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The review of the Mrs. Angelica Camacho Aranda PhD dissertation

„Social construction of history, reality and identity of Polish immigrations In Mexico as told by interviewees of two waves: Polish refugees of World War II in Hacienda de Santa Rosa, Guanajuato in 1943, and Polish professionals in Xalapa, Veracruz during Communism time”,

Supervisor: dr hab. Maria Szmeja, Professor AGH

Faculty of Humanities, AGH, Kraków 2016¹

1. The scope and purpose of the PhD dissertation (general comments)

The subject of the reviewed PhD dissertation is the analysis of two waves of Polish immigration to Mexico. First from the time of the World War II (more precisely from 1943) and the second from the period of the last quarter of the twentieth century (more precisely 1978-1990). These migrations processes took place in different historical moment, in various global geopolitical orders and they also represented the different socio-demographic character. They were insignificant in numbers from the perspective of whole immigration to Mexico. But, as Angelica Camacho Aranda writes and shows in her PhD thesis, the diverse social nature of both waves of Polish immigration affected the way of both national self-determination and integration into Mexican society by its representatives. In her work she sought the answers on the general question how Poles in Mexico construct their national and personal identity?

This PhD work should deserve the warm recognition in Poland as well as the attention of researchers from migration and ethnic studies from the couple of reasons. I point out here the three, in my opinion, basic reasons. Firstly because of the public importance of the analyzed of problem in this PhD dissertation. The history of Polish immigration to Mexico (especially from the World War II) has not been widely known in Poland in spite of publications on this topic of Polish authors (mainly Tadeusz Łepkowski and Krzysztof Smolana) to whom the author made also references. Mexico during the World War II was the only one country outside the states from the British Commonwealth which offered the humanitarian assistance to Poles leaving the Soviet Union together with the Polish army of General Anders in spring of 1942. Group 1, 5 thousand of Poles embraced this invitation and

¹ The PhD work was written in English. I prepared two language versions of my review of this work, in Polish and in English. But in the Polish version the quotations remain in the original version, i.e. in English.

settled in the village (the hacienda) Santa Rosa (which also she describes in details in her work).

Secondly because of the main research idea of comparison of the two waves of immigration which was the perspective of construction of the Polish national identity and maintenance of ethnic borders to Mexican society (and its ethnic groups)? The authoress in the interesting theoretically way have discussed these issues points out to the construction of the "double" Polish-Mexican identity among Polish immigrants to Mexico but at the same time draws a socially important variations on this field. According to her, while the Poles of the wave I identify as a person of the identity of "Polish-Mexican" ("Polish - Catholic - Slave"), Poles from the wave II depicted themselves as "Polish in Mexico" ("Polish - Professionals - Slave") (p.188).

Thirdly because of the way integration into Mexican society and the social position occupied there. The author highlights here not ethnic aspect of Polish immigration to Mexico and underlines the importance of class position (in a broad social sense) She believes that the construction of Mexican national identity based officially on the civic elements and recognizing ethnic diversity (and especially the position of the group Indian - nation of Métis) hasn't eliminated the privileged position of the "White" inhabitants (descendants of Spanish settlers) and the hidden social practices supporting their position. For this reason, both waves of Polish immigration, the "White" in the sense of ethnic-racial background, Christian (Catholic) faith religious (which applies to the wave I of immigration) and professionally educated (particularly the II wave) fitted into the upper levels of the class structure of Mexican society.

Dissertation Mrs. Angelica Camacho Aranda also raises critical remarks. At this point I will turn attention only to those that are of a general nature. The first concerns the theoretical domination (and descriptive) over the empirical part. It seems to me (I will write about it in details later in my review) that the authoress could have used more analytically collected empirical material (e.g. she describes from all 20 interviews taken only three, not to mention on the nature of the other interviews).

The second observation relates to the failure (even if short) attempts a comparative approach discussed the issue of national self-identification with other immigrant groups at this time to Mexico and with other waves of Polish immigration (Polish war refugees and emigration from Poland in the period of 1945-1990) to other countries (e.g. the United States and South American countries, for example. Argentina or Brazil). It would, in my opinion,

interesting field to compare the strength and flexibility of Polish national identity in different socio-cultural contexts of integration of Polish immigrants.

The third observation concerns the complete lack of the using of Polish, i.e. written in Polish language, the scientific literature on the subject what would highly enriched her doctoral thesis. She uses the publications by Polish authors written in Spanish and English.

The other specific advantages and comments critical hearing I will be writing in the next part of the review discusses the structure and content of the hearing.

2. The structure and content of the of the PhD dissertation (specific comments)

The reviewed PhD dissertation of Mrs. Angelica Camacho Aranda counts in total 207 pages. It consists of six chapters, the Bibliography and 4 annexes (the list of interviewers, the composition of the Polish community in Xalapa in Veracruz, the map of Polish immigration to Mexico and a series of pictures with her interlocutors). The structure of this work is generally correct and does not raise serious objections. It begins with the history of Polish emigration to Mexico, next general theoretical considerations of national identity (and the role of historical memory in the process) and the formation of the Mexican nation, then goes to methodological issues (including the hypotheses and research tools) and ends with a description obtained empirical results.

