

## Opponent's Review of Bachelor Dissertation

***Daria Tolokonnikova: Young and Footloose in Europe: Identity, Representation, and Participation in Independent Travel Writing. Prague: Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, 2018.***

The bachelor dissertation of Daria Tolokonnikova provides an inside into the phenomenon of travel blogging. Tolokonnikova examines representations of the travelling to Prague-related experiences while putting an emphasis on the interaction among the traveller's background, local (Prague) environment and strategies of the his/her identity construction as represented in the blog writing. I consider the topic to be highly actual and relevant within the chosen discipline of anthropology.

The dissertation is structured into the five main chapters. In the introductory chapters, the author contextualizes the topic, introduces her motivations, aim, the structure of the dissertation, briefly describes methods of data collection and one analytical method and finally reflects on her positionality within the field. In the first (empirical) chapter, Tolokonnikova discusses the dichotomy of local vs. outsider, the various ways travellers construct the image of the locals, emphasising the influence of his/her gender, nationality and social class. She closes this chapter interpreting, how the comparison between the expected and experienced social environment bloggers use to strengthen their credibility as travel writers. In the second chapter Tolokonnikova distinguishes among traveller and tourist and building upon her data about the bloggers-locals' interactions, she describes, how they identify themselves with these images and what kind of meaning these categories carry. In the third chapter, the author talks about the way, bloggers are referring to and constructing the image of the local political situation between 1948-1989. In Conclusion Tolokonnikova summarizes the content of the dissertation, highlighting her arguments and discussing its limitations and possible extensions.

In her dissertation, Tolokonnikova presents a deep understanding of most of the used theoretical concepts, sensitive work with a large proportion of the quoted data and skilful embedding of her data in the literature. I consider the frequency and the way, author relates the data to the literature a very unusual for the bachelor student and as definitely something what needs to be properly acknowledged. Moreover, I consider some of the arguments Tolokonnikova makes through a sensitive critical analysis a nice contribution to the research of stereotypes reproduction and authorization strategies in travel writing. Namely I would like to acknowledge her interpretation of the travel writers' use of juxtaposition and its indirect indexicality and similarly the use of other language devices as a strategy for strengthening their credibility as authors (p. 11-12, chapter I.; p. 9, chapter II.). I also appreciate authors' discussion of the reproduction of binary understanding of the local socialist past framed by the "binary socialism" concept Yurchak (2005). Moreover, there can be found some interesting notes about the imagined proximity of the Czech culture for the bloggers from Eastern Europe or the role the food gains in the phenomenon under study. Apart of the above-mentioned positives of this work I would like to mention several difficulties I have encountered during the reading.

### 1. Content and clarity issues

I consider the methodological part to be rather short and lacking the description and discussion of some of the essential parts as sampling, method of analysis (of interviews) and ethics. Although the author claims to be aware of the influence her experience with travel blogging might have, without a detailed description of research strategy (in terms of how much was the process of e.g. data collection inductive or deductive, how did the interview questions look like) it is difficult to evaluate, how much the author's bias influenced the interpretations. This issue is fuelled e.g. by claims of informants agreeing with suggested role their national identity might play (p. 8, chapter I.) or the comment on interviewees refusing to choose between two suggested identities (p. 2, chapter II.).

The theoretical part in terms of explanation of the basic theoretical background and concepts with which author work is missing completely. Firstly, I would welcome the introduction of author's understanding of the concept of identity, which sometimes seems to be understood as self-constructed, socially-constructed or given in terms of (as the author name it) national/racial, class or gender identity. Other concepts as already mentioned "construction", or the very key concepts of traveller and tourist would deserve to be discussed separately ahead of the analysis itself. If this would be the case, some interpretations may seem more convincing.

The lacks in the methodological part and the complete absence of the theoretical part also make it difficult to understand, how the traveller-tourist dichotomy was used during the research and what function does this discussion have in the dissertation – i.e. how exactly the fact that some of the informants identified with each of these categories or with none help us to understand the phenomenon under study. How does imposing these categories on the informants helps to understand the research questions? Basic link to the theory and clarification in the methodological part might help to solve this dilemma. Furthermore, it is not clear, how Tolokonnikova understand the secondary sources. In the empirical part, it looks like the analyses of the travel writing would serve as another supporting material for author's arguments (e.g. p. 7, chapter I.). Also, the distinction should be made between the scholarly and other literature, e.g. the relevancy of the topic and the choice of the field is supported with the statistics published by AirBnB (p. 1, Introduction)

The character of the data should be clarified. On several places, Tolokonnikova talks about informants' perception, their experiences or behaviour, but can we really understand perceptions for the travel writing or travel experiences from the interview?

I have identified several arguments which does not seem to be enough supported with the data, e.g. arguments about the connection of the authors image of the role of chocolate in Belgium cuisine or Tom's comparison of Prague to Magaluf as both influenced by their social class; or interpreting the Gloria's claim about the sexist behaviour of locals as an example of how blogger identity can influence the image of locals; or the interpretation of pan-Slavism of Ukrainian informant commenting on the proximity of Ukraine and the Czech Republic. In general, the interpretations of the role of national/race, gender or class identity are the weakest, even these aspects are claimed to have a key role in answering the research question.

## 2. Minor issues: accuracy in terminology and formal side of the dissertation

Among already mentioned issues with clarity given - as I believe with the missing theoretical part and uncomplete methodological part, there are several minor issues. Firstly, there is, in my knowledge, nothing like "Bourdieu's theory of cultural goods". Therefore, I would welcome if the author could expand on her understanding of Bourdieu theory (of social fields?) highlighting how it helps her to answer the research question. Also, the term "race" is not used in the Anthropology for decades due to its political connotation, but it has been replaced by the term ethnicity. Terms as national identity and racial identity are sometimes misunderstood, which may be supported by the unclarified concept of identity. The research questions are described differently in the Introduction, Methodology and Conclusion. The methods of data collection are described differently in the Introduction and Methodology. The emic-ethic dichotomy seems to be understood not clearly enough (p. 12, chapter III).

Formally, the dissertation fulfils all the major requirement with some minor deficiencies. The dissertation lacks page numbers; every chapter should, in my opinion, starts on the new page; the format of the data quotations should be unified (e.g. in italics); quotations in the different language should be translated in the footnote (p. 6, chapter I). Also, the text would be more readers friendly if the interpretations would follow the data quotations, not vice versa. To the overall comprehensibility of the text would also contribute already mentioned presence of the theoretical part and more elaborated methodological part. Finally, there are some grammar and stylistic mistakes. But more importantly, there are several passages which are difficult to understand (e.g. 1. paragraph, p.2, Introduction).

To sum it up, the dissertation of Daria Tolokonnikova is a nice example, how can student on the bachelor's degree design, realize and report own empirical research, using variety of data collection methods and working tightly with a broad range of literature. Nevertheless, the dissertation suffers some undeniable weaknesses. Therefore, I recommend it to the defence and in case the student would address the most striking issues (as listed above) I suggest evaluating the dissertation with a grade "very good".

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