

RECENZJE

THADDEUS V. GROMADA

New Jersey City University

Anna Brzozowska-Krajka, *Etnokultura w diasporze: Między regionalizmem a amerykanizacją* (Ethnoculture in Diaspora: Between Regionalism and Americanization), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2012, s. 352.

The Polish Tatra Highlanders (górale), their folk culture and mountain habitat in Podhale have fascinated Polish creative artists and scholars at least since the late 19th century. Indeed, the great Polish composer Karol Szymanowski regarded them as “artists par excellence” among all Polish folk types. This fascination has continued to the present since Tatra Highlander folk culture is still a source of inspiration for creative artists such like the composer Wojciech Kilar, and ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, folklorists, etc. continue to be allured and enchanted by it. In present day Poland Anna Brzozowska-Krajka, Professor of Folklore and Polish Literature at the University at the Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin is one of the leading scholars who has devoted much of her research to the folk culture of the Podhale region. Her major work was a book published in 1989, *Stare i Nowe Nuty na góralskich gęślikach: O Współczesnej poezji podhalańskiej 1945–1980* (Warszawa, 1989) (Old and New Notes on Highlander Fiddles: Contemporary Highlander Poetry 1945–1980). The book was a study of poetry written in “gwara góralska” (highlander dialect) in the post-World War II period. While researching this topic in the 1970’s she was astounded by the fact that much of the printed material for her study was found in *Tatrzański Orzeł/The Tatra Eagle* a quarterly edited and published in the United States in the state of New Jersey since 1947. It must be remembered that the communist regime in Poland did not encourage nor support góral periodicals. The pre-war *Gazeta Podhalańska* could not be revived, in the Polish Peoples Republic, so strange as it may seem, *Tatrzański Orzeł* was the only regularly published periodical devoted to “góral” folk culture in the world. Since it avoided political themes *Tatrzański Orzeł* could be distributed discretely in Poland. So it

is no wonder that góral folk poets like Andrzej Florek Skupien, Stanisław Nędza-Kubiniec, Aniela Gut Stapińska, Hanka Nowobielska, etc. who wanted to see their folk poetry in print often submitted them to a góral periodical in America. The role of “The Tatra Eagle” in the maintenance of Tatra highlander folk culture both in America and in Poland deserves more attention in the future.

It was this first contact with “The Tatra Eagle” in the 1970’s that prompted Dr. Brzozowska-Krajka to think about eventually doing research in the United States to learn what happens to Tatra Highlander folk culture when it is transplanted and becomes part of a Polish diaspora. The opportunity came in 1997 when her husband, Wiesław Krajka, Professor of English literature at the University of Maria Curie Skłodowska was invited to be a Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. So together with her husband and sons, she spent six months in the city with the largest concentration of “górale” in America. This was followed by longer and shorter sojourns to “góral” communities not only in the Chicago area but also in Northern New Jersey in Passaic, Clifton and Garfield in 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009-10 and 2012. Dr. Brzozowska-Krajka was thus able to do serious research on Polish góral communities primarily as a participant observer, a technique favored by cultural anthropologists. In addition she researched the major public and university libraries in New York, Chicago, and Boston and more importantly in the library and archives of the Polish Museum in Chicago, the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America in New York, the Archives of “Tatrzański Orzeł/The Tatra Eagle” in Hasbrouck Heights, NJ, and the library of Polish Highlanders Alliance of North America in Chicago. Some of this research was presented and discussed at various academic conferences held in Europe, North and South America and even in Asia. The fruit of all her laborious research is the book, *Etnokultura w diasporze: Między regionalizmem a amerykańizacją (Ethnoculture in Diaspora: Between Regionalism and Americanization)* published in Lublin in 2012. Undoubtedly, it is an impressive pioneer study which makes a major contribution to Polish American studies and to immigration, ethnic studies in America. What Dr. Brzozowska-Krajka did in this study was to respond adroitly to the appeal that was made by this reviewer in 1975 at an International Conference at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland that scholars doing research on Polonia (Polish diaspora) in the United States must take into account its internal diversity and avoid making unwarranted generalizations. To fulfill this desideratum attention must be given to sub groups within the Polish American ethnic group.¹ As Oskar Kolberg, the great Polish

¹ T. V. Gromada, *Rola regionalizmu w życiu Polonii Amerykańskiej*, [in:] Hieronim Kubiak and Andrzej Pilch (eds.), *Stan i potrzeby badań nad zbiorowościami polonijnymi*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 353–354.

