Cartography as a Historiographical Argument in the Writing of Overlapping National Histories in Europe

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Organised by Frank Hadler (GWZO, Leipzig) and Xosé Manoel Nuñez Seixas (University of Santiago de Compostela) the workshop brought together new and old members of Team 4 of the five-year European Science Foundation-funded Scientific Programme „Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in 19th and 20th century Europe NHIST“¹, which runs since 2003. The team is led by Tibor Frank (ELTE, Budapest) and Frank Hadler.

Based on case studies on the usage of maps by historians occupied with the writing of national histories in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as the ways in which cartographers mapped historical processes the workshop participants examined 1) cartographical self-representations of nation-states and empires as well as of supranational political entities such as the European Union; 2) how such case studies contribute to the writing of a transnational history of historiography; 3) ways to implement the Team’s findings in academic teaching i.e. didactic means to enable students to read maps and analyze processes of transformation of historical data and narratives into maps.

After a short explanation of the Team’s development within the NHIST programme, FRANK HADLER proposed three guiding questions for the workshop. First he drew the participants’ attention to the question whether maps as sources for the history of historiography have been marginalized in the past. Secondly, he claimed that it would be worthwhile to explore whether map-related arguments of historians’ merely contextualize the history of cartography or if they have to be regarded as contributions, which provide independent insights. Thirdly, he put forth the question if the notion of overlapping national histories is stimulating or impeding the mapping of European history. The participants discussed the further development of papers presented at a previous workshop held in Leipzig in September 2006 as well as some new contributions.

In the following a brief summary of selected papers is provided. The differences and similarities between the Austrian-Hungarian and the Spanish Empires (with regard to nationalization processes and different degrees of ethnical diversity, maritime and land-based empires respectively as well as the (un-)ambiguousness of the geographical shape) were particularly interesting. The paper on the development of cartographical depictions of the EC/EU as a different political entity built a compelling contrast with numerous implications for the comparison of cartographical representations.

XOSÉ MANOEL NUÑEZ SEIXAS presented a paper on the mapping of state and stateless Iberian national histories. Both, state and stateless Iberian nationalisms and national histories used and use maps as agents of consolidation of abstract mental images of the nation. The nation as an imagined community is identified with a demarcated space that is limited by borders and projected to the past and the presence. A cartographic representation of the nation implies an according depiction, invention or imagination of the (national) ‘Other’. In fact, this often resulted in complete ignorance of the Other’s existence. Maps visualize, create and spread ‘supralocal identities’. Cartography and nationalism mutually influence each other – nationalism impacts on the cartographic depiction of the nation and maps influence images of the nation: maps are ‘imagined territories’ (Peter Haslinger). Such imagined territories or maps can relate to other images of the prevailing nation.

Maps of Spain e.g., are imagined as a bull’s skin, which relates to bullfighting as a national symbol and was instrumentalized by nineteenth century nationalism in order to emphasize supposedly typical Spanish national traits such as pride, bravery, contempt for materialism and idealism. The problem with this cartographic representation, however, was that it excluded the Spanish isles. Whereas e.g. the Canary Islands – although they were regular provinces and not colo-

¹www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsef/
nies – were usually ignored in Spanish maps since the nineteenth century, they were typically displayed in historical cartographies of the Empire.

The geographical setting of the Iberian Peninsula, its clear demarcation by natural borders (particularly by the ocean and the Pyrenees) and its western (to the Americas) and southern (to Africa) outlook moulded self-images common to Spain and Portugal. The Iberian homelands were perceived as a bridge between Europe and Africa and as a ‘communication gate’ between Europe and the Americas, which was underlined by the accentuation of the colonial past. Both, Portugal and Spain, perceived themselves as bulwarks of a culturally and/or religiously defined Europeanness – as Christians against the Muslims and as last line of western defence against a possible invasion of Soviet-Russia.

Whereas such perceptions of the Peninsula correspond to Spanish cartographic representations of Iberia as a unity, Portuguese imaginations rather tended to ignore the Peninsula, perceiving it as an obstruction to its relations with the rest of Europe. The same is true for cartographic imaginations of the empires and post-imperial re-imaginations of Spain and Portugal. Whereas imperial representations tended to locate the respective country at the centre of a multicontinental empire (with Spain usually depicting the whole Peninsula and Portugal avoiding its depiction), the post-imperial imaginations tended to emphasize the global spread of the respective language and culture and therefore continued to adhere to a multicontinental self-imagination.

