

June 13 2018

Dear Prof. Plechanovová

I have read the draft of the PhD thesis “Mundane Self-Legitimizations of Power: Distribution of the Sensible in the Israeli Settlements in the West Bank” with a great interest. In this thesis Jakub Zahora originally explores the mechanisms, practices and political technologies that work to depoliticize contested and potentially disturbing realities in general and in the case of Israel’s colonial project in the West Bank in particular.

The main argument articulated throughout this thesis is that “the contentious nature of the settlement is erased on the part of the settlers through specific material and visual practices that feed into the middle-class ethos by aesthetization of the occupation’s manifestations and practices”. This argument is a refreshing step and a wonderful contribution to the growing interest in in the field of IR and Occupation Studies, investigating the different forms and acts through which power and oppression are legitimized through spatial, material and visual representations. Importantly, Zahora takes such argument a step forward, while illustrating how dominance and state violence function and be constructed by mundane, banal acts in the sphere of the everyday.

The thesis is well structured and the narrative is successfully articulated within the theoretical debates and the current literature. Zahora is familiar with the most updated literature on Israel’s occupation, the normalization of occupation and the spatio-visual discussion of this colonial project. Methodologically, this is a fascinating document; Zahora’s ethnography highlights the

role of the everyday, the perceived and lived space of settlers as well as the very denial (which is politically constructed) of the settlers in relation to their position. This is well elaborated in pp 212:

*“Ethics simply does not enter into one’s considerations. Because of the pervasive, minute mechanisms, practices, technologies, arrangements and frameworks, the settlers simply do not find themselves under conditions that would require contemplation on moral questions”.*

The ethnographic section is also interesting since Zahora reflects throughout the text on questions of positioning himself vis a vis his interviewees, he is careful in analysing the ethnographic materials and manages to raise theoretical questions. However, I was wondering why in such thesis the visible in invisible? In other words, I would expect an extensive use of visual documents (photographs and maps) which are part of the data collection in the fieldwork (I assume). Unless there is a strong argument on why the use of visuals (and visual analysis) is not included, as a reader I would like it to be included in this thesis in an integrative form.

My other critic\comment has to do with conclusion section. Zahora states that: *“All that being said, I am still not sure how to write a conclusion to all of this.”* (p.219). On one hand I really liked the style of Zahora’s writing; it is modest, not arrogant, not full of un-clear fashionable jargon. On the other hand, such statement is too apologetic; the task of Zahora is to present a sharp, clear and more assertive conclusion section. In other words, the concluding section raises some important and interesting insights starting from “The political implications of depoliticization” to some more general and theoretical debated on “Depoliticization Beyond Israel” (a section that I find interesting) and “Depoliticization and Erasure of Ethics”.

However, there is no clear hierarchy in the conclusions: in my view this chapter should be edited, re-phrased and maybe re-structured, highlighting EXPLICITLY the following:

1. What are the main conclusions raised from the specific case-study
2. How these conclusions fit the main argument\research question\the existing debates (in this context I find Zahora's distinction between the psychological and the political denial at the opening section of the thesis fascinating)
3. What are the THEORETICAL implications and how it contributes to the field

To be clear, I think that all these components exists in this thesis, but I would expect a sharper conclusion section.

Finally, there are many typos, grammar and style issues – the thesis need a good proof-reading.

For example:

Pp 15: double brackets ))

Pp 209: "But I further wanted to show *was*"

Pp 220: "my *bigger* awareness"

Pp 203: Why I am talking about (style of expression)

Pp 202: After I finished (completed) my fieldwork; "two-state solution" should be two-states

Pp 201: project which go beyond (should be goes)

The political implications of depoliticization (should be depolitization?)

Sincerely

Prof. Haim Yacobi

September 4 2018

Dear Prof. Plechanovová

I have read again the revised version of Jakub Zahora's dissertation. I would like to congratulate him for producing this wonderful research which I find innovative, original and important.

My main point of critic in the previous report was on the concluding section which I find now much more solid, focused and sharp. I appreciated the section on the political implications of Zahora's research as well as the reference to other cases. Beyond that, I found the theoretical revision much more convincing regarding the Foucauldian thinking.

Haim Yacobi