Tereza has set up in her introduction to investigate how Islam is manifested through Czech media and what is the ultimate role of the medias in conveying the public comprehension of Islam and the Muslim community in the Czech Republic as such. Her body of evidence is acquired from an in-depth analysis of various resources, predominantly online. There seems to be an overarching idea to her interest, which we find scattered throughout the introductory pages but which can still be resumed as “lack of information” is the reason of public disdain for Muslim community in the Czech Republic. I believe it is more a moral attitude than a scholarly question. This confirmed in the fact that the empirical evaluation represents only a tiny portion of the overall thesis (p. 71-75).

Critique:

Interestingly when it comes to conceptual language, Tereza often recurs to the lexical meaning of the terms as if it landed them more reliable significance. Therefore she often refers to dictionaries (ex. p. 10, what is a church? or what is a mosque?) rather than to works that put given conceptual terms at work. Speaking of the mosque, the use of the term seems to be rather accidental: “Pour des raisons pratique, dans le present mémoire, je garde le [mot] mosquée bien qu’il ne soit pas approprié” (p. 20). Is reference to a dictionary the only way how to come to terms with the fact that our concepts have a social life? The fact that our categories and concepts, be it a “mosque” or “community”, do not fit with how they are put in place by social actors shouldn’t make us even more insisting on the historicity of such categories, their contested nature?

Another disturbing aspect of Tereza’s approach is her occasional, but still significant, uncritical use of resources. Here I provide two most blatant examples: 1. Topinka’s policy paper commissioned by the Ministry of Interior as a pool of analytical tools (“integration process”); 2. Lhoťan’s pamphlet of a recovered convert to Islam as a source on inner community cleavages. By uncritical use I don’t mean the exclusion of these texts from analysis; quite on the contrary a due attention to them as effective and socially shaped actants in community life.

Topinka’s is neither a reflexive nor an independent research. Its basic presumption is that most desirable integration is assimilation since this is the final phase of any integration process. For a similar reason I find it extremely problematic to rely so heavily in the narrative on the genesis of Muslim organizations on one source (L. Lhoťan), leave alone its dubious quality and acceptance both among specialists and Muslim community members. It would have been desirable though to present the dynamics in Muslim community by embedding such a text in the process. This case in fact reveals how the Muslim question is entangled in the Czech Republic with the more visible question of religiosity and politics.
I also noticed some empirical haziness, for example when listing “14 Muslim organizations” in CZ and at the same time admitting they do not always comprise Muslim followers (p. 18), not so surprising if they haven’t been identified through Islam in the first place. I also see no relevance in the discussion of various legal definitions of charity organizations which, as on many other places, seems to fill in some evidence; the same goes for some of the Tables, like No. 7 (p. 30-37, sic!).

Evaluation:

Tereza thesis is carefully written, with even too much respect to scholarly jargon. Although much of the questions I would be interested in are not addressed or not properly researched (community, violence, history), I believe Tereza also demonstrated a degree of rigorous analysis and thus merits to be awarded a master degree. My assessment: 6 / 10 – dobře/passable.

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