

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of International Studies

PROTOCOL ON DIPLOMA THESIS ASSESSMENT
(Reviewer)

Name of the student: Alicia García Cabaleiro

Title: Applying the Framework of Transient Mental Illnesses to the Study of Psychiatrization of Dissidents for Social Control: A Comparative Analysis of the Soviet and Francoist Cases

Reviewer: Jakub Střelec

1. TOPIC AND OBJECTIVE (short information on the thesis, research objective):

The MA thesis examines the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union and Francoist Spain. It is a comparative study which aims to address two questions: firstly, why did these regimes rely on psychiatry as a form of social control, and secondly, whether I. Hacking's classification of 'transient mental illnesses' can be used to study the emergence of the diagnostic categories 'sluggish schizophrenia' and 'marxist fanaticism' in both countries.

2. CONTENT (complexity, original approach, argument, structure, theoretical and methodological backing, work with sources, appropriateness of annexes etc.):

The thesis is divided into two main chapters: the first deals with the 'weaponization' of psychiatry in both regimes, mainly on the basis of secondary literature; the second focuses on five questions related to I. Hacking's proposed concept of 'transient mental illnesses'. The second chapter, especially section 5.1., also contains the main empirical analysis, which deals with Soviet and Spanish psychiatry and their definitions of the two aforementioned diagnostic categories. I appreciate the reflectiveness about the sources and the identification of some of the shortcomings in their selection, which is logical given the subject matter. On the other hand, the thesis would benefit from greater acquaintance with some contemporary historical work dealing with Soviet psychiatry (e.g. the work of Benjamin Zajicek) or social history of psychiatry in 20th century. This also brings me to the perhaps somewhat excessive use of various theoretical approaches, such as references to Foucault's concepts (biopolitics, conduct of conduct, subjectivity), Ian Hacking's 'transient mental illnesses', and the notions of 'history of psychiatric therapy' and 'institutional psychiatric history'. In practice, the thesis draws on three lines of research that may prove challenging to keep together: the political abuse of psychiatry, the role of psychiatry in the biopolitics of modern dictatorships, and the formation of certain medical categories.

3. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE (quality of language, citation style, graphics, formal aspects etc.):

The formal aspect of the thesis is appropriate. In some cases, the directly cited pages of the publications are missing (e.g. notes 47, 53, 54, 56) The text is written in a clear and coherent manner. As a non-native speaker, I am unable to assess its grammatical accuracy.

4. STATEMENT ON THE ORIGINALITY OF THE THESIS

The thesis was checked by the Turnitin/URKUND/Theses anti-plagiarism software and no problem was found. The similarity of 19 percent is not connected to one source.

5. SHORT COMMENTS BY THE REVIEWER (overall impression, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, achievement of the research objective etc.):

I welcome the original attempt to compare the two regimes, which is very challenging and, in this particular case, novel in the field of contemporary history of psychiatry. Especially in the second chapter, the thesis contains very interesting observations and points, such as the difference between the 'individualization' of the political abuse of psychiatry in the Soviet Union and the focus on the 'nation' and its 'purification' in Spain, the role of mental hygiene and eugenics, or the notion of 'political transient mental illnesses'. On the other hand, the broad research themes account for some of the imbalance in what is compared. For example, in section 4.1, the thesis concentrates more on the emergence of new biopolitics and subjectivity of people after the Francoist seizure of power, while the Soviet section focuses mainly on the political abuse of psychiatry against dissidents in 1960s and the 1970s. The temporal delimitation of the thesis could be also clearer, as the author mentions in the introduction that she focuses on the period of 'consolidation', but at the same time, in the case of the Spanish psychiatry, the selection of primary sources is mainly from the Spanish Civil War (e.g. the texts of Juan Antonio Vallejo-Nágera). One can also consider the interconnectedness of the two main chapters. It appears that the primary objective of the thesis is to address the latter, as evidenced by the title. Perhaps focusing on just one perspective would benefit the thesis (cf. sections 5.4. and 5.5., which could be then developed further).

6. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING THE DEFENCE:

What was the key to the selection of the main theoretical perspectives (Foucault, Hacking etc.)?

7. (NON-)RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTED GRADE:

I recommend the thesis for defence. Grade: C.

Date: 27. August 2024

Signature: