

REVIEW

of dissertation

«Trauma and celebration. Sacralization and transformation of the commemorative celebration»

Author: Iliana Nikolaeva Hubenova

for the creation of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, PhD program "Cultural Studies - Cultural Heritage and Local Identity"

Reviewer: Prof. Sofia Vasileva, PhD. Full professor at the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Department of "Culture, Historical Heritage and Tourism"

This dissertation thesis is dedicated to a significant scientific problem related to the need to study the development and transformations of the commemorative celebrations of the April Uprising (Bulgarian: Aprilsko vastanie) and the Liberation from Ottoman rule. The dissertability of the topic is also determined by the lack of an independent monographic study on this topic to date. The period between the two world wars is particularly poorly studied in this regard.

Information about the PhD student

Iliana Hubenova was a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Cultural Studies, enrolled in 2019. In the period 2015-2018, she successively acquired a bachelor's degree in "Cultural Studies" /2015/ and a master's degree in the specialty "Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage" /2018/. The biographical reference attached by the doctoral student shows that she is successfully realized in the field of the educational qualification she has acquired. He works as a cultural and

administrative manager and gains professional experience both in contemporary art and culture organizations and in traditional institutions such as community centers and bookstores. He has experience in organizing cultural events, creating cultural products and working on projects in this field.

Presentation and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation has a volume of 186 pages and is structured in an introduction, five chapters, conclusion, bibliography, and appendices. Conclusions are formulated at the end of each chapter. In a synthesized form, the conclusions are also presented in the conclusion of the dissertation work. The bibliography includes 116 titles, of which 101 are titles of published scientific literature, and 15 items of archives, from which currently unpublished archival materials, as well as published materials sought from archival funds, are brought into scientific circulation. The dissertation contains appendices, including illustrative materials, found as a result of field studies carried out by I. Hubenova, mainly photographic images - the author's personal archive, photographic material found in the archives of museums, community centers and local municipalities. The appendices also contain interviews with museum, community center and municipal specialists.

The research impresses with its wide chronological scope, with the methodology used and with the large volume of analyzed and systematized information, which is the result of systematic field studies of the doctoral student, carried out in the period from 2017 to 2021.

Despite the traditional strong interest in this issue, in-depth scientific research on the development over time of commemorative celebrations of the April Uprising and Liberation and their transformation into a holiday has not been conducted so far. There are also few local studies published on this issue. This determines the significance of the dissertation work.

The doctoral student has clearly formulated the purpose of the research, the set tasks, the research thesis. A specific goal of the dissertation work is, through conducted field studies and a clearly formulated working hypothesis, to trace in a long chronological

period /from the Liberation to today/ the development of the commemorations of these events, their transformations and their positioning in the field of modern celebration. A more general but equally significant goal of the dissertation is to present the symbolic side of this process, to seek an answer to the question of the transformation of the perceptions and memory of the respective communities, which is expressed in the transformation of commemoration into a celebration. The text presents the research field, based on an original conceptual model of research, which covers the development of the celebrations from their very origin to the present day (including the background of the main narrative and its development and confirmation in the scientific field and public consciousness). Attention is drawn to the symbols and meanings attached to anniversaries. The research gaze also turns to the audiences and their profile to draw conclusions about the meanings that the community attaches to the celebrations. Through field research, the work aims to build an up-to-date structure of the celebrations and outline their current picture. For this purpose, the text seeks to answer the questions: "Is there trauma in these historical events and what does it express today?; What meaning they carry and how it is incorporated into the modern, strong technological world?; How does the community use the anniversaries and for what?".

The presentation of the dissertation follows a corresponding author's concept. The part entitled Introduction is actually an introduction to the topic, highlighting the significance of the researched scientific problem. Questions are raised about the formation of the symbolic and value value of events such as the April Uprising of 1876 and the Liberation War that followed it. The problems of tragedy, trauma, death, heroism and self-sacrifice are raised, which occupy an important place in the construction of the Bulgarian historical pantheon. The text in this part of the dissertation aims to justify the need for the research and, accordingly, to bring out its main object - the development of the narrative of the April Uprising and the War of Liberation in commemorative celebrations and the stages of their transformations over a period of over 100 years. The first chapter - "Introduction to the problem" is actually the classic introduction characteristic of any dissertation study. The objectives are clearly presented, the tasks and working hypotheses are presented, the methodology is

substantiated in detail, in which field studies occupy a key place. Accordingly, the following main methods are highlighted: direct observation, interviews, visits to local archives and institutions, photo documentation, tracking of events in the online space and media coverage in recent years. The criteria for the selection of the places for the field studies are substantiated. The second chapter presents the historical framework of the main narrative of the April Uprising and Liberation, the creation of a pantheon of heroes, and tracing its development to the present day. This part traces the steps of the institutionalization of the commemorations and the legitimization of the historical narrative in the public consciousness in order to reach the essence of the researched problem, namely the contemporary situation and the possible transformation of the commemorative celebrations. The author shows a very good and detailed knowledge of the currently published literature related to the subject of the dissertation work. The main historiographical and memoir sources are presented, having a significant role in the creation of ideas in the mass consciousness about the April Uprising and the War of Liberation, as well as their authors - Zahariy Stoyanov, Ivan Vazov, Stoyan Zaimov, Dimitar Strashimirov, Ivan Hadjiyski, whose works are still alive today. form the main image in the mass representations of these events. The contribution of foreign journalists, writers, public figures such as Januarius McGahan, William Gladstone, Lady Strangford, Eugene Skyler, Victor Hugo, Oscar Wilde, Edwin Pierce, L. N. Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Dmitri Mendeleev, Ivan S. Aksakov, Ivan Turgenev, Jan Neruda, etc., a brief overview is also made of the Balkan political satire of the period. The exposition in this chapter continues with a historiographical review of publications by contemporary researchers, emphasizing moments of conflict and uses of narrative over the years. For me, the third and fourth chapters are of a contributing nature, in which the field observations carried out by the doctoral student occupy a key place.

