



Warsaw, 10 November 2016

Doctoral Thesis Review

Candidate: Mordechai Levy

Thesis title: *The "kibbutzim" As a Collective Political Identity under Change*

Supervisor: dr hab, prof. UAM Radosław Fielder, Adam Mickiewicz University

Reviewer: dr. hab., prof. UW Justyna Zajęc, University of Warsaw

I. Choice of topic

Mordechai Levy submitted a doctoral thesis dealing with the change of collective identity of kibbutzim members in Israel. He examined the social and political factors that caused this change and its impact on political the preferences of kibbutzim members. In his study M. Levy examined three leading kibbutzim, located in northern Israel: Kibbutz Degania A, Kibbutz Mizra and Kibbutz Ein-Dor.

The choice of topic is undoubtedly pertinent and important; during my stay in Kibbutz Mizra in 2007 this problem was already being discussed by its members in a lively manner. The kibbutz's inhabitants were aware of their changing lifestyle, their way of thinking, and their changing social and economic attitudes. They were not in agreement, however, on the causes of this change or on its impact on Israel's political system and its politics. As Mr Levy correctly points out "until now the most of the researchers studies engaged in the changing kibbutzim, primarily the social and economic aspects of the >>renewed kibbutz<<. However, a research on the changes in the political perception of the kibbutz members has not yet been conducted" (p. 8). For this reason, I find the choice of topic as a relevant and needed. The conclusions Mr Levy reached in his research bring new information and shed new light on the question of change of the kibbutzim members and of how this change affected their political views.

II. Methodology

The methodology used in this study meets the requirements for a doctoral thesis. In the *Introduction*, the author lists the elements required for an academic dissertation: the aim of the study, its hypothesis, the research questions, and the formal structure of the dissertation. They are coherent and correctly presented. Mr Levy names two primary objectives in his dissertation: 1) to understand the factors of change in the voting patterns in the kibbutzim in recent years and 2) to create a model explaining change in the political participation of the groups (p. 13). He raised several research questions which can be divided in two groups: 1) what are the change creating factors in the voting pattern of a group? and 2) what are the change creating factors in the voting patterns of the kibbutzim in recent years? (p. 9). Mr Levy's assumption that "the explanation of the individual's behavior, the political behavior as well, can be found in understanding the group to which he belongs" (p. 12) accurately reflects the title of the dissertation, which focuses on "collective political identity". The author then formulates five hypotheses, and the main method he uses to test them are different questions put to the inhabitants of Kibbutz Degania A, Kibbutz Mizra and Kibbutz Ein Dor in the form of questionnaires (338 respondents), in-depth interviews (14) and focus groups (3, one in each kibbutz). The methodology of the dissertation is thus appropriate, since it makes it possible to identify correlations between variables, as well as reveal the manner in which members of the kibbutzim perceive reality and the political system.

The **dissertation structure** is clear and logical. The study was divided into six chapters. The first chapter includes fundamental information needed to understand individuals' political behavior; the author describes different approaches, models and theories in his research of voting patterns. The second chapter presents collective political identity and its influence on individuals' political behavior; it addresses the individual's need for identity and for a politicization process of social identity. The third chapter goes on to describe Israel's political system. Chapter four focuses on a description of the kibbutz, its origins, historical development, features and structures. The fifth chapter discusses the Kibbutz crisis of the 1980s – a factor that had an enormous impact on the political perceptions of kibbutzim members and initiated change in the kibbutzim collective identity. The last, sixth chapter focuses on the changes in the political identity of kibbutzim members over the last thirty years. This part of the thesis contains empirical research, tests the initial hypotheses, and

presents the research's final findings by means of a theoretical model proposed by the author.

The dissertation is written correctly, it is understandable and reads well. The footnotes are done correctly. In terms of form and technique, the dissertation stands at a high level. The thesis also includes a list of tables, a list of figures (at the beginning) and a glossary of parties, kibbutz movements, political institute websites, party websites and kibbutzim websites (at the end), which make reading easier.

The sources of the dissertation are adequate to carry out an appropriate analysis. The most important sources are questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups. The author also relied on books, articles and internet sources written by reputed scholars and analysts on the topic being researched though, in some part of his thesis, Mr Levy should have made more references to classical literature, rather than relying secondary sources. The second chapter of the dissertation, focusing on collective identity, would have undoubtedly been enriched by the works of Erik Erikson, Sheldon Stryker, George J. McCall and Jerry L. Simmons. A list of the sources used in the dissertation has been given in the form of a bibliography. A division into several categories – books, articles and internet sources – would make the bibliography more clear, however.

III. The contents of the dissertation

The contents of the dissertation undeniably correspond to the topic defined in the title. The study is logic and consistent. The author successively presents all the information necessary to understand the question of change in the political identity of kibbutzim members. The first chapter explains voters' behavior. Mr Levy presents different approaches to understanding voters' preferences in a political election: the psychological approach, the rational approach, the sociological one as well as integrated models. This chapter helps to understand reasons why people vote as well as the main determinants influencing a voter's decisions and preferences. The author reviews research in this area and chooses the most important findings based on studies of such distinguished scholars as Angus Campbell, Anthony Downs, Paul Lazafeeld and Simor Lipset. The second area of Mr Levy's research is collective political identity. In the second chapter he analyses concept of "social identity", using two theories: social identity theory and social representation theory. Those theories were chosen correctly: The first allows the author to explain the individual's motivation to

