Eric Hounshell:
“Mapping Ethnicity”

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SHADOW OF THE TREE

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MAPPING ETHNICITY Ethno-linguistic Landscapes



Franz Ritter von Le Monnier: "Karte der Vertheilung der Bevölkerung Österreich-Ungarn's nach der Umgangs- beziehungsweise Mutter-Sprache auf Grund der Ergebnisse d. Volkszählung v. 31. Dez. 1880", in: Josef Chavanne: *Physikalisch-statistischer Hand-Atlas von Oesterreich-Ungarn in 25 Bättern mit erläuterendem Text*, Vienna: E. Hölzel (1887), n.p.

Monnier based his map on data from the Austrian census of 1880 and presented it as an update to the 1855 ethnographic map by Karl von Czoernig.

In 1878, the Austrian civil servant Adolf Ficker stressed the importance of maps for ethnographic statistics. Perhaps their highest virtue was didactic:

"How often a line on a map teaches more than many words of a book allow! How often it facilitates obtaining an overview that even the most faithful memory withholds!"

Adolf Ficker: "Die 'Ethnographie Internationale'", in: *Statistische Monatsschrift* 4 (1878), p. 549–563, p. 555.

Ethnographic cartography boomed from the mid-nineteenth century onward amidst the nationalist "awakening" across Europe. Aside from depicting complex types like ethnicities, such maps plotted artefacts of material culture (housing features, farming implements, apiaries), folkloric motifs, word usages, and dialects. As Ficker noted, maps could capture not

only the distribution of peoples but also correlations between human difference and the natural landscape.[1]
The 1886 map by Franz Ritter von Le Monnier drew from the Austrian census of 1880, the first in the empire to gather language data. The map offered a "completely new and reliable" update to the famous 1855 rendition by Ficker's predecessor at the Central Statistical Bureau *(Statistisches Zentralamt),* Karl von Czoernig. It appeared in Josef Chavanne's atlas of the empire's natural and human resources. Notably, Chavanne organized the language map in the "physical" rather than "statistical" part – with maps of climate and natural resources rather than of demography, military manpower, land use, and livestock.

MAPPING ETHNICITY Concepts and Measurements

The classification of ethnicities and nationalities gained practical political relevance in Austria in the second half of the nineteenth century. The 1867 constitution made the issue especially urgent with its guarantee of equal rights to all nationalities.[2] Yet, as even contemporary experts readily admitted, nobody knew what this meant. Maps like Monnier's, with its clear distinctions through lines, colors, and gradients, therefore offered false concretizations of murky concepts. Disputes over nationality enlisted language statistics as evidence, even though the statisticians themselves stressed that language did not equal nationality.[3] In this way, approximate non-knowledge became fact.

"And in fact this principle [of ethnic nationality] requires the resolution of difficult questions: which ethnic groups exist as nationalities within the state *(Volksstämme im Staate),* under what conditions an ethnic community can be called a nationality *(Volksstamm),* when there is a language indicating nationality *(Volksstamm)* and when there is a mere dialect."

Rudolf Herrmann von Herrnritt: *Nationalität und Recht, dargestellt nach der österreichischen und ausländischen Gesetzgebung*, Vienna: Manz'sche k.u.k. Hof-Verlags und Universitäts-Buchhandlung (1899), p. 48.

"There is no agreement over these concepts: what is to be understood by folk *(Volk);* what race *(Rasse)* is supposed to mean; what a stock *(Stamm)* is to make one think of; what is meant by a people *(Völkerschaft)*, a people as family *(Völkerfamilie),* a nation *(Nation)* or a nationality *(Nationalität)* - no one can say with certainty today [...]
A reason for this uncertainty and this vacillation is obviously, among other reasons, due to the fact that these concepts stand in the eternal flow of development [...] This eternal change of things, the eternal flowing into each other and eternal negotiation of essences and forms impede the construction of solid concepts."

