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Spanish educational policy towards Catalonia during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco – an attempt at an analysis from the perspective of the political theory of Ernesto Laclau

This text analyses the educational policy imposed on Catalonia during the regime of Francisco Franco Bahamonde (1892–1975). Hence, the key category discussed here is dictatorship, which is generally understood as a form of “the exercising of absolute and unlimited authority by one person or a group of people enjoying the support of the army and the police” (*Słownik języka polskiego PWN* [Dictionary of the Polish Language PWN], 2014). In the present text, however, I understand dictatorship in a slightly broader way – as an imposition and exclusion, in the social, political and cultural senses, of specific meanings, which brings about concrete consequences in the context of the construction of identity.

The problematics of dictatorship continues to be important, since we can still experience the phenomenon, albeit in a masked form, in particular in the context of the expansion of neoliberal ideology in contemporary states. It is connected inter alia with the imprinting of specific dispositions into individuals and the exclusion of alternative (not free market) manners of thinking and is becoming a cause of many negative consequences described in relevant literature (Potulicka, Rutkowiak 2012). In view of the above, it continues to be significant to explore the mechanisms of dictatorship, primarily in the context of the creation of the identity of individuals, which takes place among other things via specific educational policies.

Educational policy during dictatorship is a tool designed to impose particular meanings and thus to construct specific subjectivity. This process was particularly marked during Franco’s dictatorship in Catalonia. I shall attempt, with all the consequences involved, to analyse it further on. I shall start however with a description of Catalonia as a territory of Spain.

The very defining of Catalonia in the territorial sense is complex, since on the one hand it is considered to be a state (Constitució de Catalunya 2010) in the Mediterranean region of Europe, on the Iberian Peninsula, with its capital in Barcelona. It covers an area of 32,106 km² and is inhabited by 7,539,618 persons (*Gran Enciclopèdia*

Catalana 2014). At the same time, Catalonia is one of 17 autonomous regions (Comunidad Autónoma) of Spain. Article 137 of the Spanish constitution provides that from the territorial point of view, the Spanish state is organised in the form of *municipios* (an equivalent of Polish municipalities), provinces – autonomous regions, which combine to form one state. All these subjects enjoy management autonomy, in consistency with their interests (Constitución Española, BOE núm. 311, de 29.12.1978).

In view of its broad autonomy mentioned above and the linguistic and cultural distinctness, we can say that Catalonia is a state within a (Spanish) state. This situation was and continues to be complex for political reasons – and such was the case in particular during the regime of Francisco Franco, which was one of the most turbulent moments in the history of Catalonia, especially in the context of education.

The educational policy applies to many areas related to the construction of identity. It contains goals, orientations, and general priorities, which – defined by governments in the form of strategies – must be implemented (UNESCO 2005). The cultural distinctness of Catalonia is so considerable that it is worth analysing its educational policy in the context of the Catalans' linguistic identity, because, as argued by Zbyszko Melosik, Catalonia is “a region, in which the linguistic identity constitutes the largest component of political and cultural identity” (2007: 273). The official language of this region is Catalan.

The Catalan language belongs to the Romance languages and was developed in the Middle Ages. Some sources provide that in the 13th and 14th centuries, it was the language of the confederation of kingdoms with its capital in Barcelona. In the 15th century, during the “Spanish unification”, Catalonia lost its independence, and, in the 18th century, also its autonomy. It was at that time that the dynasty of Bourbon introduced political “uniformity”, which was tantamount to a ban on the use of the Catalan language – also in education. At that time, Catalonia experienced an economic growth, becoming the most important region for Spanish industry. It was followed by a rebirth of the awareness of the national identity and culture and alphabetization in the Catalan language, and the new middle class began to practice nationalist politics. The separatist politics was finalised with the recovery of autonomy in 1931 (Melosik 2007: 273).

The presented fragment of Catalonia's history until 1931 shows a fight for hegemony, which without any doubt affected the construction of identity on the basis of cultural, and primarily linguistic distinctness. Further on I shall analyse the educational policy during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939–1975), during which the fight for hegemony was particularly marked. To do so, I shall use the political theory of Ernesto Laclau.

Laclau's political theory is useful for at least two reasons:

- it allows an analysis of social processes in present-day multiethnic and multicultural states;
- it supports the process of the democratisation of societies, taking into account the demands of minority groups, the excluded, which makes it possess a huge political potential.

