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The review of the PhD dissertation

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“Social construction of history, reality and identity of Polish immigrants 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 times”

The dissertation concerns the important and interesting sociological problems of processing history, reality and identity construction by social subjects. These general problems are well discussed in sociological literature, but the case of Polish immigrants in Mexico which are taken into consideration in this work has not been studied yet so well. In this piece, the two groups of Polish immigrants were taken into account, which enables the use of comparative perspective. As we can read in the *Introduction*, the author has decided to answer the following research questions: how two groups of Polish immigrant to Mexico construct their identity; how they use symbolic elements of Polish and Mexican national culture in this process; how they memorize the Polish past; how they construct the social world they live in. The author also declares that her writing is addressed to two kinds of readers – Polish and Mexican ones. This perspective has considerably influenced the narration presented here, which I will discuss later.

The dissertation counts 202 pages and consists of the following parts: introduction, five chapters, conclusions, references and appendix. The layout/composition is correct. One can find theoretical and empirical part, as well as the information about historical, social and cultural background of the analysed problems. In general, the premised postulates have been achieved, although some in full, while others only partially. Let's concentrate on respective parts of dissertation in details.

The first part of *Introduction* embraces general overview of the content of each chapter. The introduction is not perfect though, as it lacks some more clarification of what and in which part some issues will be discussed. For example, the content of the first chapter is presented in details, while other chapters are sketchily mentioned.

The part I.I *Mexico-Poland, history of relations* concerns the presence of Poles in Mexico since the 18th century. The author mentions some historical figures (e.g. Karol Bieniewski, Jerzy Hostyński) and their biographies in Mexico. She refers only to one book concerning this issues that is *La migración polaca en Mexico* written by Tadeusz Łepkowski. In this part some strands are repeated. We can also find some references to Mexican history (the division between the Conservatives and the Liberals) which have not been elucidated enough, especially for Polish readers.

The next section is dedicated to the 20th century Polish immigration to Mexico. The author uses selected statistics and other data concerning the composition of immigrant groups given by After Łepkowski. As the author underlines, they were mostly Jews who has not been included in the further research.

In the subsection I.II *Migration to Mexico in the 20th century*, the author describes the waves of immigration to the country, as well as the national composition of newcomers groups. The author also discusses the matter of legal regulations concerning the status of people arriving to Mexico. This information is valuable, but what I would suggest is to add more detailed data concerning the General Migration Law and its provisions. Ms Camacho has fed some of them, especially these which enfold the 1930s but she has omitted the newest ones, e. g. only mentioning the ones from the 70s. To understand the position of immigrants in the Mexican state it would be necessary to provide more background of the immigration policy at all. Some statistics would be also helpful as well.

The next part is dedicated to the presentation of the situation in Poland during World War II and the fates of Polish citizens during this time. As I suppose, this information functions as the political, military and social contexts which forerun Polish migration to Mexico in the 1940s. The author pointed out to the Russian annexation of Polish territory and further deportations of Poles to Siberia and their life conditions there. She shows the process of the Polish army construction under Władysław Anders command. Some fragments of this part are too detailed, while others are too repetitive. It could be said that this part of the text is dedicated especially for Mexican

consignees, as for Polish ones these facts are rather obvious. Apparently, the author has to face dilemma what exactly to present about Poland and Mexico, so as not to be suspected of being overly simplistic or unclear.

The sections coming next contain, as the author declares, the descriptions of Polish immigrants' experiences. It is difficult to uncover what was the general idea for this part. Ms Camacho decided to reconstruct these experiences on the basis of the memoirs of Władysław Rattinger. The intent to analyse someone's memoirs to provide the insight into history is very accomplishing, but not in this, mostly historical, context especially subsequent to the information presented on the previous pages. I do not find these parts well conformed to the narration included in the first chapter as a whole. Moreover, the descriptions coming from Rattinger's book, cited by Ms Camacho, are too extensive and detailed, and are mostly focused on the time before leaving Russia. I would suggest joining them with the part V.I.

The next two parts of this chapter provide detailed information about Mexico in the context of foreign policy of the state in the 1930s and 1940s and the Spanish immigration to the country at that time. I would say that they are somehow unnecessary. Although, it is useful for Polish reader to get an insight into history of the described country.

The paragraph *Second migration wave 1978-1990; Poland's historical background* is dedicated to the presentation of Polish history and political situation in the state after World War II until the 1990s. The author focuses on the most important moments of these times, but the narration is not consistent. For example, there is a lot of information about W. Gomułka's period, but not even any about E. Gierek's governance. There is no doubt, to my mind, that the author has tried to comprehend the socio-political situation in Poland to give the reader (especially Mexican one) necessary facts and data. What I find missing here is the information concerning the immigration waves of Poles in the post war period.

