

Assessment of Master Thesis of Anamaria Remete: ETHNICITY REVISITED. THE CASE OF HIGHER-EDUCATED YOUNGER GENERATION ROMA IN CONTEMPORARY CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, Institute of World History, TEMA EMMC “European territories (civilisation, nation, region, city): identity and development“, Prague 2013

In her MA thesis, the author investigates the difficult topic of Romani identities and how these make sense to mainly “activist” young Roma. The biggest part of her thesis is devoted to the discussion of concepts like ethnicity, identity and diaspora. The author did an extensive reading about these topics and discusses the opposing trends in their conceptualization (primordialist vs instrumentalist, subjectivist vs objectivist, strategic choices vs structural constraints, continuity vs adaptation, identification/categorization). She takes the instrumentalist position and comes to the conclusion that the social reality is usually influenced by both poles (e.g. both structural constraints and individual agency). In this argumentation she is frequently helped by Eriksen and Jenkins that hold similar positions. She extensively uses also Brubaker’s critique of the terms. She uses theories about second/third generation immigrant identity to understand young Roma and also presents academic debates on Romani origin and identity. The authors she chooses are usually relevant for the discussion and she is well informed about the theoretical developments and able to compare the positions of authors. Thanks to this work the author was able to avoid essentializations that I usually find in academic texts about Roma. This part of the work is however rather lengthy, as if the author wanted to describe everything she read, and the reader is not informed about how the author intends to use the concepts.

Finally the author arrives to the methodology and rather short summary of interviews. I am not informed about the standards of research in this study programme, but I was surprised to see just four interviewees questioned through Skype – the abstract of the thesis has promised two groups of study – “First, those who were beneficiaries of the university scholarships granted by the Open Society Institute’s Roma Initiatives. Second, those who are working in Roma focused NGO advocacy organizations“ – which raised more expectations from the reader. The author did not discuss the difficulty connected to this “online” methodological choice particularly if she claims that frame analysis should be contextualized. The interviewees are presented under their real names (was anonymity an issue?) and we do not know how she contacted them. It seems also that the fifth interview that is presented in the supplement (Shejla), was not used in the body of the text. In the supplement one can also find introductory part of the interviews when interviewees discuss the title of the thesis – have this part of interview been used in the analysis? During the thesis defence I would suggest to reflect on these topics.

Despite the small number of interviewees I do find the data and their interpretation interesting. The author found that the main frame revolves around “need for struggle to advance Roma rights, the issue of supporting and promoting Roma Pride and the idea of unity in diversity”, not the issue of “one national culture” as was the case for the older generation of activists. Being Romani is interpreted in terms of being activist for a Romani cause and being on the journey of identity re-discovery. The final discussion could have been longer and could have returned to some previous theories – it seems that the data refute Herbert Gans’s assumption that the ethnicity for the young generation is a sort of “museum stuff”. Also frames that are different from Vermeersch’s were found, but there is no comparison of this finding. I would be also more careful to say that the “men of respect” would necessarily have “defensive strategies so that their culture survives in the majority societies in which they lived” (p. 109), but I understand that past changes may seem “passive” in terms of keeping gender inequality. Finally I have one suggestion for contextualization – it seems that the interviewees repeat that they want to have their identity project supported by “real data”, (meaning “hard facts” e.g. about the history of Roma). To which extent is this academically-backed identity concept influenced by the fact that the activists are usually university educated?

In terms of the work with theories, I would criticize Laederich's assumption that the reason that Kale in Spain kept strong traditions is an indicator of their acceptance by the surrounding society (p. 69), or I would return to previously mentioned critique of dualism when citing Goodwin's thesis that the Romani identity is only based on the opposition to Gadjé (p. 75). These are however just minor suggestions. Factual mistakes are rare – e.g. Kroeber and Kluckhohn did not identify 162 different definitions of ethnicity but of culture (p. 11). There is also a long paragraph that appears two times – p. 34 and 48-9. Graphics is usually solid, mistakes do occur (“feeling is restricyted to the communit levely”, p. 95), but they do not block understanding. Citation practice seems fair.

As the author did a meaningful work with results that have some potential towards further exploration and discussion I recommend the thesis for the defence and suggest “very good”.

In Prague, 4. 9. 2013
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