But I have here one remark which focuses on the too extensive title of PhD thesis. In my opinion it should be shortened to make it more understandable to the readers.

Chapter I "Introduction" (pp. 3-36) presents the foundations of analysis and structure of the dissertation, and next it introduces to the history of analyzed problems. The authoress describes the history of the Polish immigration to Mexico in the twentieth century, its historical causes and draws a social picture of Mexican society at the time, including the processes of immigration from Spain to Mexico. In my opinion, in this chapter lacks a clear summary which it will be shown the theoretical importance of Polish immigration to Mexico.

Chapter II "The problem of <Making History>" (pp. 37-89) presents the theoretical background of research of the authoress, i.e. the discussion on the national ideology and its influence on the social and personal identity. Special attention is given to the means of preservation of nation and national identity, among them the ways of commemoration and narrations about them (especially the phenomena of "oral history" and the post-memory). As she writes "oral history is not wrong; it helps to reconstruct and reinterpret facts. For instances, migrant Poles in Mexico can Refer to Their experiences allowing the readers and the researcher to understand what historical researches do not mention, for example how

Poles Decided to migrate and how they were part of a community in a different country "(p. 50). An important role (as in the final chapter) plays the publications of the Spanish - Catalan nationalism researcher, Montserrat Guibernau). As in the previous chapter, it is missing here a clear summary of all theoretical considerations and indications which elements are selected as the key elements of analysis.

Chapter III "Building the Mexican Nations" (pp. 90-120) is another comprehensive and interesting part of PhD dissertation. The authoress outlines the history of building the Mexican nation and its identity with particular emphasis on symbolic level (Virgen de Guadalupe) and the colonial past, affecting the phenomenon of ethnic and racial mixing. The authoress concludes this chapter by writing about the needs of the modernization of the Mexico including the need of the influx of professionals and researchers mainly from European countries with a Christian heritage. In her opinion, Polish immigration of two waves perfectly formed part of the overall process.

The author in chapter IV "Methodology" (pp. 121-138; in the table of contents and in the text of the paper is on the wrong numbered as the section VI) describes the main objectives of their research (study of the life courses and the ways of narrations), research techniques (interviews and questions and the story of theirs conducting) and the foundation of the grounded theory.

Chapter V. "Texts and Interviews" (pp. 138-173) presents the results of research. It consists of a description of two books of memoirs of Polish immigrants from the war period (Wladyslaw Rattinger and Anna Żarnowska), the history of the Polish refugee camp in Santa Rosa and a summary of 4 interviews (with Anna Żarnecka, Barbara Batorska and Agnieszka and Anna Maklakiewicz).

This part of the PhD work raises my biggest criticisms. The authoress focused on the almost entirely on the description and summaries not referring to the theoretical considerations and also she did not mention the content and significance of the other interviews (conducted together since they were 20). This chapter is seems to me as the unfinished.

Chapter VI "Conclusions" (pp. 174-187) in turn is the best part of the doctoral thesis. The authoress finally departs from the whole description and attempts to summarize the theoretical results of their empirical research. She shows with one hand the cultural similarities of two waves of Polish immigration to Mexico and creating by its representatives "double", Polish - Mexican national identity. As she points out (p. 181) "in their own words, from both waves Poles see themselves as people with two sides. Their Polish side makes them

organized and ordered people, patriotic, structures, disciplines, work oriented, straightforward and reliable. Their Mexican side makes the flexible, improvising people, unpunctual and with an indigenous inherited past".

On the other hand, she points the differences between them in the ways national identity and narratives about themselves what influenced the impact on the course of integration into Mexican society. She stated at the end of her work the question about the sustainability of the immigrant experience of Poles in Mexico. She noted that they are not longer immigrants but Mexicans "by choice" involved their privileged class positions as the "White Europeans" in Mexican society. As she underlines "as White Europeans, they have had privileges in a country That, even though officially declares That mestizo people are the real Mexicans, even today common people talk about the Advantages of White people living here and mixing with Mexican dark skinned people because that helps Improving the race "(p. 182).

The dissertation ends with an extensive Bibliography (pp. 189-198) and 4 annexes (pp. 199- 202).

3. Conclusion

Despite reported here my critical remarks about the PhD dissertation of Mrs. Angelica Camacho Aranda I consider that it meets the conditions specified in the Act on scientific degrees. As I wrote at the beginning of my review, her work is important to the Polish public (because of forgotten fate of Poles living in Mexico) and the impact on research of national identity and ways of functioning of the Polish diasporas in the whole world.

With this in mind I recognize that the PhD thesis of Mrs. Angelica Camacho Aranda meets the requirements specified in Art. 13 paragraph. 1 of the Act of 14 March 2003. On Academic Degrees and Titles and on Degrees and Title in Art (Dz. U. No. 65, item. 595), and put the request to accept the hearing by the Council of the Faculty of Humanities University of Science and Technology in Krakow and its release to the public defense.

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