Ludwig Gumplowicz: *Der Rassenkampf: Soziologische Untersuchungen*, Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Univ.-Buchhandlung (1883), p. 186-87.

The Monnier map represented data on *Umgangssprache* (language of exchange) and *Muttersprache* (mother tongue). For decades, the international statistical community had debated the proper indicators of nationality for state censuses. Most experts admitted that nationality was a complex phenomenon that could encompass customs, material culture, descent, perhaps physical characteristics or "race," and so forth. Yet many also agreed that, while not equivalent to nationality, language was its most practically expedient indicator. Even then, however, there was room for debate over which relationship to language in particular should be gathered – *Umgangssprache*, *Muttersprache*, or *Familiensprache* (family/household language). Each understanding had its own implications for representing the linguistic situation of a given population and spatial unit, especially in multilingual states.

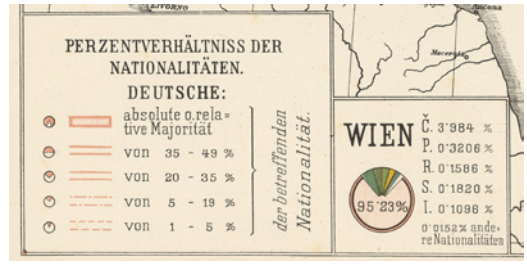
MAPPING ETHNICITY Representing and Obscuring

The historical development of linguistic diversity and the shape of linguistic relatedness were central preoccupations of the time. The legend and color distinctions in Monnier's map reflect these concerns with their classification of linguistic families (German, North Slavic, South Slavic, Magyar, and Romance), with the notable absence, from a certain perspective, of the Jews. In general, the sharp distinctions in the map obscure alternative conceptions of language and ethnicity held by contemporaries.



Detail from Franz Ritter von Le Monnier: "Karte der Vertheilung der Bevölkerung Österreich-Ungarn's nach der Umgangs- beziehungsweise Mutter-Sprache auf Grund der Ergebnisse d. Volkszählung v. 31. Dez. 1880", in: Josef Chavanne: *Physikalisch-statistischer Hand-Atlas von Oesterreich-Ungarn in 25 Bättern mit erläuterendem Text*, Wien: E. Hölzel (1887), n.p.

The legend classified nationalities according to language groups: Germans, North Slavic, South Slavic, Magyar, and Romance.



Detail from Franz Ritter von Le Monnier: "Karte der Vertheilung der Bevölkerung Österreich-Ungarn's nach der Umgangs- beziehungsweise Mutter-Sprache auf Grund der Ergebnisse d. Volkszählung v. 31. Dez. 1880", in: Josef Chavanne: *Physikalisch-statistischer Hand-Atlas von Oesterreich-Ungarn in 25 Bättern mit erläuterendem Text*, Wien: E. Hölzel (1887), n.p.

Monnier and Chavanne highlighted the map's innovation in representing proportionality rather than mere borders and islands. This served a clear German-centric message: each area, first colored according to its dominant linguistic makeup, was patterned to indicate the proportion of Germans. Pie charts also dotted the landscape, each of them representing the local proportion of language groups. The cartographers admitted that simplification necessitated by production compromised the map's accuracy, leaving minorities below 20% invisible. Thus, the map mirrored the common hierarchical picture of highly developed "historical" nations (the Germans among them) versus mere ethnic peoples *(Völkerstämme).* The text underscored Germancentrism by stressing their distribution across the empire, assuring the reader that "the Germans are thus not only the numerically strongest but most widely distributed nation among the many peoples of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Moreover, through their education and their industriousness they also play an important role where they are only represented in small numbers."

