



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Mensur HAMZIC

Title: 'Border Walls: The Case of Saudi Arabia'

Programme/year: IEPS, Year 2

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Janusz Salamon

Criteria	Definition	Maximm	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	10
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	28
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	37
<i>Total</i>		80	75
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	8
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	4
<i>Total</i>		20	16
TOTAL		100	91



Evaluation

Major criteria:

In his Master thesis, Mensur Hamzic had the audacity to take on two influential social scientists, D.B. Carter and P. Poast, who put forward a first comprehensive theory of the border wall construction, and he identified weaknesses in their theory, suggesting the way the theory might be supplemented. The style of Hamzic's critique of Carter's and Poast's theory strikes me as mature in not being excessive, as he appreciates the overall plausibility of the theory, while skilfully exploiting the fact that the authors - who are focused on a bigger global picture - appear to overlook the challenge posed to their theory by an exceptional complexity of the border wall construction in the context of the Middle East. Thus I have no reservation to the way the research question and the research objectives are formulated. The conceptual framework of the thesis (and to large extent also the methodology) is borrowed from Carter and Poast, so that Hamzic's critique is in effect an *internal* critique focusing on the question of the consistency of their theory vis-a-vis the empirical data they themselves claim to be interpreting. The total absence of *external* critique, that is the absence of any attempt to challenge Carter's and Poast's methodology and conceptual framework (instead of taking them granted and adopting it in his own Master thesis) may be considered a weakness, because although it would be a more ambitious task requiring contrasting Carter's and Poast's approach to a range of other discussions of the subject matter (and such discussion within the space constraints of a Master thesis would not be easy to handle), there is a sense that Hamzic is not entirely familiar with a broader context of the scholarly discussion of this issue, in which variety of conceptual frameworks and methodologies are adopted. Having said that, the main argument which Hamzic puts forward - which boils down mainly to giving greater prominence to *socio-political* (as opposed to purely economic) factors that motivate border wall construction (or lack of it) - seem to me convincing in that it explains in a plausible manner the empirical data that Hamzic points to (especially the absence of the wall between Saudi Arabia and Jordan - the wall that should be there if Carter's and Poast's theory would be without fault).



Minor criteria:

It seems to me that the imperfections of Hamzic's thesis manifest themselves more obviously in the way he interacts with the sources and in the overall style of the thesis. Reading the thesis one has an impression that the work would benefit greatly from a more thorough treatment of the sources (the sources which *are* mentioned in the bibliography). As things stand, there is a sense that the thesis was written in a rush and while aware of the existence of the broader context of the scholarly debate of the matter, Hamzic had no opportunity to explore this debate at any depth and to show how this debate sheds light on his own interesting findings. But again it remains a contentious issue how broad knowledge of the issues is an author of a Master thesis (not a doctoral thesis) to manifest. I have no doubt that in the case of Mensur Hamzic this knowledge should be less restricted, and a closer reading of a greater number of sources would result in a more comprehensive analysis of the empirical data he considers, but on the other hand I judge that his originality and creativity in approaching the research question compensates for this weakness. The fact that the thesis was clearly written in a hurry also effects the overall style - not just the linguistic style, but also the style of presenting the findings of his research. In some places - for example in discussing the political and economic situation of Saudi Arabia and of the neighbouring countries - there is a sense of certain superficiality in the way the data are presented (as if one would read an introductory article in an encyclopedia, instead of a piece of a specialist literature).

Overall evaluation:

The thesis written by M. Hamzic - devoted to a topic whose importance is highlighted by the centrality of the promise of building a border wall between USA and Mexico to Donald Trump's electoral platform - appears to me as an ambitious and well executed research project that exceeds what is usually expected from a Master thesis, therefore despite of its weakness - clearly resulting from time constraints with which the author had to deal - deserves the highest grade.

Suggested grade: 1 (excellent)

Signature:

Janusz Salamon