



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

Master's Thesis Review

Student's name and surname: Lourdes Peggy Armelle BILEMBO ADJA

Title of the thesis: L'Europe et ses Noirs: Analyse historique et enjeux contemporains de la négrité à Prague et à Paris

Reviewer's name and surname: Markéta KRÍŽOVÁ

1. Heuristic (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

1.1 Evaluation of the selection of literature and sources	3
1.2 Complexity of used sources from the perspective of the state of the art	3

Short evaluation:

The student was able to amass considerable diversity of sources (oral interviews, websites and blogposts, films, academic books and articles). But these sources were not at all critically evaluated, classified and analyzed. It is not clear which sources are principal and which supplementary; it seems the student is taking all testimonies at face value, without assessing the specific contexts in which they were produced; relevant methodologies (interview analysis, analysis of films and historical sources) were not applied.

2. Research problem and its solution (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

2.1 Choice of the formulation of the research issue respects the task given to the student	3
2.2 The relevance of the goal from the perspective of research area methodology	3

Short evaluation:



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

The research problem, as it was formulated at the beginning of the thesis (p. 14), was to compare the impact of the “city” (without specifying what is meant under this term – city as a physical, architectural structure; or city as a community of people) upon the racial (self)identification. Concretely, the goal was to compare two cities (Paris and Prague) and their role in the construction of “blackness” (*négrité*). Even though the chronological determination of the research problem was not specified (only when reading through the text it became apparent that it is meant to be focused on present situation), overall this was interesting and innovative formulation of a problem, consistent with the overall aims of the TEMA+ program and at the same time with a potential to contribute valuable insights into the present-day studies of racialization and construction of otherness in Europe within the globalized world. However, in the course of the thesis this problem was not explored adequately, as will be explained below (see point 4). Neither were developed supplementary questions that from time to time appeared in the text, such as on p. 97: “le rôle des actions politiques et des institutions dans la configuration des identités.”

As for the method used, the student announced (p. 18-19) to rely on comparative method, which would be adequate for the problem as it was formulated (even though I would recommend the methodological instructions by M. Hroch rather than invoke Weber for this purpose). Subsequently, however, and without further explanation, the student also added entangled history/*histoire croisée* to the portfolio of her methods, without actually having any point of intersection between Prague and Paris, and without invoking this method throughout her work. In fact, neither the method of comparative history was applied adequately. The objects of comparison (the two cities) were not outlined, the common points not identified. There are in reality two separate stories evolving in the thesis.

Also, the comparison is not balanced. While the French case goes back to the 17th century, slavery and the triangular trade, to explain the roots of the attitudes of the French towards the black people and the institutionalization of blackness, the Czech case only starts with the Cold War and the quasi-colonial approach of the Soviet satellites towards the African continent, with just a brief mention of the ventures into North Africa by Czech missionaries of the 17th century or popular plans of the taking over of the former German colony Togo in 1918. Thus the whole of the colonial dreams of the 19th century are omitted, such as the great interest of the public of Emil Holub (including his bringing of a black girl Bella to Prague in the 1880s) and in his colonial exhibitions.



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

3. Thesis' structure evaluation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

3.1 Is the structure of the thesis logical?	2
3.2 Does the thesis' structure work along the methodology and methods declared in the introduction	3

Short evaluation:

Overall, the thesis structure is logical in that it starts with broader introductory chapter that aims to situate black people into the general contexts of France and the Czech Republic, and proceeds to comparison according to the formulation of the problem in the introductory part of the thesis. However, the contextualization is far too extensive, it covers two thirds of the whole text, while the analysis per se only evolves between pages 92 and 135. And even here the promised study of impact of “the city” upon the construction of (racial) identity was not presented, but rather several life stories of migrants in the two cities under consideration. Other theoretical instigations are dispersed in the text, such as on p. 110 the allusion to Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of the “*effets de lieu*”.

While a short introduction of comparative method (and the method of entangled history) are inserted at the beginning, there is not evaluation of sources, and neither the explanation of why precisely these concrete sources/types of sources were used, that should precede their analysis. By the way, only on p. 63 does the student admit her lack of comprehension of Czech language and the consequent reliance on sources in English and French. Nor is methodology of the interviews explained at the beginning (it is only briefly and inadequately touched upon on p. 92). And while the concept of gender is being referred to throughout the text, it is not referred to at the beginning; neither is the problem of “urban studies” and the very concept of the “city”. There is also not an adequate conclusion – on the final page (p. 135) is merely repeated the assertion that “l'expérience de la négrité est importante”.