The next chapter *The problem of 'making history'* serves both as the theoretical introduction and the description of some important facts concerning Mexico and its history. In the first part, the author discusses the concepts of memory, collective memory, post-memory, history and the invention of tradition in reference to the theories of Ricoeur, Connerton, Hirsch, Anderson, and Hobsbawm. This piece of writing is well organized; respective theories are elaborated in the right way. Nevertheless, some fragments are unnecessary (e.g. the Anderson concept of census). The further sections of this chapter are devoted to the concept of nationalism and nation. The author

recalls the classical ideas of this phenomenon (Gellner, Anderson, Calhoun, Kedourie, Greenfeld, Smith). The way how she presents given points of view is correct. What is lacking is more comparative approach to these theories. The following subchapter embraces the concept of identity. As before, the author analyses the main topic from different theoretical perspectives. I would say that here one can find deeper approach as the points are presented in more problematical way. However, some parts have descriptive rather than analytical character. It should be admitted that the title of this fragment of the dissertation does not correspond to its content.

The next part of this chapter concentrates on ethnicity, and national and ethnic identity. As in the previous fragments she ponders over the main concepts of the phenomena. Citing Smith, Guibernau, Fenton et.al she sketchily describes the topic. Without the doubt, she gives an overview of the problems. I am not convinced that the given discussion is well ordered. It would be useful for the narration to introduce some basic definitions of the studied issues. Moreover, the author uses the existing theoretical concepts to interpret Mexican situation literally. For example, she exactly employs A. Smith's words to describe the processes of identity creation among Polish immigrants in Mexico. It makes the impression that this group was described by Smith himself. It is worth grasping the given empirical problems in the context of a given theory, but firstly it should be studied somehow and then interpreted. Additionally, the empirical or historical data which are recalled as an evidence of described processes are not well supported by the bibliography. They are just mentioned without reference to previously introduced information or literature. The last subsection on Bhabha's concept of a nation as a narration is well written. At the end, one minor remark, according to Barth concept of ethnicity is not just social organization, but social organisation of cultural differences (p. 79).

Generally speaking what I can see as a fault of the whole chapter is the inconsistency of the narration. The author on the one hand discusses the theory of a given issue; on the other hand, provides some examples which are chosen to illustrate them in details. I am inclined to agree with this strategy. Nonetheless, I would suggest reconsidering whether it would be better to add more necessary examples in order to develop the points, or to reduce them to minimum and concentrate on the theory only. The existing form of the presentation leaves a lot to be desired. It has been pointed out above that some parts of text are only descriptive. One can see the lack of interpretation in the whole narration. Still, this does not change the fact that the author has presented the well established knowledge about such phenomena as identity, memory, nation, ethnicity etc. The

quoted literature has been well chosen. It could be said that the reader gets most of required understanding of the discussed problems.

The chapter III *Building the Mexican Nation* is dedicated to the problems of the role of myths in the construction of a nation, especially the Mexican one. Unlike in the previous parts, Ms Camacho interlaces the theory and data, such as historical facts, or social and cultural aspects of the processes. She begins with some theories of a national myth and then, step by step, analyses the core Mexican national symbols and ideas. She takes into consideration Pre-Hispanic Mexico, colonial times, the struggle for independence in the 18th and 19th century, and the raise of new nationalism in the 20th century. The author provides a lot of historical data. She interprets them in the context of national processes which have been taking place for many decades. The main Mexican national myths have been discussed both in the context of their origin and the symbolic content, for example, the Virgen de Guadalupe as the Mexican emblem, or the process of permeation of the indigenous and Spanish culture. In my opinion, this part is a well written. The Polish reader becomes acquainted with many necessary information which enables to grasp the complicated Mexican past and culture. The only issue which has been missed out is the lack of any statistical data concerning the ethnic and national composition of Mexican society now. I only would like to admit that this part is dominated by more historical than sociological insight.

The following chapter gives prominence to the methodological aspects of the dissertation. Ms Camacho relates to the challenges she had to face in the process of her research project construction. In her writings, she demonstrates the sensibility to the demands which a researcher has to face while she/he is choosing the right population to study, the methods and techniques which would be applied when gathering empirical data etc. She describes her experiences from the field as well as the interviews scenario.

