



Posudek oponenta diplomové práce

Kateřina Šmídová

Thema: **Koronavirus v Africa: Novy fenomen**

v angličtině

Kateřina Šmídová, by choosing to write her Masters thesis on COVID-19, inevitably went into uncharted scholarly territory which is brave of the student but also makes this thesis a difficult one to evaluate in terms of conventional academic scholarship. As a result of the currency of the pandemic, there are scarcely scientific sources available which makes the thesis theoretically and, more generally, academically rather 'thin'. The student's goal is to map the breakout and occurrence of the virus in selected African states and she focuses on those hit most seriously, such as Egypt, South Africa, and Nigeria and those who were only marginally affected by the pandemic, such as Tanzania, Chad, etc. The student identifies her study as an explorative and descriptive case-study which aims at describing the development and political impact of the virus in affected states, and also examines COVID-19 in comparison to four other infectious diseases prevalent in Africa. Kateřina Šmídová, all in all, delivers a very coherent script which highlights several interesting points about the limited spread of the pandemic on the African continent during the first wave.

Regarding the general writing of the thesis, the candidate demonstrates her ability to formulate logical and, at least mostly, well substantiated sentences and she presents these in an overall acceptable academic format. However, a few conceptual and scholarly concerns arise. While the initial sections of the thesis read fairly well in terms of their content, the latter part, in particular chapter 4 and 5 seem quite shallow and, in part, speculative. One would have expected better researched analyses for a Masters thesis and chapter 5 disappoints. While acknowledging that scholarly resources are very limited on the very topic of COVID-19, one also gets the feeling that some of what does exist has not been consulted. For instance, the special issue of the *South African Journal of Science* 116 (7/8) published in July 2020 a comprehensive interdisciplinary Special Issue on COVID-19, raises several socio-political points which have not been consulted in the thesis. The same accounts for other international publications. The specific lens through which the student examines, i.e., which factors have influenced the spread of the virus, leads her to have many vague deliberations and quite some speculations, rather than providing hard evidence and empirical facts. Although she touches on a wide range of issues ranging from climate, to demographic, industrial, economic, crime/terrorism, poverty and more, the findings seem rather preliminary and at times too presumptuous, from my perspective. While she makes extensive reference to world humanitarian and development organisations there is no critical engagement with these sources, and statements often remain vague. The goal to show some of the political impacts COVID-19 has had on selected African states is only fleetingly dealt with and remains largely unaddressed.



In the introduction, the student mentions several academic volumes, but these works neither feature in later parts of the thesis, nor in the bibliography. If the student nearly wanted to recognize their existence but these texts are only available in Italian, it would have been good to provide this information (at least in a footnote). The chapters themselves are cohesively written and address several valid issues. Structurally, however, and for the sake of drawing more systematically from academic scholarship available, it would have made more sense, from my perspective, to have started the thesis by focusing on the four infectious diseases African states have been dealing with in the past decades (in other words, exchanged chapter 3 and 4). It would have also been nice to see a more profound engagement with the broader academic literature on these topics (Malaria, Ebola, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis) and perhaps a more nuanced distinction between some of the countries. This could have academically grounded the thesis and provided background and explanation for the early lockdown measurements and the relatively moderate first wave on the continent.

The student does a reasonably good job showing that the horror scenario some of the western media painted of COVID-19 in Africa did not occur, but I was missing, for instance, nuanced detail about the effectiveness of the radical local lockdown measures. Also, the likely higher number of excess deaths (through unreported COVID) as well as the fact that the African population is not as old (lower life-expectancy level) and hence not as endangered by the virus, are not considered in the analysis. Most information, it seems, stays at a fairly superficial level. There are also several parts in which a more careful engagement with a source might have been appropriate. Several statements are made without substantiation through a source. Last, there is also some repetition which makes the reading in some parts tedious and could have easily been avoided through better content editing.

All in all, however, the student demonstrates with her thesis that she can tackle a topic and address a research question in a sound and comprehensive manner, drawing from a variety of sources. Despite some reservations, I recommend and advocate for this thesis to be accepted. The student has, after all, demonstrated the capacity to deliver a descriptive overview of some of the effects COVID-19 on the African continent and she has done so in an acceptable form.

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