4. Quality of analysis and interpretation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

4.1 Analysis of sources and literature	4
4.2 Interpretation of sources and literature in their interaction	3



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

Short evaluation:

The sources used were diverse, but as it was not explained why they were chosen and the sources critique was not executed, and neither were specific methodologies executed, the value of their use was considerably diminished. It is not certain which sources are the central ones and which supplementary.

Ostensibly, the interviews should have constituted the core and the real value of the thesis. But the number of interviewed persons is very small (3 in Paris, 2 in Prague), the methodology of their choice, recruitment for research, and the way interviews were conducted is not clear; and the information drawn from the interviews is drowned in the mélange of other information drawn from other sources. It is a pity, since the personal testimonies in themselves certainly could have been valuable also for other researchers interested in the same topics. Similarly, the analysis of blackness in films (using the Czechoslovak *“Fugue on the Black Keys”* as a contrasting case to the French ones from the same period) should have been very useful, but this would require more developer methodology and different reorganization of the text. As it is, these are just separate cases woven together by a very thin narrative. The information drawn from the sources is mostly used to confirm the starting thesis, which is also the conclusion: that blackness matters in Europe and that one’s self-identification is constructed in interaction with one’s environs. The analysis also is not limited to the Czech and French cases – often the examples quoted are from the USA or other parts of the world.

Neither was the secondary literature evaluated and scaled. There are considerably omissions in relevant bibliography especially with respect to the Czech case. Works of K. Mildnerová on Namibian “Czechs” (children brought to Czechoslovakia in the 1980s), or F. Herza on the understanding of “race” in the Czech discourse in the 19th and 20th century should have certainly been taken into account. Neither were mentioned such cases as the murder of Hassan Elamin Abdelradi by two Czech members of skinhead movement in November 1997, at the student dorm of the Economic Institute, which provoked not only massive anti-racial demonstrations in the Czech Republic, but also debates about race.

Apparently the student is not very well familiarized with the overall Czech history, as proves her muddled, inconsistent use of the toponyms Czech Lands (until 1918), Czechoslovakia (or, as the student alternately writes, CSSR, between 1918-1992) and Czech Republic (after 1993). It would have been beneficial to study at least one concise history of the region, such as J. Pánek – O. Tůma, et al, *A History of the Czech Lands*, 2018.



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

Maybe it would have been better to focus in depth to the French/Paris case, without forcibly bringing in a second case for comparison, given the existing linguistic limitations and lack of orientation in local history.

There are numerous pictures inserted in the text and in the annex, but these are mere illustrations, without being subject to analysis.

5. Quality of the text (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

5.1 Style and grammar	2
5.2 Use of terminology	3

Short evaluation:

The text is written in good academic French. The scientific terminology used (city, gender, identity) is, however, not adequately explained. Also there are great deficiencies in the referencing to the sources and secondary literature. The final bibliography is not standardized; the references in the text do not rely on standard footnotes, instead (sometimes) the page is indicated in the text, which makes the reading rather difficult.

6. Synthetic evaluation (minimum 500 signs):

The student chose for her thesis a topic with great relevance in present-day academic discussions, that of the construction of identity and the institutionalization of difference, with special regard to the contrasting notions of “whiteness” and “blackness” in European society. It also touched upon (even though not explored in depth) the problem of “colonial complicity”, that is, participation in hegemonic discourses by members of nations who were not directly involved in colonial expansion. All of this is very important. There were interesting sources identified. However, the thesis did not, lamentably, fulfill the expectations. Instead of analysis is offered a mosaic of excerpts from sources and secondary literature, the indicated methodological approaches were not applied. While certainly a result of much work invested, the thesis hits at interesting problems, but does not develop them. Therefore, I recommend the thesis for defense, but only recommend the grading *dobře/assez bien/C/3*.



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7. Questions and comments which should the candidate answer and discuss during the defence:

1. As this was not clearly outlined in the thesis, and it is in fact a fascinating question to ask, what was exactly meant under the “the impact and the role played by the city in one’s identity-building process”? And what would be the answer to this question in the cases of contemporary Paris and Prague, with respect to the construction of one’s blackness.
 2. Also, please sum up the principal differences and similarities between the Czech and French case that resulted from your research.
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Suggested grade:

Assez bien (C in Charles University grading = 3 in ELTE).

Date: 18.1.2021

Signature: