational experience and differences. The oldest generation fully shares the auto-stereotype whereas with the youngest generation it is present on a smaller scale. The middle generation takes the average frequency of the auto-stereotype occurrence.

The essentialist and constructivist classifications of identification have been observed in the studied locations on both sides of the border. The essentialist classifications of one's own identification dominate the oldest and partially also the middle generation. The choice of self-identification with certain culture and its elements is not possible since the identification is given by "objective" facts. The constructivist classifications of self-identification are present mostly with the younger and middle generations in the Slovak Orava and Podhale.

My research has confirmed that majority of the inhabitants of the Slovak-Polish borderland perceive their identification in compliance with the thesis of R. Brubaker (2004) as a subjective phenomenon. Hence, majority of the researched localities' inhabitants of the middle and the younger generation perceive identification with the concept of "a Goral" as a subjective choice, as one out of many options, not as a predetermined fact.

The researched area offers two opposed approaches to identification. Based on the conclusions of my study and in compliance with the theses of R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, I claim that identification is a social phenomenon which is perceived by the inhabitants of the researched borderland both objectively and subjectively. At the same time, it is the basic condition for functioning of the local community.

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