Next, she discusses the selling points of qualitative approach, narrative and in-depth interviews, the ethnographic approach as well as basic ideas concerning grounded theory. It could be said that many issues have been discussed and mentioned, but I would suggest changing the way of introducing them. I would advise the author to organize the narration around basic question: what was the main methodological approach and why; what techniques were used during research; who was investigated; where, when and, last but not least, why? More information about the studied population, however, would be helpful. We know that the author interviewed two groups of Polish immigrants. She had chosen interviewees correctly, but we do not get any contextual data. How

many Poles live in Mexico nowadays? What is the social structure of this population? What parts of Mexico do they inhabit, etc? There is some demographic information needed. I have some doubts whether the names of interviewees should be openly stated. I would suggest concealing them before publishing this work. Concluding, in this chapter Ms Camacho has comprehended all necessary details. She has chosen the right approach to grasp the studied problems. Nonetheless, the arrangement of the narration should be slightly changed. By doing so, she would also be able to omit some of the repetitions.

Next section of the dissertation has an empirical character and is focused on the description and analysis of two kinds of materials. The first kind is the memoirs of Władysław Rattinger and the autobiographical novel written by Anna Żarnecka. The other one is the interviews collected by Ms Camacho during her field research.

At the beginning, I would like to concentrate on the first part of this chapter. First of all, the author does not justify the choice she has made according to the analyzed printed material. She just writes that she is going to study these two books. I think it would be necessary to mention the reason why these books have been chosen, why they are the valuable kind of material. Moreover, she does not give any information about the date of publication, the content of the books etc. It is reasonable to triangulate both existing and obtained data, but the reader should know the purpose of this procedure. While discussing the content of Rattinger's writings, Ms Camacho concentrates rather on the story, than on problems. There is an attempt to interpret the memories but I would suggest deepening this perspective. Again, no conclusions have been stated. I wonder why the author describes in details Rattinger's experiences coming from the time of transportation and the contacts with the Soviets if the main analytical aims are much wider. There are also no references to other experiences different than the memory of the times proceeding immigration. Maybe in the memoirs Rattinger writes only about this, but this fact should be mentioned at the beginning of analysis.

The same could be stated about the analysis of the second book. Ms Camacho focuses on the description of the memories of Żarnecka, especially the ones which had predated the time of the migration to Mexico. The chosen parts of the novel of Żarnecka have been quoted but not commented according to the main topic of the dissertation. Only a few lines concern Żarnecka's experiences associated with the times of the journey to Mexico and the settlement there.

Commenting on this part of work, it should be admitted that the extension to the materials such as reminiscences earns praise but, as any kind of sources, this one should also be treated conceptually. The researcher should not be deceived by the data, he/she should rather regard them critically bearing in mind the main topic of his/her study. As Ms Camacho writes "The two books used were analysed as fiction that depict the way Polish immigrants from World War II use narrative to tell their past" and in this context she exercised her task. However, as we can read on page 123, the main categories of the analysis according to the empirical material (including books and interviews) taken by Ms Camacho were: identity, life stories, collective imaginary of the Polish nation, and collective imaginary of Mexican nation. Looking from this perspective, it could be said that she focused mostly on the life story, not on the identity or imaginary of Mexican or Polish nation. The author writes "Biographies have been an important tool to understand the construction of reality that a social group makes" and it is the important reflection over this topic. However, she does not use fully this perspective on this kind of documents.

The next part of this chapter concerns the life of Polish immigrants in Santa Rosa Camp in the forties. Ms Camacho demonstrates the social and economic condition of the residents, relations with its surrounding, the attitudes of local authorities etc. These descriptions are based on the existing literature concerning Poles in Mexico (among other Łepkowski, Carreño, Zack). On the basis of these writings she tries to reconstruct the identity problems of the Poles who came to Mexico. Then, she describes the content and interprets the interviews.

As she mentions, she has done twenty one interviews during the fieldwork, but she discusses only four of them. The only explanation of that choice which she gives is that they "better represent the stories of the two waves studied" and that are very illustrative and show the pattern of migration and life in Santa Rosa camp and Xalapa. Each researcher makes his/her own decisions concerning the extension of gathered material. But I am convinced that it would be also interesting to find out what other interlocutors have in their minds and hearts. Taking into consideration bigger empirical data would enable to make a comparison, to show tendencies in the opinions or to reconstruct what is typical or unusual. The cut down of empirical data seems to be inconvenient. Having read the whole part pertaining the interviews analysis, one can have this conviction. The author, while analysing the chosen interviews - two for each time span, concentrates on reporting rather than interpreting. The narration is inconsistent. For example, in the part *Barbara Batorska*

we can find both Barbara's words and opinions, as well as other interviewees' ones. She quotes also a book by Piotrowski. At the end of this part she makes the summary of threats, what is an interesting point in this part of the narration. But one can get the impression that some conclusions are not well based on empirical material. Maybe she formulates them according to her knowledge coming from the whole set of data (interviews and participant observation) which, due to scarcity of the quoted utterances, the reader does not have chance to recognize.