The stateless Iberian nations try to elude the peninsular context by emphasizing their close contact to other European territories. Whereas Basque cartographic displays present the Basques as a people between France and Spain, the Catalan representations tend to include French Catalonia, the Balearic isles and the Catalan-speaking city Alghero in Sardinia. Nationalist Galician imaginations emphasize the virtual Atlantic character of Galicia by appealing to cartographic representations of the ‘Seven Celtic nations’ of Western Europe, which implies the marginalization of the spatial link to the Mediterranean. The stateless nations also tend to stress the significance of language borders and the extension of the medieval kingdoms which serves as a means to refuse the current administrative organization and underline the relevance of ‘traditional borders’, defined in cultural, historical and ethnic terms.

Schoolbooks make use of oversimplified cartographic representations of the homeland in order to foster imaginations of a supposed historical continuity of the Spanish and Portuguese nation state. Accordingly Basque, Catalan and Galician cartographic depictions of the autonomous communities not only project their existence into the past but can also be understood as a projection of long-term political objectives i.e. independence.

MONIKA BAÁR (University of Essex) presented a paper on the mapping of the Habsburg Empire. Baár started off by pointing out that cartography’s impact on the transmission of national self-images is comparable to the influence of historiography as „Legitimationswissenschaft“ . The works of historians and cartographers were often motivated by similar ambitions with regard to nation building processes: Next to administrative centralization, education and the army the mapping of national territories, the cartographical depiction of geopolitical entities, the homeland of a commonality of citizens, was a crucial tool in processes of nation building.

Both, historians and cartographers presented a desired rather than an actual situation. Cartographical depictions of envisaged national communities therefore often created the illusion of geographical unity of in fact fragmented political-territorial entities. Cartographers and historians often claimed the supposedly ancient, perennial and natural character of borders. Baár, however, pointed out that borders are social constructs. Maps reflect and create reality at the same.

Maps indicated a state’s strength and stability and were often instrumentalized by rulers and national elites in order to legitimize their claims. During the nineteenth century regional borders eroded as national, external borders vis-à-vis foreign nations were defined more precisely. Especially in ethnically mixed regions the rigid demarcation of previously unsettled and more or less amorphous borders led to interest conflicts, which became a
Important for the Habsburg Empire.

Whereas political divisions were of little importance to them and largely ignored by cartographers until the eighteenth century a new pattern of cartographical representations emerged: from then on the land was literary cut into pieces by state boundaries and each piece was isolated from its geographical context. However, even these unities did not display contemporary political entities. The fact that different entities such as Hungary and the Habsburg Low Countries for example were united by common sovereignty was not indicated. The principle of modern historical atlases, colouring and shading as a means to depict the territorial unity of disparate, non-contiguous possessions, only emerged in the 1790s: Habsburg possessions were now displayed in one colour.

Since the second half of the eighteenth century pragmatic reasons such as the clearing up of Alpine deposits and the management of rivers as well as the drainage of swamps fostered the need for large scale maps and increased the significance of cartography. Whereas during the reign of Joseph II only the Alpine countries and Moravia were mapped, the Imperial Royal Military-Geographic Institute conducted a comprehensive survey of the entire Monarchy between 1873 and 1889. At the same time maps and atlases became ever more important in science and education as well as the economic realm. The increasing significance of maps was reflected in the continuous production of county and world atlases as well as maps on economics, transport, ethnography and population and their publication in newspapers, periodicals and books.

Although national and imperial ambitions and objectives basically contradicted each other in the Habsburg Empire, the national movements of the nineteenth century did not necessarily ultimately aim at an independent nation state. The national territory has often been imagined as part of a larger entity – a considerable number of politicians and scholars would have been content with a limited degree of independence within the empire. Although cartography contributed to the emergence of imagined communities and the mapping for example of the Austrian-Hungarian frontier involved conflicts, the expression of national self-images through cartography was not necessarily centrifugal but often depicted the prevailing entity as an integral part of the empire.

STEFFI FRANKE (GWZO Leipzig) tackled the historical developments of cartographical representations of the European Union (EU). Franke scrutinized the changes of cartographical depictions of EU enlargement and the European Union’s neighbourhood policy in the 1990s to 2004.