act in the name of the group, while the second contributes to understanding the mechanism of social thinking. This part of thesis is well-done but, as it was mentioned above, the author should have made more references to classical literature on collective identity. The third field of Mr Levy's thesis is the Israeli political system. As the author persuasively states, "relations between the worker's parties and the kibbutzim members needs to be given in a broader perspective of the party and political system of Jewish society and of the State of Israel" (p. 10). As a result, in the third chapter he presents Israeli political camps (the left wing camp – the Labour Party, the right wing camp – the Likud Party, the religious camp , the center camp and the Arab camp), then he maps out the parties according to several cleavages (class, religious, ethnic, national and ideological). He also analyses the political system in Israel over three periods (1947-1977, 1977-1996, 1996-2015). Tough mainly descriptive, this chapter makes it easier to understand the heterogeneous nature of Israeli society in terms of such factors as age, nationality, religion, ideology, social status and how it affects Israel's political system. The author also shows the dynamic of Israel's political system in 1947-2015, claiming correctly that "the political system in Israel in the year 2015 is not at all similar to the system that had existed in the first years after the establishment of the State" (p. 139). This claim proves that changes of collective identity in the kibbutzim may contribute to changes in Israel's future political system, taking into consideration that "the strongest variable that influences the Israeli voter is his collective identity" (p. 156). The description also dominates in the fourth chapter, which is devoted to the kibbutz as a unique socialist movement. In this part of the thesis Mr Levy presents the kibbutz as a unique phenomenon. He presents information on the circumstances surrounding the emergence of this phenomenon in the Land of Israel at the beginning of 20th century, the development of the kibbutzim in the years that followed, as well as the features and structure of the kibbutzim. Mr Levy demonstrates that in the 1980s the kibbutzim suffered an economic and demographic crisis which them to change for survival. The reasons and causes of this crisis are laid out by Mr Levy in the sixth chapter. In it, he analyses the political and economic changes in the kibbutzim, he describes the decline of their status, changes in the composition of the kibbutzim community and the changing ideological commitment of youth. Mr Levy also presents the impact of this crisis on the kibbutzim's structures and functioning. As was already mentioned, an important part of these chapters is descriptive in nature. However, without the information about the kibbutzim in Israel contained in chapters four and five it would be much more difficult to

understand the change of collective political identity of kibbutzim members – the issue that is examined by Mr Levy in chapter six. This part of the thesis is based on empirical research. Using three methods – questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focuses groups – Mr Levy examines the members of Kibbutz Degania A, Kibbutz Mizra and Kibbutz Ein Dor. This research brought the author to the conclusion that the basic values of the kibbutzim, such as national identity, equality and justice, have changed dramatically since the communities were established. He finds several correlations between many variables: 1) there is a correlation between the age and the political affiliation: Most of the population above 60 saw itself as belonging to the Left (approx. 71%), while only 43% of young respondents (20-30 years) support parties of the left and 43% support center political parties (p. 288); 2) there is a correlation between the political affiliation of kibbutz members and their attitudes towards privatization in the kibbutz: Those who support privatization in the kibbutz support center parties, while those who want to retain the model of the cooperative kibbutz belong to left-wing party supporters; 3) there is a correlation between the pattern of voting for the Knesset and social identity: Those who define themselves as belonging to the working class support the parties of the Left, while those who see themselves as a middle class support center parties; 4) there is a correlation between the pattern of voting for the Knesset and voting stability: Left camp voters are stable in their political preferences, while the center camp voters have an unstable political identity; 5) there is a correlation between the pattern of voting for the Knesset and the voters social language; those who use the old social language of the kibbutz vote for parties of the Left, while those who adopted the new social language vote for center parties. All these findings verified the authors' hypotheses. It needs to be emphasized that the sixth chapter and the *Conclusions* are the most stimulating parts of the dissertation and provide answers top the research questions and hypotheses.

The dissertation is rich in factual data. Mr Levy also presented much information and data in tables, models and/or figures that facilitate their understanding. We do not know, however, whether these tables, figures and models were created by the author or adopted by him from other sources. Information to that effect should be clearly noted in the text. It is also not clear why the author chose a different age of respondents assigned to a similar group: In tables 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, "the young group" is defined as people from 20-30, while in table 6.9 – as people from 20-40. It is also unclear why the author did not include respondents aged from 40-50 in those tables. The thesis would also benefit from a clearer

presentation in the *Conclusions* of how the process of change of the collective political identity of kibbutzim members can influence the Israeli political system in general, since kibbutzim members comprise only 2.5% of the Israeli population.

Despite the above remarks above my evaluation of this thesis is highly positive: Its contents are indicative of the author's high degree of familiarity with the questions he addresses and of his understanding of the complicated processes taking place at the levels of society and the state. The argumentation in the dissertation is logical and conclusions reached are appropriate.

IV. Final remarks

Mordechai Levy's doctoral thesis demonstrates the author's high knowledge of political science and a good familiarity with the questions under examination. Mr Levy is able to use research methods and techniques as well as answer research questions effectively. Many of the author's findings and observations are indicative of his familiarity with the facts and understanding of the dynamic connections between variables. In his work, he makes use of political science notions in a precise and mindful manner. His doctoral thesis shows skill in linking accepted methodological and theoretical premises with an analysis of the empirical material and constitutes an original treatment of an important research question. Mordechai Levy's thesis constitutes an original contribution to the research question as set forth in the title.

V. Conclusions

The doctoral thesis written by Mordechai Levy meets the requirements defined in Art. 13, section 1 of the Act of 14 March 2003 on scientific degrees and academic titles, and on degrees and titles in the arts [Ustawa z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki]. In connection with this, I motion for accepting the dissertation under review and allowing Mr Levy to proceed to the next stage of the PhD program.

