A review of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Divided Cities. A Case Study of Mitrovica*, by Marzena Maciulewicz, a PhD candidate at University of Warsaw, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”

Evaluation of the Subject, Contents and Methodology

After a very profound Introduction, in the first chapter of the dissertation, entitled 'Methodology and Theoretical Framework', the candidate introduces the reader into the state of art and previous researches. The author concludes that there is a wide bibliography of works written on Mitrovica for the period before it became the divided city after the 1999 Kosovo war, but there are just few dealing with this issue after the division of the city. It is also important to stress that the author concludes that there is no study that describes the overall situation in the city, taking into consideration both parts of the city, the north and the south, the Serbian and Albanian part. It is also important to stress that until this PhD thesis most of analyses are dealing with security issues or peace building process, without taking into consideration the comprehensive synthesis including the experience of the residents and their everyday life practices. In this part of the thesis the candidate demonstrates wide knowledge of anthropological theories that have helped her to base her researches into complex and various methodological frameworks. The theoretical basis of this thesis are anthropology and sociology of urban spaces, but also sociology of everyday life, history, collective memory. Three main research categories that are employed in this work are explained – the divided city, site of memory and actors of urban space.

The second chapter is entitled „Historical Overview of Mitrovica’s Development“. Comparing with other works dealing with divided Mitrovica this is a new approach since other researches were dealing with older periods of history or were neglecting historical approach. The problem oriented approach serves as an important context for the understanding of contemporary Mitrovica. In this part of PhD thesis candidate provides the reader with general characteristics of urban settlements in the Balkan Peninsula with particular focus on Mitrovica. The candidate stresses that the Balkan Peninsula had experienced different urban traditions - Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire, Slavic countries in the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire and new traditions in nation-states. Mitrovica appears in documents of the second half of the 15th century and only in 16th century it is described as an urban settlement. In its history it was a communication junction, multicultural settlement, strategic garrison, mining and industrial center. For centuries it was a multi-cultural environment with the fluid social composition that is in detail described
in the chapter as well as constant shifts in its structure. Special attention have been payed to the development of Mitrovica in socialist period and its industrial and urban development.

Third chapter is entitled “Imagined Boundaries. Symbolic Dimensions of Disintegration in Urban Space”. Urban space is understood as a platform where sites of memory are manifested. That helps the candidate to detect influences on continual creation of urban space, to identify the main actors, their motives and their intentions to integrate or to divide the city. The first part of the chapter deals with symbolic space of contemporary Mitrovica. River Ibar is perceived as a border between southern and northern Mitrovica that divides the city between Serbian and Albanian community. But the candidate also emphasizes that each neighborhood is a specific microcosms of complex relations with internal shifts and developments. One subchapter is dedicated to contemporary Mitrovica and its urban landscape that helps the reader to understand the importance of the division. Special attention is payed to symbols, places of interest and the ways city itself is called since this is the best methodology to show mental boundaries of its inhabitants. In this part of the thesis there is also a very subtle analyses of layers of symbolic landscape in Mitrovica, starting with Ottoman legacy up to the post socialist and postwar period. This profound research and analyses helped the candidate to conclude that Mitrovica is not simply divided into two completely separate parts due to ethnic lines. Some of the city symbols are regarded as shared by several communities. Candidate came to the very important conclusion that “there is no doubt that Mitrovica has many actors of urban space who separately strive to implement many different strategies, not in accordance with any urban plan or other legal schedule, which means that “the problem of division can be localized and analyzed in different dimensions, not only the ethnic-national one”. This is the most important conclusion of this thesis and the real contribution for further analyses of divided cities.

Chapter four is entitled “Social Practice - Divisions among Urban Community”. In the beginning the candidate offers a theoretical framework on divided cities that shows that ethnic dimension of disintegration prevails other aspects of division. But, this research goes
further aiming to show the complexity of the situation. Those other aspects are economic inequalities, religion, rural-urban frictions, individual behavior etc. This is why this chapter is concentrated on complex relations between residents in their everyday practices. The analyses starts with a very important demographic characteristics showing that in the north part of the city live 29,460 residents (22,530 are Serbs) and in the south 70,289 (69,497 are Albanians). Those numbers do show the ethnic division, but for the author it is very important to notice that ethnically mixed neighborhoods are still present, which is not usually the case of divided cities. One of the important results of the research is that residents are commuting, going from one part of the city to another, although with some problems. It is very interesting that shopping, work, health, administrative issues or religious reasons are stressed as most important reason for crossing the river and visiting the other side. The main conclusion of this chapter is that a significant number of residents cross the river every day for different reasons. It is also emphasized that local identities are not based only on ethnic component and that are many different identity layers that form different integration and disintegration factors.