I shall inscribe the educational policy towards Catalonia in the times of Franco's regime into Laclau's reflections concerning the game between universality and particularity. Further on, I shall present this fragment of Laclau's theory.

Ernesto Laclau's theory as a tool for an analysis of educational policy

Laclau's theory fits the trend of reflections concerning democracy. Dorota Sepczyńska points out that Laclau is the key theoretician of radical democracy. The researcher writes that he subjected Marxist texts to critical selection, rejecting ideas such as economic determinism, the theory of class struggle, the historical logic of necessity, faith in the proletariat and its historical mission, as well as the call for revolution by blood, and it considered of key importance hegemony, emancipation, dialectics and social antagonism (Sepczyńska 2006: 280).

In Laclau's approach, hegemony refers to the practice of the chance creation of a temporary unity of a political community. Emancipation is the elimination of economic exploitation and other forms of discrimination, and is to ensure human rights, a combination of civil freedom and political freedom. Civil freedom is understood as freedom from violence and domination by others, as well as real liberty in the undertaking of public action and the formulation of all kinds of opinions, while political freedom as including participation in power and voting rights. Dialectics concern a paradoxical relation between the universal and the particular (Sepczyńska 2006: 281), while social antagonism is tantamount to an inherent conflict between various political and social groups. It is an effect of hegemonic practices and is aimed at the sketching of the borders of discourse. This determination of the border lies in the exclusion of an endangering discourse outside the discourse borders. Hegemonic unity is achieved owing to "mobilisation against the endangering force, which becomes a universal representation of the enemy or oppressor" (Laclau 2004: 21). Laclau believes that "[...] relations between groups are constituted as relations of power- that is, that each group is not only different from the others but constitutes in many cases such difference on the basis of the exclusion and subordination of other groups" (Laclau 1996: 27).

According to Laclau, a ceaseless game between the particular and the universal takes place within the social field. This element of the theory is of key importance for the analysis of the educational policy towards Catalonia. The game described by Laclau has no end, since there are never any final configurations or constant positions in the discourse. The researcher specifies four types of the particularism/universalism relationship:

- type one recognises that there is a border between the universality and the particularity, and that the pole of the universality can be fully understood by reason. From this perspective, one may say that there is no mediation between the universal and the particular: "the particular can only corrupt

- the universal” (Laclau 1996: 22). This approach is represented in classical ancient philosophy;
- the second approach recognizes that “a point of view of the totality exists, but it is God’s, not ours, so that it is not accessible to human reason. [...] the universal is a mere event in an eschatological succession, only accessible to us through revelation”(Laclau 1996: 23). The relation between the particularism and the universalism is therefore opaque and inconceivable (it takes the form of incarnation), which means that there is no rational link between the universality and the body that incarnates it. “God is the only and absolute mediator” (Laclau 1996: 23). This type of relation is connected with Christianity;
 - the third perspective rejects the logic of incarnation, and God is replaced by reason, for which everything is transparent – including the relationship between the universality and the body that incarnates it. This is tantamount to an elimination of the disproportion between the universality which is to be incarnated and the body which incarnates it. What is assumed here is the existence of the body which is the universal. It is a rational approach;
 - the last type considers the universal a symbol of the missing fullness, while particularism exists in motion between the determination and the recognition of differential identity on the one hand, and its cancellation via a non-differential intermediating medium on the other (Laclau 1996: 22–28).

Laclau inscribes his reflections into the fourth approach, which clearly refers to political actions. Varieties of politics include the understanding of identity in terms of difference and closure with a view to maintaining pure identities. According to Laclau, the construction of differential identities through closing to the external, is not however either a realistic or a progressive political strategy. If an oppressed group is defined through a difference in relation to the oppressing groups, the difference becomes an element of the identity of the oppressed, and the idea of “negativity” prevents us from stepping beyond the logic of pure difference. This is manifested in forms of objection: for it to be radical, it should equate the excluded with the accepted; this means that exclusion is a special form of acceptance. Laclau writes that every objection involves a certain conservatism. Antagonistic relations involve a certain equivocality, which can be subjected to negotiations, but which cannot be entirely eliminated. In the politics of difference, the continuation of difference as being always different has this consequence – that the rejection of the other does not constitute a radical elimination, but the continuous renegotiation of forms of its presence. If we reverse the oppression relation, “the other” (the oppressing) will be subject to exclusion and oppression, and the reversal leaves the form of oppression untouched. If the identity of the emancipated groups constituted itself through a rejection by the previous dominating groups, the groups continue to shape their identity. Inversion has taken place as a part of the formal system of power. The political identities of the oppressed and the oppressing are split, because

“no particularity can be constituted except by maintaining an internal reference to universality as that which is missing”(Laclau 1996: 59–62).