The census that provided data for the map drew on a particular scientific conception of language. Just before the 1880 census, the statistician Ficker teased the imminent appearance of a new map and laid out the principles upon which the language census was based. He stressed unified nomenclature and linguistic classification as preconditions of ethnographic statistics and offered a tree-like tabular classification of European languages.[4] He drew in particular on the genealogical portrayal by the linguist Friedrich Müller.[5] Typical of the era, Müller analogized between animal and ethno-linguistic genealogies and held that, like species "types," existing languages and peoples could be traced back to descent from ancestral languages *(Ursprachen).*[6] Another picture, prominently cited in treatments of nationalities

law, came from the Graz professor Ludwig Gumplowicz quoted previously. He argued for polygenetic origins of the world's peoples. But he also saw the historical process as one of progressive amalgamation – rather than endless proliferation or static diversity – leading to ever fewer peoples.[7] A third Austrian picture of ethno-linguistic relatedness came from Hugo Schuchardt and Rudolf Meringer (both of them, incidentally, also in Graz). They challenged genealogy by stressing the arbitrariness of "pure" languages as scientific constructions, multiple origins, constant horizontal mixing, and continuous "gradations" and "waves" of linguistic ethnic attributes across geographical space rather than vertical descent.[8] Neither scholar captured their contrasting image of linguistic variation and change in an actual map, though in writing they illustrated their vision with geographical language.

"The image of a genealogical tree *(Stammbaum),* by which we seek to imagine the past development of languages that belong together, is so intuitive *(anschaulich)* and seems to be so appropriate that we experience a certain sorrow when we discover [...] that not only, as they say, *omne simile claudicat* [every comparison limps] but that it cannot stand on its feet at all."

Hugo Schuchardt: *Über die Klassifikation der Romanischen Mundarten: Probevorlesung gehalten zu Leipzig am 30. April 1870*, Graz: [unspecified publisher] (1900), p. 5.

The youthful Schuchardt began his lecture with this attack on the prevailing orientation of linguistics toward a genealogical tree.

"[...] what pertains to the youngest generation, the top of the genealogical tree, pertains as well to the earlier ones because the same conditions were always in play. And two language varieties cannot first have developed and, when they were finished, influenced each other; rather, this mutual influence already began at their divergence. We link the limbs and branches of the genealogical tree through countless horizontal lines, and it stops being a genealogical tree."

Hugo Schuchardt: *Über die Klassifikation der Romanischen Mundarten: Probevorlesung gehalten zu Leipzig am 30. April 1870*, Graz: [unspecified publisher] (1900), p. 11.

Schuchardt here drew the consequences of horizontal influence, mixture, and transitional forms for the appropriateness of the tree image.

"If we were to sketch a map upon which we specify the contours *(Umfassungslinien)* of all possible phenomena of sound and form by which Latin transformed into Romance, we would perceive some thicker or darker points where more of them cross each other: that is, we would mark out transitions *(Übergänge statuiren).* Yet we would still be far from reaching a classification and at best recognize certain main points of emanation *(Hauptpunkte der Ausstrahlung)* [...] The only means of classifying things that according to their nature are not classifiable but to make them appear to the observer in a certain order is the determination of arbitrary, as it were trigonometric, points on the basis on which others are determined and the whole area measured."

Hugo Schuchardt: *Über die Klassifikation der Romanischen Mundarten: Probevorlesung gehalten zu Leipzig am 30. April 1870*, Graz: [unspecified publisher] (1900), pp. 29-30.

Schuchardt sketched a picture of language variation and change in terms of transitions and waves. What we take to be the languages in a classification are really scientific constructions. Meringer extended the metaphor in his ethnographic work, imagining ethnic types (in this case house types) as "a great sum of larger and smaller circles that intersect and encircle each other, that are in all thinkable relations with each other [...] like a pond [...] on whose surface many stones and pebbles are cast and from every point where a stone lands or landed waves ripple outward that intersect with the others in the most manifold of ways." He went on to imply language "purity" was ultimately a political construction.[9]

