

Opponent's opinion on the master thesis:

Mentality of the Oppressed: An Analysis of Czech Inferiority Complex Towards the West

By Sinan Ertin

The graduate submits for defense a rather interesting diploma thesis devoted to the analysis of the Czech inferiority complex. He formulates a provocative hypothesis that this inferiority complex is the result of the trauma of the post-communist transformation towards globalized capitalism. He expresses the conviction that this trauma was caused (brought about) by the "rhetoric of coming back to Europe". He then interprets this rhetoric in the context of the critique of so-called Orientalism by theorists of post colonialism. He then tries to confirm his hypothesis by means of a survey of 189 respondents on the server www.vyplnto.cz.

Such a view is certainly unusual in the context of the Czech tradition, but the author could not be criticized because of this fact in itself. It is certainly useful for "natives" to look at themselves through the eyes of "the others." The problem, however, is that **the author utterly fails in his attempt to present convincing empirical arguments for his claims.**

The author's preoccupation with the postcolonial approach and discursive analysis can be seen in the work. However, the problem is that he fails to operationalize his hypotheses and test them with quantitative research tools. The possible alternative would be to start from his discursive-critical orientation and try to prove his hypotheses by a critical discursive analysis of Czech texts.

[The Legitimacy of the Application of the Critique of Orientalism in the Context of Czech Mentality](#)

I

It could be speculated that the author's experience as an English teacher with the mentality of Czech students led him to his conclusions.

However, given how intensively the author promotes the concept of Orientalism, **he pays relatively little attention to its precise definition.** He cites notorious instances of Said's critique of Western Orientalism (pp. 27-32), which, moreover, were rejected by Bernard Lewis, for example. "Orientalists" do not consider themselves Orientalists.

For every concept in social science represents a hypothesis about the nature of reality, which has yet to be tested in confrontation with the facts. It is not enough merely to illustrate a concept with some evidence. The question must be asked, whether there are alternative concepts that describe reality better.

Personally, I have a big problem with the notion of "Orientalism" as a scientific term, because it is used too ideologically, as if the very suggestiveness of the term could replace confrontation with empirical data.

Thus, for example, in Delanty's Handbook of Historical Sociology we learn that we need to de-Orientalize Max Weber's sociology of the city because Weber spoke of the uniqueness of Western cities based on the civic principle as opposed to Oriental cities based on clan structure.

But the question from the point of view of common sense is not whether Weber was an Orientalist or not. Instead it is empirical: can we document similar examples of cities based on civic rather than clan

principles in the non-European world? Or: can Weber's hypothesis be falsified with empirical data? Why then do we need emotive labels like "Orientalism"?

Factual objections to the statements in the theoretical part:

1. The author draws on a relatively small body of literature, only a minority of which is devoted to the Czech question. Moreover, the work gives the impression of an inorganic synthesis between postcolonial critics of Orientalism and differently oriented Czech authors (Kundera, Klicperová, Holý). Holý 1996 is generally under-exploited in the work. Inside this book the graduate would have found much more evidence and insights on the question of Czech mentality.
2. I understand that it is difficult to write about the history of a foreign country whose language is difficult to learn. However, even so, there are too many inaccuracies and simplifications in chapter two.
For example: on page 11, the author states that the Czech language was almost silenced by Germanization and only revived by the national revival in the 1870s. However, the standard definition of the beginning of the national revival is the end of the 18th century.
3. Similarly, there are inaccuracies in the text on page 11 concerning the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands. In addition, the source of some of the information cited as Černý et alia 2004 is not listed in the reference list.
4. Some parts give the impression that the author quotes only ideologically related authors and does not try to find alternative evidence. For example, on page 12 he quotes the Czech anarcho-communist Ondřej Slačálek, without reflecting much on the fact that this colleague is not a widely recognized authority. On the other hand, there is no mention of the writings of Prof. Miloš Havelka, who works at our faculty. I only want to show that the student quotes ideologically related authors without regard to their "objective relevance."

Objections to the empirical study

I.

The empirical part of the thesis is more like a research report. At the same time, **it is absurdly descriptive**. For example, FOUR pages 41-44 are devoted to a mechanical description of demographic variables.

Similarly, the interpretation of the responses is excessively descriptive. On page 57, for example, we learn the days on which respondents completed the questionnaire. Further, three pages are devoted to graphs of demographic sorting variables: region, age category, gender. Age category is listed once in the table on page 58 and a second time in the graph on page 59. In addition, the entire table is further reinterpreted in the paragraph on p. 59, which mechanically lists the number of respondents and their relative frequency for each category.

These figures should be part of the appendix, not the actual thesis corpus. The whole thing gives the impression of a rush job and a failure to think deeply about the meaning of the data.

II.

I didn't find a link to on line research in the paper. I had to look it up personally:

<https://www.vyplnto.cz/realizovane-pruzkumy/setreni-o-ceske-identite/> read on 18th May 2022

Ertin, S. – *Šetření o české identitě (výsledky průzkumu)*, 2022. Dostupné online na <https://setreni-o-ceske-identite.vyplnto.cz>.

III.

I believe it is impossible to defend a thesis based on a survey of 259 respondents. Moreover, **the sample is not representative**, i.e. it is not quantitatively compared with the distribution of age categories in the whole Czech population. For example, seniors 75+ make up 8% of the Czech population, with 2% in the sample; 26% of respondents live in Prague, which does not correspond to the roughly 12% representation of Prague residents in the general Czech population.

III.

The author resigns to any statistical analysis. Most of the graphs and tables represent first-order classifications.

Any statistical tests (chi-square, odds ratios etc) are missing.

IV.

