

## **A Review of the Diploma Thesis of Emilia Golik “The Implementation of the European Work-Life Balance Directive in the Gender Discourse in Poland”**

Emilia decided to focus her diploma thesis on the gender equality policy. Concretely, she decided to analyze how the European Union’s work-life balance directive impacts the gender discourse in Poland especially with respect to the traditional family model and gender roles in Poland. The topic is timely and very relevant. The choice of methodology, critical discourse analysis, is also commendable.

Considering first formal issues, there are too many typos/grammatical problems in the text (see for example p. 3 or 4); i.e. the text needed a more careful final edit. It would be also advisable to have a native speaker to proof-read the thesis before submitting.

As the result, the reader can sometimes understand what the terms are supposed to mean from the context (e.g. shard work p. 17), but sometimes s/he is just lost. Yet another reason may be a certain awkwardness concerning explanation of the author’s intentions. For example, I did not understand the meaning of five theories discussed on pp. 15-16. What are they supposed to mean and why are they discussed?

Irrespective of typos, the text is not an easy read. One reason is that Emilia often does not use paragraphs to break up the narrative (see e.g. p. 5, 6, 7...). One can even find whole pages without a single paragraph (e.g. 10, 28, 31...). As a result, each paragraph tends to refer to several thoughts, concepts, theories etc. Trying to understand such a text is an exhausting task with an uncertain outcome. It definitely does not help grasp what points the author is trying to make.

To make a long story short, it was difficult for me to follow the arguments that the author tried to make. I even had a hard time to understand many sentences, for example: “For example, in Poland, due to law women were once (before 1918) excluded from having electoral laws, on the other hand, are now included and can enjoy their electoral laws” (p. 20), “Moreover, after the law establishment, it is necessary to regularly verify whether the law is restricted” (p. 20), “Firstly, parents face a lack of employer knowledge of how to employ a parent or a lack of individual verification of the case” (p. 31), or: “Poland remains the country with the highest number in the European Union, where employees are working part-time only due to a lack of possibility to balance between house and work” (p. 33).

The theory part starts with discussion of basic concepts. However, it is surprising that the student of our program feels the need to define first the concept “gender”. It would be OK in the bachelor’s thesis, but not in the master’s thesis. Unfortunately, I find her definition of gender (“gender is more a performance”) wanting. One may say that people perform gender categories (masculinity, femininity, trans etc.), but one can hardly perform a theoretical concept.

Concerning the basic concepts, it is not a good practice to use them before they are properly defined. For example, the author assumes that the reader knows what she means by the preferred/promoted family model, the traditional family model and the sentimental family model (p. 18) before they are explained (p. 24). It is also not a good practice to leave some key concepts undefined. This is particularly problematic with respect to the concept “discourse” which is central to the analysis. Emilia can offer her definition during the defense.

Some statements presented in the theory part are rather questionable. I am not going to list all of them, but Emilia could explain for example why it is mistaken to claim that: “This myth [of procession] completely omits women and makes them unimportant and irrelevant” (p. 8). What about Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene? I would also think that the 1919 government did not have 442 members (p. 18).

It is not usual that academic theses contain value judgements which are not substantiated by a proper analysis or which are not properly referenced. That is why I find problematic statements like: “Their politics [PiS] were ignorant...” (p. 25) or “Polish citizens prefer to remain within their comfort zone” (p. 25). These opinions cannot be just stated, but they must be supported either by an analysis or by reference to the relevant literature.

The methodology chapter starts with the researcher’s positionality, paradigm assumptions and research design. These subchapters are more straightforward and understandable than the theory chapter. It does not mean, however, that the argument is always consistent. For example, the author sometimes characterizes critical theory as a paradigm (p. 43), but she also claims that it is a method (p. 43). It cannot be both. In any case, one cannot say that: “The critical theory paradigm explains what is wrong with the current understanding of the specific issue. In this case – what is the problem with the current understanding of Work-Life Balance” (p. 43). At the defense, Emilia can explain why.

I also suspect that Emilia mixes together different understandings of the term “critical theory” when she refers to Rhode (1990). If she wants to claim that her paradigm is critical theory referring to Guba and Lincoln (1994), she cannot use the term in a general sense as Rhode does.

I see also a contradiction between Emilia’s criticism of dualism in western thought (p. 6-8) and her self-proclaimed liberal feminism. In my understanding, liberal feminism is built on this dualism as many of Emilia’s own formulations reveal. She could explain how she reconciles the contradiction. She can also explain why she thinks that: “Qualitative research is much more individual than quantitative research” (p. 45).

With respect to the research sample, it is not sufficiently explained why these particular 11 articles were selected for analysis and what was the overall number of articles devoted to the amendment of the Labor Code. It is also not explained why only *Gazeta Wybrocza*, which is in open opposition to the PiS government, was used as the source of 9 opinion pieces. It is not explained how such a narrowly conceived sample could help understand the influence of the directive’s implementation on the gender discourse in Poland. Naturally, it would also help to know what the author means by “gender discourse in Poland”. Unfortunately, she does not define the term. The fact that *Gazeta Wybrocza* articles are behind the pay-wall also puts a question mark with respect to their impact on the public discourse. It is also not obvious how the article of Szymański relates to the implementation of the directive (2023)?

The research method, CDA, is introduced sufficiently. However, given its nature, it cannot help understand: “how the implementation of the directive is impacting its reception” (p. 48) which is one of the declared research aims.

While the author uses some of the CDA’s tools to analyze individual articles, the analysis as the whole is not the CDA. It is a discussion of individual articles, but it does not help understand the impact of the implementation of the European Work-Life Balance directive on the gender discourse in Poland. It presents views of one minister and several authors on the impact of the amendment of the Labor Code, but this does not represent the gender discourse in Poland however it is defined. Emilia demonstrates good analytical skills, but she loses sight of her main goal.

Actually, the problem starts already with her “side research questions such as ‘how the directive is implemented?’, ‘Where the traditional family model has its beginning?’, ‘What are the motives of the ruling party?’, ‘how do women feel about the directive?’, “What is the father's reaction?”” They do not help focus Emilia on the discourse analysis, but rather they point her attention to the process of implementation and its impact on the lives of employees, men and women.

Overall, the thesis meets the requirements set by our program. I recommend it for defense with the grade C (3).

Petr Pavlik

Reviewer

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