ethnographer and folklorist revealed in his monumental works, the Polish nation with its many regions has produced a variety of folk cultures some of which have survived to this day like the Polish Tatra Highlander folk culture. Further, the Lublin folklorist did not ignore Rudolph Vecoli's exhortations to immigrant/ethnic studies scholars that in their research they must "get to know more of the internal lives of immigrants, their perceptions, attitudes, state of consciousness and aspirations, their sources of vitality and creativity. They must do it through the study of their songs, their folklore and their poetry".² This is exactly what one will find in Brzozowska-Krajka's book which focuses on one sub group within Polonia, the *górale*, the Polish Tatra Highlanders, who immigrated from Podhale, the Tatra mountain region in southern Poland as early as the 1870's and as late as the 1970's. So far as it is known, no scholar in Poland or the U.S. has been able to match Brzozowska-Krajka's truly exceptional interdisciplinary study of a Polish American subgroup in diaspora.

The author explained that her study was "neither predominately historical nor sociological", but rather a study that was, influenced by the interdisciplinary cultural studies approach advocated by the Australian social scientist, Chris Barker in his book *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. Her many years of meticulous research, primarily as a participant observer in the Chicago area as well as in Northern New Jersey, have led her to conclude that the Polish Tatra Highlanders in America have not only been able to retain their identity and preserve the main elements of their folk culture within the urban American civilization, but were even able to expand and develop it further. "They have found a way", she declared, "to harmoniously co-exist with their folk culture in America's multi-cultural urbanism".

It is in the twelve chapters in Part 2 of the book where Brzozowska-Krajka painstakingly describes and analyzes the manifestations, processes and the ethnic markers (music, song, dance, dialect, costume, family customs, religious observances, folk art, architecture, etc.) that give evidence of the vitality of the Tatra Highlander subgroup in America. She is especially impressed with its strong efforts to maintain an authentic folk culture and its careful imitation of cultural patterns and models of Podhale, the original homeland. Two institutions were credited for playing a special role in maintaining the identity and folk culture of the "górale" in America, The Polish Highlanders Alliance of North America (Związek Podhalan w Ameryce) based in Chicago but with over eighty circles in various states, and the bilingual periodical *Tatrzański Orzeł/The Tatra Eagle* published in New Jersey (originally in Passaic and presently in Hasbrouck Heights) continuously since 1947 and co-edited by American born children of

² R. Vecoli, *History from the Inside Out*, "Spectrum", No. 1, 1975, p. 1.

góral immigrants, Thaddeus Gromada and his sister Jane Gromada Kedron. Chapters 7 and 8 and Appendixes 3 and 4 are devoted entirely to this quarterly publication which for almost seven decades has worked to raise the consciousness of persons of “góral” origin by introducing them to the beauty and values of Tatra folk culture. As a co-editor of this journal I am both humbled and delighted by the attention that was given to *The Tatra Eagle* all throughout the book and especially for calling it the “forge of góral thought in the world” (kuźnię myśli góralskiej na cały świat) (p. 315). I would agree with the author that Polish góral ethnicity is defense mechanism against being forced to jump into the “Melting Pot” and becoming a standardized, homogenized Anglo-American but it is not a barrier to Americanization. I do not, however, believe that górale are strongly resisting Americanization, especially since the ‘New Ethnicity’ “movement of the 1970’ and 1980’s espoused by Michael Novak and others there is now a greater emphasis on diversity and cultural pluralism in American society. It is possible to be an American without giving up ones Polish and góral cultural heritage. Brzozowska-Krajka rightly support’s Roman Reinfuss’ theory that “Urban civilization does not by itself cause the disappearance of folk cultures rather it is the inferiority complexes of those cultures vis a vis urban culture. But when a folk group has a positive self image and values highly its culture, it can without conflict co-exist and even flourish and take advantage of all the amenities of urban culture.” Reinfuss made this observation after researching Tatra folk culture in Poland in the late 1980’s in his “Podhalański Fenomen” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa (Polish Folk Art)* 1988 no.1–2. One thing is certain, Tatra Highlanders both in Poland and America tend to have a very high positive self image and are very proud of their folk culture. This may be partly due to the myth that Polish elites have created about them in the late 19th century and early 20 century which lionized and idealized them and their folk culture. Stanisław Witkiewicz, for example, lauded them for “possessing superior psycho-physical qualities and an unusual artistic sense”. One wonders what happened to other Polish subgroups based on folk cultures in America. Are they dormant or extinct? If not, this book is a splendid model to emulate by other researchers.