Drawing on John B. Harley Franke highlighted that the production of cartographical representations of spatial orders includes specific strategies of selection and narrative organization. Conscious omissions and accentuations by cartographers, sponsors and recipients of maps are omnipresent and unavoidable. Such efforts have often been motivated by the wish to anticipate and/or to reaffirm power structures – be it as a ‘legally binding image or a utopian vision of the world’. Maps are essential symbols and visual instruments of spatial representation and organization of (new) political orders.

Therefore Franke consulted not only ‘„pure“ cartographic material’ but also maps, which were integral elements of an overall layout of documents published by EU institutions responsible for the EU’s communication strategy i.e. its representation towards the wider public through public relations, media and political education.

Against this backdrop, Franke presented a selection of maps that underlined her findings with regard to changes of the EU’s cartographical representation in the world and its imagined relation to it. The first finding concerned the composure of the EU’s neighbourhood. Franke perceived an intertwining of reduction and extension: At the beginning of the investigated period EU maps mainly depicted actual member states. Parallel to the enlargement process’s advancement the representation of the EU’s neighbourhood widened to the East and to the South with eastern Europe and northern Africa becoming abiding elements of the EU’s vicinity. The EU was no longer depicted as an island but contextualized to the world surrounding it. Previously excluded areas became part of the EU’s spatial imaginations and thus tur-
ned these areas into ‘objects of political and cultural considerations’, framing future developments. Moreover, Franke claimed that the changes in the cartographical depiction of the EU give evidence for a teleological impetus – the proof of the inevitability of enlargement a posteriori. On the other hand Franke pointed out a reductionist tendency. Whereas Russia is reduced to its territory west of the Ural, Africa is cut off at its northern coasts or only represented by its north-western edge. According to Franke this gave evidence of ‘an underlying transnational dimension’. The depiction of neighbours is not restricted to sovereign states, but includes contiguous regions, perceived as relevant to the development of the EU.

Secondly Franke dwelled on ‘cartographically developed qualities of inner and outer space’. Representations of the EU’s inside and outside vary with regard to colour and the degree of differentiation of the respective territory. In general the depiction of the EU territory is more differentiated than that of the areas surrounding it. Whereas contiguous regions are mostly displayed as homogeneous or amorphous spaces the EU territory is internally differentiated and depicted as consisting of different nation states, regions or cultures. The workshop was finalized with a presentation of SEBASTIAN LENTZ and SABINE TZSCHASCHEL (Leibnizinstitut für Länderkunde, Leipzig), who reported on cartography from a geographers’ perspective. They underlined that maps have to be interpreted as transformations, reductions and adaptations of complexity, which implies that their production is always connected to processes of selection. Maps are thematically organized means of communication.

In the final discussion the group defined three major problems. Firstly, the participants discussed the problem of how to deal with the mapping of historical entities, such as the medieval Greater Moravian Empire, which have not produced cartographical evidence themselves. Secondly, the group addressed the problem of historiographical production and utilization of maps in times of political change. Finally the problem of mapping natural and artificial borders was discussed.

Conference overview:

NHIST Team 4 Workshop ‘Overlapping National Histories in Europe’ - Consello da Cultura Galega (Council of Galician Culture), Santiago de Compostela

Session One
Ragnar Björk: Natural borders of Sweden and of the North - on the map or of the world?
Illka Liikanen: Mapping Finnish borders for Nordic history
Steffi Franke: Mapping EU Neighbourhood
Jacobo García Alvárez: Education and Cartographic Nationalism in Franco’s Spain
Markus Kirchhoff: From Historical to Political Geography - On the Gentile Roots of Zionist Palestine Maps
Frank Hadler: Mapping the Greater Moravian Empire in the Historiographical Debate on the Czechoslovak or Slovak „U尔斯staat”

Session Two
Monika Baár: Mapping of the Habsburg Monarchy, mapping of small nation states
Sorin Antohi: Symbolic Geography and Mapping Transylvania
Tibor Frank: The Treaty of Trianon and the Hungarian ‘Carte Rouge’ in 1919-1920
Xosé Manoel Nuñez Seixas: Notes on the Importance of Cartography in Iberian national Histories
Sabine Tzschaschel/ Sebastian Lentz: How to read maps