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Opponent's Report of Master's Thesis

Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar, *The hero and the image of nationalism in Colombia. The sculptures at „Parque del Centenario“ 1883-1958*, 112 pp. MS.

Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar chose as his topic a segment of the question that has been drawing attention of social scientists for several decades – that of the existence of nation and nationalism in Latin America at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. This problem is rather broad. The student chose as the topic of his Master's Thesis the concrete case of the establishment of the “Centennial Park” in Bogota, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of birth of one of the protagonists of the Wars for Independence of Latin America, Simón Bolívar, and the subsequent development of the park until its liquidation in the 1960s. He studied these developments within the frame of the processes of initiation and development of Colombian nationalism. He based his analysis on the generally accepted theses of the specific character of the processes of nation formation in Latin America. According to the followers of the concept of Estado-Nación (Nation State) the Latin American nations were created in the course of the 19th century. During its first half the local political and cultural elites gradually became aware of specific features of their own communities and tried to present them as characteristic national traits; in the last decades of the 19th century they tried, also via the image of the national hero, they tried to spread the idea of the nation to the general society. These efforts continued, with decreased intensity, also in the subsequent period.

Various means were applied in corroboration of national sentiment, many of them known and used also in other parts of the world. Popular was the presentation of heroes who assumed important role in the defense of national interest and spreading of the fame of concrete national communities. While in Europe such role was assumed by Napoleon, on the one hand, and his opponents in the German States, Spain or Russia on the other, in Latin America were celebrated those who fought against the Spanish regime Miguel Hidalgo in Mexico, Simón Bolívar at the northern part of South America and José San Martín at south of the subcontinent. For Colombian political and cultural elites in the 1880s the centennial anniversary of Bolívar's birth thus offered convenient occasion for opening nationalist discourse aimed at those social strata that had been so far indifferent to nationalist slogans. From the beginning of the 1880s they thus endeavored to establish in the center of the capital a vast park whose center was to constitute a *templete* (literally, “little temple”) with Bolívar's statue.

Discussions concerning the establishment of the park in Colombian press, the addresses by cultural representatives and politicians of the times as well as the very process of realization of the thought served Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar as material for analysis. He followed up not only the realization of the original idea, but also the transformations of the park, the gradual extending of the repertoire of sculptures and finally the destruction of the park, again on the basis of the periodicals, official decrees, inventories of monuments and city plans. In the first part of the work, in which he followed up the genesis of the idea of establishment of the park and its imposition upon Colombian society, the author made use especially by the paper *El Papel Periódico Ilustrado*, whose director Alberto Urdaneta belonged to a creole

family that gained economic prominence already during the colonial times and since the beginning of the 19th century belonged also to the political elites of the country. Alberto Urdaneta himself had been considered already by his contemporaries to be a leading representative of the cultural elites. He thus embodied precisely those classes that promoted Colombian nationalism.

Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar complemented his analysis by detailed historical overview. Here I have a single reservation. I consider rather redundant the space devoted to the early colonial period. On the other hand I appreciate the fact that the author resisted successfully the urge to present the colorful life story of Simon Bolívar and remained focused solely on the role of Bolívar as a national symbol within the frame of the discourse of Colombian nationalism.

The text as a whole I consider to be well done. The author succeeded not only in capturing the transformation of the national hero in the nationalist discourse of Colombian society in the course of more than seventy years, but also the changes in the willingness of this society to sacrifice part of its public space to this symbol. In other words, Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar was able to follow, on the example of the statues of several important symbols of Colombian nationalism in the Centennial Park, the transformation of importance ascribed to these symbols. At the end of the 19th century the cultural and political elites considered their public presentation as important to the utmost. Later, the national rhetoric continued and the sculptural decoration of the Park was even enlarged in relation to the celebrations of the hundred years from the independence in the 1920s. But, in the end, the Park had finally to give place to the expanding capital and the sculptures were removed.

Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar accomplished a careful analysis of primary documents. He proved not only factual knowledge, but also the ability of compare the important constituent parts of the nationalist discourse in their development through time.

I recommend his work unequivocally for a defense and recommend the evaluation A (Czech grading: výborně, French grading: J-G 16).

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