Chapter 10 begins on page 85 and is entitled Correlation Analysis. However, **the author does not seem to know what is meant by correlation in statistics (Pearson or similar correlation coefficient)**. Instead, the graduate constructs a kind of index of his own. He then provides a table on page 85 where he calculates the magnitude of this index for the whole sample, and then tables on the following pages where he gives the average values of the index by age, gender and social class. Again, any statistical analysis that could justify generalizing these data to the whole Czech population is missing.

For example, on page 90 the author states:

When we chart the responses with respect to the Age groups of the respondents, we see those positive feelings towards being Czech and towards the country increases visibly with age. Also, the negative view of communism decreases. Regarding capitalism, we see stronger support among the middle age groups, and less support among the youngest, and of course the least among the oldest, as mentioned before. The view of Western Europeans vis-a-vis the Czechs also declines with age. This strongly supports our hypothesis that the older Czechs see themselves less as being inferior to Western Europeans as compared to younger Czechs.

I took the author's data, downloaded from www.vyplnto.cz in excel and copied it into the PAST statistical program. I calculated Spearman's rank correlation coefficients and found that age was statistically significantly correlated only with the answers to questions 6, 8, 13.¹

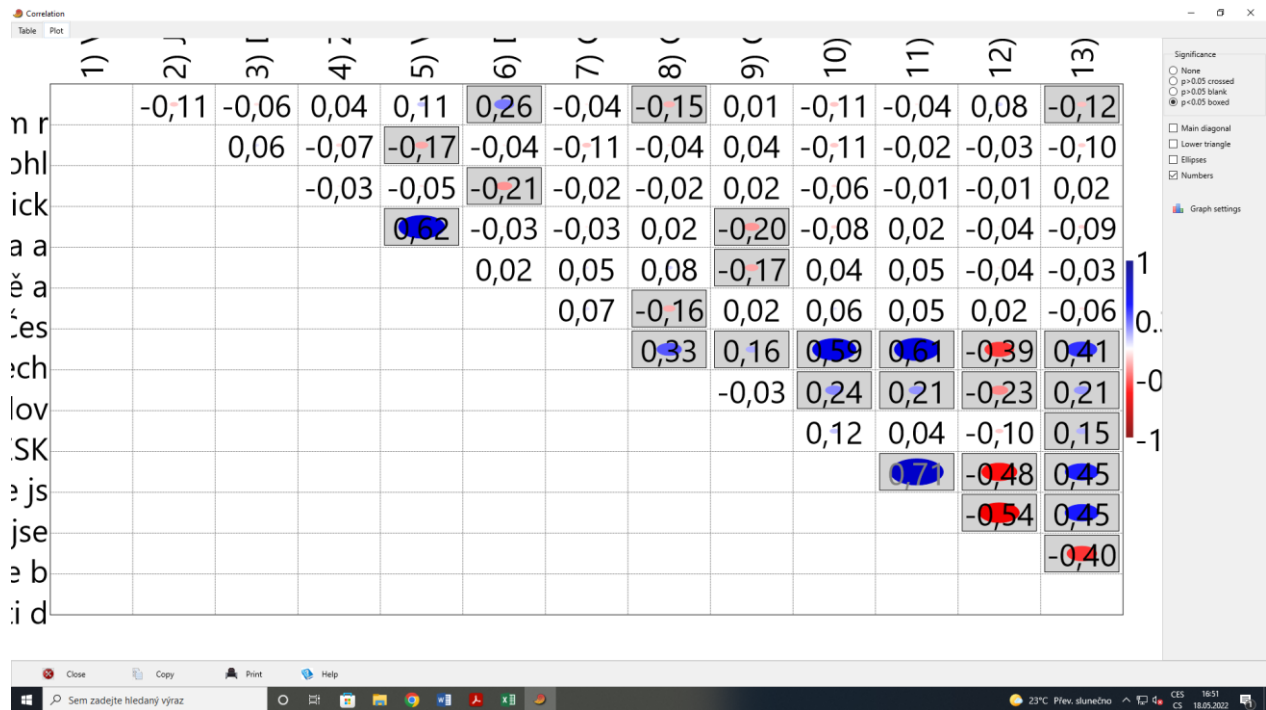
Thus, despite the author's claim that positive attitudes towards Czech identity increase with age, in fact **only positive attitudes towards Slavic identity and towards communist regime correlate positively with age. The other results are not statistically significant.**

Moreover, even for the statistically significant correlations of age and Slavic identity and age and positive evaluation of the communist regime, the strength of the correlation coefficient is small. Age explains 3% of the variability regarding Slavic identity and 7% of the variability regarding the evaluation of the communist regime.

¹ Since I did not find a clear list of questions in the thesis, I am listing them here, traced from the source file in excel:

- 1) What age range are you in?
- 2) What is your gender?
- 3) What economic class do you think you belong to?
- 4) Which city and region are you from?
- 5) In which city and county do you live?
- 6) Complete the sentence. I perceive Czechoslovakia under communism as the time?
- 7) I feel myself to be a Czech.
- 8) I feel myself to be a Slav.
- 9) SKIP THE QUESTION BELOW IF IT DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU. My ethnicity (Moravian, Roma, Vietnamese, etc.) is more important to me than my Czech identity.
- 10) I am proud to be Czech.
- 11) I am happy to be Czech.
- 12) I would rather have been born in a country other than the Czech Republic.
- 13) I feel good in the company of other Czechs.

Figure 1 Spearman rs, counted in PAST



Topics for the defense discussion

1. Plausibility of the application of orientalism concept on Czech question. (react to above mentions arguments).

Conclusion

Unfortunately, I have to say that the submitted thesis does not meet the requirements, especially in the empirical part. Therefore, **I do not recommend its defense** and suggest its reworking.

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