Additionally, she finishes the part concerning the first wave of immigrants with some ideas which embrace the problems discussed in the next paragraph. To make the text more coherent, the order should be changed.

The subsequent section is devoted to the analysis of the Maklakiewicz sisters' case, and the second wave of immigration. Differently from the first wave immigrants' case, Ms Camacho gives some information relating to the experiences of being a Polish immigrant in Mexico. It could be said that she accentuates other problems than before. Therefore, it is difficult to compare two groups of Poles and their visions of the world. As all the conclusions are given in the previous part, this one does not include any. It is disadvantageous that the author designed only 5 pages to describe the Poles who came to Mexico in the 1990s.

The final part of the dissertation works as a summary of the issues discussed in the theoretical and empirical chapters. The author joins threads, interprets data coming from interviews and participant observation. In my opinion, this is a well-written section. Unlike in others chapters, Ms Camacho shows the ability to interpret and analyse the data, and not only present them. She implements the theories, compares the material and states the conclusions. This type of writing should have been implemented earlier. However, it cannot be said that this fragment of work has been perfectly composed. There is too much theory. The author includes too much new information (for example, about the Mexican concept of the white nation) which should be presented in the previous chapters to clear the historical and cultural context of discussion about Mexico. Still the reader can grasp the main idea of the book better. At the end, the author implements the concept of fragmented identity (see figures), which I find interesting. I only regret that this concept has not been developed in details. I would like to underline that some conclusions stated in the summary have not been well related to the data coming from the empirical work undertaken by Ms Camacho. The only choice is to trust the author's words. I suppose, that such comment would have not been stated if Ms Camacho had employed the full data from field research. This scarcity was a mistake.

To summarise the merit of this dissertation, I would say that the author provides an interesting issue, good bibliography which has been well chosen, but not applied fully as an interpretative tool. The reader has been acquainted with the history of Mexico, the cultural and social aspects concerning the nation building processes of this country. It has been also possible to get into the complicated fates of the Poles who immigrated to Mexico in two moments of time. One can ask whether Ms Camacho has developed well her main points of interests, that was “to study the identity construction and social reality of the Poles who migrated to Mexico in two different periods: June and November 1943 and 1978-1990”. Has she shown “How (...) Polish immigrants in Mexico construct their identity?” The answer should be – yes, but partly.

As I have mention in prior fragments of this review, what is missing is an analytical perspective and interpretative approach towards the discussed issues. It concerns both the implementation of the theory and the analysis of the fieldwork data. Generally, the readers are given the descriptions of the problems. According to empirical data, it has not been a thick description, but rather thin one. I cannot say that they were not correct and well collected. They were helpful and informative. Sometimes they were profound, some other time sketchy. Due to the shortage of the empirical material, the full answer to the main research question seems not to be given. The readers do get the knowledge about identity processes; however, it should be noticed that Ms Camacho analyses mostly the memories. It would be helpful if she showed the linkage between these two aspects. Nevertheless, the revised dissertation expands the insight on Poles in Mexico in the context of their identity, experiences of being an immigrant as well as their attitude toward their mother country. What I would like to advise the author is to employ her inevitably good knowledge about Mexico, Poles in Mexico to more deepen interpretation of the questions. I would say, as a conclusion, that the more empirical data, the better.

At the end, I would like to make some comments on editorial aspects of revised writing. In the table of content there is the omission of sequence of chapters. We have part number three, than part number six, and then number five and then number six. I would rethink the titles of given parts to make a correspondence between the content and the headline. I find the title of the dissertation not very clear either. If we know the whole manuscript, the topic mentioned in the title does not correspond well to the actually discussed problems.

The language and style of writing is correct. The literature is quoted in a good manner. So I do not have many remarks in this matter.

Despite of all critical remarks I recommend this manuscript as a foundation of PhD degree to the Council of Faculty of Humanities of AGH-University of Science and Technology. It meets the standards of PhD thesis.

Kraków 24.05. 2016

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Krzysztof Winiarski'.