

Abstract and Keywords

“In the World through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.” — Frantz Fanon

In this thesis, one of my first aims, among others, is to discuss and put in perspective the different levels of identification that can coexist and contribute to the creation of a person. I want to understand the impact and the role played by the city in one’s identity-building process by studying the self-perception of visibly black people in Prague and Paris.

Why did I decide to work on blackness within the European context? I decided to work on blackness for many reasons, one being that blackness as much as whiteness are social constructs. However, when whiteness has a history of multiplicity, and white people are being granted individuality, blackness, on the other hand, is often seen as an encompassing term. Black people are perceived as a monolithic social group in every sense of the word, sharing the same history and past across the globe. It is because of the peculiarity of blackness, which is seen as a factor of global identity that I wanted to study that topic within Europe. Working on blackness in Europe is working on a topic that would look like an oxymoron. Indeed, Europe is associated with whiteness, and blackness is associated with Africa. Therefore, thinking about black Europeans or about black people being Europeans might appear as a cognitive dissonance for some people. This is that cognitive dissonance that I also want to analyse in that thesis and through it, the notion of “black community”. By asking if being black in Paris and being black in Prague mean and entail the same thing, I intend on questioning the notion of unity or diversity of European black identities.

Why the focus on Prague and Paris? Prague and Paris are studied within their national context in this thesis. What is interesting with these cities is the ties or lack of ties they had with African countries. Undoubtedly, France’s colonial past turned Paris into a somehow multicultural city when Czech Republic ties and relationships have mainly been with other European countries. Therefore, processing and thinking about blackness and Europeanness in these two countries and two cities might produce very different answers and definitions. By taking these two very different cities, I intend to discuss the impact of history in present-day society, and how history can be an identity-builder and shape the relationship one has with its city, (and maybe with its country too). I want to discuss how the different historical paths and countries’ personal decisions have affected black people in the construction of their blackness.

Through interviews with black Praguers and black Parisians I aim to understand the importance of skin color in the way people perceive themselves. I want to see if it plays a big part in the identity and if it comes before or after other identities. I would also like to see if there are some patterns in the perception of the self and if these patterns are spatially induced or induced by other aspects of their living experiences.

Keywords: Black Europeans, Cultural Differences, Blackness, Identity, Urban Anthropology, Cultural studies