Absent from the map were Jews, whose status as a language group or nationality grew increasingly vexed. (They appeared instead as "Israelites" in the map of religious confessions.) The issue was highly politicized, but it was also genuinely tricky. First, the choice of which relationship to language to survey (language of exchange, mother tongue, family language)

had particular implications for the Jews. Second, the status of Yiddish as a language, as opposed to a "*Jargon*" or dialect, was still a genuinely academic question.[10] Indeed, for all groups, the status of language as opposed to dialect was a precondition for the rights guaranteed in the Austrian constitution.[11]

The 1886 map of multilingual Austria both captured and obscured the state of knowledge. To borrow Ficker's word, the map helped the viewer obtain an "overview" far simpler than either the reality or the varied scholarly perspectives on nationality and ethno-linguistic classification circulating at the time. In this way, the map conspired with the political exigencies that made nationality and ethnic types real.

Notes

1 On ethnographic mapping in Central Europe, see Eric Hounshell: "Lines, Points, Waves, Streams: Mapping the Ethnographic in Swiss *Hausforschung,* 1880s-1950s", in: *Historische Anthropologie* 31/1 (2023), pp. 140-164. On Austrian cartography, Deborah R. Coen: *Climate in Motion: Science, Empire, and the Problem of Scale,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2018).

2 Gerald Stourzh: *Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs, 1848-1918*, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (1985).

3 Emil Brix: *Die Umgangssprachen in Altösterreich zwischen Agitation und Assimilation*, Vienna: Böhlau (1982); Wolfgang Göderle: *Zensus und Ethnizität: Zur Herstellung von Wissen über soziale Wirklichkeiten im Habsburgerreich zwischen 1848 und 1910*, Göttingen: Wallstein (2016).

4 Adolf Ficker: "Die 'Ethnographie Internationale'", in: *Statistische Monatsschrift* 4 (1878), p. 549–563, p. 558.

5 Ficker cited Müller's 1868 analysis of the data gathered by Austria's Novara world expedition (1857-59) and his *Allgemeine Ethnographie* (1873; 2nd ed. 1878).

6 Friedrich Müller: *Allgemeine Ethnographie*, Vienna: Alfred Hölder (1873), p. 5.

7 Ludwig Gumplowicz: *Das Recht der Nationalitäten und Sprachen in Oesterreich-Ungarn*, Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Univ.-Buchhandlung (1879); Ludwig Gumplowicz: *Der Rassenkampf: Soziologische Untersuchungen*, Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Univ.-Buchhandlung (1883).

8 Stefani Engelstein: *Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity*, New York: Columbia University Press (2017).

9 See Rudolf Meringer: "G. Bancalari und die Methode der Hausforschung", in: *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 33 (1903), p. 258; Rudolf Meringer: *Das Deutsche Haus und sein Hausrat*, Leipzig: B.G. Teubner (1906), p. 6.

10 On Jewish nationhood, Malachi Hacohen: *Jacob & Esau: Jewish European History between Nation and Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2019); Gerald Stourzh: "Max Diamant and Jewish Diaspora Nationalism in the Bukovina", in: *From Vienna to Chicago and Back: Essays on Intellectual History and Political Thought in Europe and America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2007), pp. 190–203.

11 In legal theory, for example: Rudolf Herrmann von Herrnritt: *Nationalität und Recht, dargestellt nach der österreichischen und ausländischen Gesetzgebung, Vienna: Manz'sche k.u.k. Hof-Verlags und Universitäts-Buchhandlung* (1899), p. 48; Edmund Bernatzik: *Über nationale Matriken*, Manz: Vienna (1910), p. 81.

Further Readings

Deborah R. Coen: *Climate in Motion: Science, Empire, and the Problem of Scale*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2018).

Wolfgang Göderle: *Zensus und Ethnizität: Zur Herstellung von Wissen über soziale Wirklichkeiten im Habsburgerreich zwischen 1848 und 1910*, Göttingen: Wallstein (2016).

John B. Harley: *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (2002).

Steven Seegel: *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2012).

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