Chapter five is named “Actors of Disintegrated Urban Space. Parallel Institutions - Higher education”. First part is dedicated to the actors of urban space and their roles in the divided city. There is a very interesting conclusion that political factors, both internal and international are perceived by as very influential for urban structure of Mitrovica, which means that they don’t have a feeling that they can influence the situation in the city except on the micro scale. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the issue of parallel institutions as “the most extreme example of duplication of services and infrastructures demonstrating the disintegration of the urban organism”. Although the situation is still very complex, the author concludes that the level of duplications has diminished in Mitrovica since the war. The formal division is still sustained especially thanks to the existence of two municipalities and two mayors, a Serbian and the Albanian one. Special attention in this part of thesis is payed to higher education as the example of parallel institutions. After the war the university that have remained in Northern Mitrovica is the only one with the Serbian curriculum, which together with care system and the municipality are the only remaining
Serbian institutions in North Mitrovica and in the north of Kosovo. Special subchapter is dedicated to the University as a parallel institution and the best example of divided city. The candidate shows that there is no cooperation, economic connection or common language and that the division of higher education makes the University a hostage of political situation and one of the most visible signs of the division.

At the end of the thesis there is a very well developed Conclusion. It starts with the presumption that in the first place Mitrovica is an industrial center, communication junction and the post-socialist city that became a divided city only after the Kosovo war in 1999. The main goal was to make a comprehensive synthesis free from ideological influences that will reflect the complexity of the city structure. The mix methodology helped the candidate also to include minorities and their sensitive position between the two dominant groups. The conclusion is that the city is much more complex and dynamic than expected. The residents are critical of the present situation, but the conclusion is that the situation “will not change as long as the main actors are linked with external political forces that do not prioritize the well-being of this multicultural, diverse community, but instead focus on private goals which only deepens current divisions”.

The Methodology of the Dissertation

As far as the methodology is concerned, the candidate Marzena Maciulewicz has employed an interdisciplinary approach and mixed methodology. Research materials included original empirical data and multicultural, multilingual written sources in Serbian and in Albanian language. It includes statistics but also field work, interviews, conversations and the analyses of visual materials.

As the candidates points out in the Introduction a triangulation approach was applied which means “compiling data from various sources in order to determine the compliance of the
results - it assumes that one research strategy is cross-checked against the result of using the method associated with another research strategy”. Methodological tools are created with regard to three main dimensions of the divided urban space: symbolic, social and functional.

Those mix methodologies and various sources helped the candidate to apply theoretical frameworks of divided cities, sites of memory and urban actors. This thesis is important as a new input to the researches of divided cities as an ambiguous category. It is especially important because divided cities in the Balkans are not explored enough which gives an important place to this thesis within comparative analyses of divided cities.

Another research category are sites of memory and symbolic dimension of urban space. Since the analyses of the symbolic dimension of urban space is relevant for deeper understanding multiple identities in the divided city. Such kind of analyses uncovers different narratives and helps the candidate to answer some of the crucial questions, in the first place the question of mental divisions in the urban space.

Finally, the category of the actors of urban space was especially important for this research since it helps understanding whether the division of the city is the results of interest of antagonistic groups or there are other actors interested in the social change. That is why the candidate concludes that “it is essential to identify the importance of particular actors, their sense of agency and attitude towards representatives of other groups and last but not least, their understanding of concepts such as citizen, neighbor and citizens‘rights”.

**Assessment of the Academic Achievement**
From a theoretical aspect, Marzena Maciulewicz has succeeded, in an explicit and clear manner, to analyze and synthetize the material she had collected and to present a very interesting analyses of a controversial concepts of divided city in the case of Mitrovica. Using different theories and mixed methodologies, she is successfully describing the complexity of everyday life in a divided city showing that the division is mostly ideological, political and symbolic. This thesis is unique since Maciulewicz made her researches both in the norther and southern part of the city thanks to the fact that she had learned both languages and have spent some time living in the city. This is why her field work and especially interviews she made with residents of Mitrovica gave a completely new approach and new findings. But, the main outcome wouldn't be so complex if she didn’t introduce historical analyses, everyday life methodologies, symbol analyses and deeper analyses of the urban life actors.

**Conclusion**

The doctoral dissertation „Divided Cities. A Case Study of Mitrovica”, by Marzena Maciulewicz is a profound study, in which the candidate has succeeded to create a complex analyses of a divided city of Mitrovica, which has not been elaborated as a whole thus far. One should stress that the candidate had learned Serbian and Albanian language in order to be capable to develop a research of various sources.

The candidate Marzena Maciulewicz has shown a great talent for academic research, to implement various and mixed methodologies and to use rich literature. Her style of writing is clear and understandable even in introductory chapters in which the candidate is dealing with theoretical concepts. The thesis is very well structured and the chapters are reflecting methodological and theoretical starting points. Thanks to all that the candidate has succeeded to reach very important conclusions that will be very helpful for future researches of other divided cities since mixed methodologies that the candidate had implemented
offered her the possibility to understand the functioning of the residents on the everyday life level, which is much more complex than expected.

I hereby confirm that the dissertation fulfils the requirements of a doctoral dissertation and motion that the doctoral student Marzena Maciulewicz be qualified for the next stages of the doctoral degree procedure. I propose magna cum laude.

Belgrade, January 5th 2020.

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