Laclau sketches several directions of action owing to which multiculturalism can be defended. On the one hand, we may recognise the rights of various ethnic and cultural groups to independent development and respect for their uniqueness. This path leads to a voluntary apartheid, recommending total segregationism and the opposition of particularisms. This kind of political actions are, however, based on inconsistency. Supporters of this option, defending the rights to the difference as a universal right, and fighting for legislative changes aimed at the protection in judicial institutions, engage in the fight for changes within the existing institutions. These institutions are, however, rooted in the political and cultural values of sectors of the Western society, and this is why the demands cannot lead to a reform of the system or broad hegemonic action. Laclau stresses that “(...) a system of oppression (...) can be combated in two different ways – either by an operation of inversion which performs a new closure, or by negating in that system its universal dimension: the principle of closure itself” (Laclau 1996: 33).

The democratic process, which takes place in today’s societies, can be deepened and extended, covering the demands of larger sectors of the population, i.e. minorities and ethnic groups, which were usually excluded from it. From this perspective, the institutions and theories of liberal democracy should be deconstructed, since they were designed for more homogeneous societies than the contemporary ones. Anyway, the conclusion of Laclau’s insightful analyses is that the universal does not have a concrete content, but is an escaping horizon, which emerges as a result of a chain of equivalent demands. “Universality is incommensurable with any particularity but cannot, however, exist apart from the particular” (Laclau 1996: 34). This paradox, according to Laclau, does not have a solution, but constitutes a prerequisite for the existence of democracy.

Laclau’s conception is a useful tool for the interpretation of social and political phenomena in multiethnic and multicultural societies. Spain can no doubt be categorised among them, as apart from Castilians (referred to as Spaniards), it is currently inhabited by Catalans, Basques, Galicians, the Roma, and immigrants from Africa, Asia as well as Central and Southern America. María Jesús Lago Ávila points out that minority groups are exposed to discrimination, i.e. a process in which one or more rights available to the rest of the society are violated, and the possibilities to enjoy rights are limited (Lago Ávila 2000: 81).

In Franco’s times, Spain was a country in which the rights of ethnic minorities were particularly violated – hence, I would like to briefly analyse the period of Franco’s dictatorship. As mentioned above, I shall use for my interpretation categories being elements of Laclau’s concept, aware that it is a theory of radical democracy. However, it shows relations between various subjects, who strive to achieve power and construct their identities.

Education during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco

Franco's dictatorship began upon his coming to power in 1939 and lasted until 1975. To begin with, it is worth to briefly recall his political doctrine, although, as pointed out by Adam Wielomski, it is difficult to delineate Franco's precise ideology. However, we may indicate its elements which did not change during the several dozen years of his regime:

- Catholicism – Francoism is considered a political doctrine of a catholic state, in which religion is a foundation of what the political system is and is considered to be the religion of the state. According to theoreticians of Francoism, power can be legitimized by two sources: either by the peoples or by God, and that is why Franco found in Catholicism a counterproposal to liberal democracy;
- nationalism – changes in politics depended on what, at a given time, Franco considered best for the Spanish nation. Nationalism in his version was tantamount to the “consideration of the superiority of the national interest (the common good) over particular interests, with an assumption that the best interest is expressed by the state”;
- subordination to the *caudillo* – faithfulness to and recognition of the leadership of general Franco (Wielomski 2012: 98–105).

Francoist policy was particularly affected by nationalism, as expressed by general Franco's words:

Spain is organised in a broad totalitarian concept, through national institutions, which provide for its totality, unity, and continuity. The character of each region will be respected, but without harm to the national unity, which is to be absolute, with one language, Castilian, and one personality, Spanish.¹ (Moa 2010)

Francoist policy applied mainly, inter alia, to ethnic minorities and aimed at the “eradication of the ethnic identity of native groups inhabiting Spain” (mainly Basques and Catalans), which was carried out via various institutions (Gmerek 2011: 287). Of key importance in this context was education and school policy, through which different actions were undertaken with a view to the cultural and social unification of the state. Educational institutions aimed at the promotion of the dominating, i.e. Castilian, culture and language. The Catalan minority was therefore subordinated and marginalised (Gmerek 2011: 287). Alongside the consequences of general Franco's political actions, the marginalisation of Catalan language and culture was a result of the absence of Catalan in public life, little interest in its use by persons speaking Castilian, as well as an influx of immigrants (who used Castilian, assimilating themselves to the Spanish community) (Gmerek 2011: 288).

¹ Translated into the English language on the basis of P.S.'s translation into Polish.

The principles introduced by Franco were to constitute a universal mission of re-Hispanicization, since according to the right wing politicians, Catalan particularism posed a danger to the Spanish (Castilian) culture. To achieve the above, the Catalan language was delegalized and eliminated from public institutions. These measures met resistance. In Catalonia, the social group aiming at the preservation of the linguistic and cultural uniqueness/separateness/distinctness was the *intelligentsia*. We may say that the resistance posed by the Catalans and other minorities in Spain was treated as a conflict between the Castilian universality and the minority particularisms – in which these social groups were to disclose „their incapacity to represent the universal” (Laclau 1996: 24).

In this situation, Spanishness was manifested through the establishment of an inequality between the objective positions of the social subjects, including Catalonians and Basques. Representing a concrete particularity, Franco’s government had to maintain “to have knowledge of the ‘objective meaning’ of any event, and the viewpoint of the other particular social forces had to be dismissed as false consciousness. From this point on, the authoritarian turn was unavoidable” (Laclau 1996: 26).

Anna Antczak writes that „during general Franco’s dictatorship, all the minority languages, including Catalan, were banned, and education was provided solely in the Castilian language, which was also the language of the entire administration, judicature, army, and the world of business” (Antczak 2008: 156). The hegemony of Francoism is clearly seen here. Franco, according to Melosik, believed that territorial identities posed a threat to the national unity and his power. This is because he imposed a “model of homogenisation”, in which Castilian was to be the official language, and the unity of the nation was to be based on the Castilian culture. However, the assimilation policy resulted in the consolidation of regional identities, and due to Franco’s violence “Spanish identity” was identified with authoritarian measures, while the regional identity – with the liberal-democratic policy (Melosik 2007: 269–270).

The oppression of Catalans took different forms: from a ban on the use of the Castilian language, dissolving Catalan political and cultural institutions, and sanctioning or expelling teachers to thousands of executions, in particular of persons involved in the defence of Catalonia’s autonomy (such as Lluís Companys) (*Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana* 2014). The oppression and exclusion of Catalans in the context of the construction of Spanish identity can be interpreted in two ways – this is because during Franco’s dictatorship, the Catalan opposition, constructed in this system of power, was equivocal towards the system. On the one hand, the system prevented the development of Catalan identity, while on the other it was a prerequisite for its very existence. A victory over the system would infringe upon the identity of the victorious power, which confirms Laclau’s thesis on the unending game between the particular and the universal. Spain (the Castilian identity) exists owing to Catalonia (the Catalan identity) and the other way round. Through the exclusion of Catalans, Franco in a way recognised their identity, and this very recognition was a condition for the construction of both identities at the same time.

In the times of Franco's dictatorship in Spain, there was a strong social antagonism between representatives of the separate Castilian and Catalan cultures. As it turns out, this difference cannot be eliminated – it is an element of both the identity of the oppressed, and the oppressor, even when one discourse becomes hegemonic. Following Laclau's line of reasoning, "[...] the abyss between the universal and the particular cannot be bridged, which simply means that the universal is nothing but a particularity which at some point won the dominating position, and social reconciliation is impossible" (Melosik 2007: 55–56).

There were also consequences of Franco's dictatorship in the context of the Catalans' emancipation. According to Tomasz Gmerek, due to the paradoxically low status of Catalan, the language entered the realm of the culture of Catalan elites, who continued to use it in social life and personal relationships. High culture (art and poetry) was also an element of the preservation of the language (Gmerek 2011: 288). Antczak writes that cultural revival in Catalonia began in the first half of the 1960s, mainly owing to the protests of students, the youth movement, and the New Left. It was then that progressive Catholics after the Second Vatican Council began to ground economic and social issues in Catalan realities. This social group was led by Jordi Pujol i Soley, whose goal was the rebuilding of Catalan national identity "on the basis of culture and economic progress, which would create a foundation for political actions in future" (Antczak 2008: 140). Thus, in the context of emancipation, the nationalism condemned by the majority of the society obtained a new meaning from the point of view of anticolonial ideas. It was because the Catalan left compared Catalonia at the time to a Spanish colony, which legitimised efforts aimed at the regaining of autonomy. In 1969, *Coordinadora de Forces Polítiques* (coordinated political forces), transformed in 1971 into the *Assemblea de Catalunya*, and demanded democracy, autonomy and freedom. Antczak stresses that "it was already a new generation raised during Franco's regime, all ready to act and having concrete goals" (Antczak 2008: 140).

Resistance and emancipatory efforts, which constituted the Catalan identity, took place in the context of the Spanish state. Under Laclau's logic, Catalonia, in order to fully constitute its identity, had to in some sense to integrate with Spain:

The identity of the oppressive forces has to be in some way inscribed in the identity searching for emancipation. This contradictory situation is expressed in the undecidability between internality and externality of the oppressor in relation to the oppressed: to be oppressed is part of my identity as a subject struggling for emancipation; without the presence of the oppressor my identity would be different (Laclau 1996: 46).

The construction of identity takes place via demands concerning education, consumer goods, and employment. Such situations mainly took place after the fall of the Francoist regime in 1975 and the introduction of a new constitution in 1978. Francisco Franco's death in 1975 was followed by the social, cultural, and political revival of the region, which invigorated the Catalan society. It was especially well

seen in the sphere of education. After many years of discrimination, a chance appeared for a rebirth of the minority language and culture. Gmerek believes that the most important element of the process was the introduction of the Catalan language to schools and making it a meaningful language in social and institutional discourse (Gmerek 2011: 288).

The above happened owing to the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, signed in 1979 and supported by 88% of the people voting in the region (Antczak 2008: 141), which made it acquire a broad autonomy in politics. Today, the government of Catalonia has competences to create educational policy and manage education. In Spain, however, the system of education is highly centralised, which means that it is the central government which ultimately guarantees the quality of education and its unification in the entire country. The above is tantamount to the implementation of a single national system of education, which considerably differs to the education proposed by the particular autonomous regions (Gmerek 2011: 289). Hence, we may say that the game for hegemony is ceaseless. Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas points out that: “Spanish nationalist and patriotic discourse exists since Franco’s death and is still present today as a group of various multifaceted ideas. In this sense, there is no Spanish nationalism, but various nationalist discourses despite certain basic assumptions”² (Núñez Seixas 2005: 56).

The period of Franco’s dictatorship and the related events exemplify processes, which take place also today, in particular in the conditions of multiculturalism. I believe that, when analysing past events, also ones outside the Polish context, we may draw valuable conclusions concerning the present politics and education. On the one hand this is because we live in a diversified society, in which many social minority groups coexist with each other, each of them creating a distinct identity and fighting for the creation of their own “self”/ “selves”; and on the other in view of the “new” types of dictatorship I mentioned at the beginning, such as the hegemony of the neoliberal discourse, which create specific subjectivities. Owing to analysing mechanisms of hegemonic fight, we are more sensitive to new hegemonic projects.

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Summary

Spanish educational policy towards Catalonia during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco – an attempt at an analysis from the perspective of the political theory of Ernesto Laclau

The text deals with the problem of the Spanish (Castilian) educational policy imposed on Catalonia during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. The dictatorship in this text is understood as an imposition of certain meanings and the exclusion which shaped the Catalan identity. The educational policy aimed at Catalonia is analyzed from the perspective of Ernesto Laclau's theory, in terms of the relations between Spain and Catalonia treated

as a constant particular/universal game and the struggle for hegemony. During the dictatorship, Franco imposed the Castilian particularity, by rejecting elements of the Catalan identity, its being a threat to the unity of the Spanish nation. The dictatorship of Francisco Franco via the usage of school policy on the one hand precluded the formation of the Catalan identity and, on the other hand, was the condition of its existence. Thus, the Castilian identity could exist due to the identity of the Catalan and vice versa. *Ipsa facto*, the oppression and the exclusion of Catalans was particularly significant for their emancipation and processes that took place after 1975.

Keywords

education, politics, Ernesto Laclau, Catalonia, Franco

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