They were carried out in the cities of Batak (in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020), Perushtitsa (2018, 2019 and 2020), Karlovo (2019 and 2020) and the village of Skravena, Botevgrad (2019, 2020 and 2021). .). The criteria by which the research areas were selected are very well justified. During these studies, data were sought from local institutions - community centers and museums, as well as from local history

publications and collections, interviews were conducted with municipal specialists. Particular attention is paid to the period from 1944 to 1989, when commemorations changed dramatically. The fundamental religious character of the celebrations is removed, and the anniversaries are linked to "heroic" moments in the history of the ruling BKP party. The doctoral student has followed in detail the tendency to include party history with the heroes of the revival and their ideals. Specific contributions in this chapter are the tracing of the fate of the religious character of the celebrations, highlighting the role of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and accordingly the radical changes that occurred after September 9, 1944 - the marginalization of the church ritual, its rejection, and accordingly the changes in the symbolism of the celebrations, which are becoming increasingly tied to party ideology. Here the exhibition is supported by spectacular examples from Batak, Perušitsa and Skravena. The field studies carried out also allow to show the local/regional nature of the anniversaries and their significance for the local communities. The presentation of the results of the field observations continues in the fourth chapter, where a profile of the current situation is made. In this part, N. Hubenova unfolds a dynamic and comprehensive exposition, such as the described various situations, conflicts, growing into scandals /eg. the so-called "Case of Batak"/ in practice follows the development of the process of how commemorative celebrations become a cultural memory of a traumatic nature. The wide chronological scope and the variety of sources that I. Hubenova includes in a scientific address allow a comparative approach to be applied in the entire study when considering the issue in its significance, complexity and diversity. The fifth and final chapter outlines the visual summary of the celebrations through the prism of their symbolic and spatial dimensions. The studies presented in this part are significant for supplementing the research field of modern Bulgarian festivity. In the Conclusion, the generalizations and conclusions made are synthesized.

Contributions of the dissertation:

In my opinion, the methodology used is of key importance for the achieved results of the dissertation research. The preferred methods and approaches are tailored to the lack of cultural institutions in places / eg. museums and community centers" of a

unified system for searching, storing and presenting statistical information on important aspects of the issue under consideration. Of the investigated objects, this is most clearly evident in Peruštitza - "On the field, during the observation - notes N. Hubenova in her dissertation, the museum had no information about the history of the celebration, except for a few undated photos from that time. There is no maintained archive in the city" /p. 59/. In this regard, the model for field studies developed in the dissertation can be very useful for the development of subsequent regional and local studies, as well as for local institutions of memory, public organizations, local historians and all those interested in this issue.

The dissertation gives new knowledge and brings into scholarly circulation important information about the researched commemorative celebrations, reconstructs the main narrative that multiplies the anniversaries and its genealogy. The main fragments, meanings, uses and their perception by the audience are examined. Empirical material is provided for future research and analysis.

The dissertation is a contribution to the research of modern festivity. It gives new knowledge about the local diversity of modern festivity and its characteristic specifics. I believe that the contributions are the personal work of the candidate and can be significant, both for expanding theoretical knowledge and for practice in this field.

Recommendations: Taking into account the specifics of the research, I would allow myself to make the following recommendations: I think that in the introductory part, the limitations of the dissertation work should be clearly formulated and justified, such as the fact that in view of the preferred selected sites for field research, the commemorative celebrations for the Liberation are presented more fragmentarily and those for the April Uprising are presented more extensively and in detail. In the course of the dissertation, this feature of the research is explained in an indirect way, but it is necessary to clearly state it in the introductory part. Some weaknesses have been admitted in the presented dissertation work, mainly related to repetitions of individual evaluations and findings in the process of the presentation. These recommendations in no way diminish the merits of the present study, the value of the results achieved, the conclusions and generalizations made by the doctoral student.

Abstract and dissertation publications

The abstract objectively reflects the content of the dissertation work and the achieved results. Doctoral student Iliana Hubenova has approved parts of her dissertation work in three publications. Two of the publications were printed respectively in: Yearbook of SU, FF, Kulturologiya, vol. 1, 2022, pp. 89-113; and Yearbook of SU, FF, Book of doctoral students, item 5, 2020, pp. 125-140. The third publication is 15 pages long and has been accepted for publication and included in issue 27 of the "Seminar BG" magazine, according to the attached official note.

I have not found any forms of plagiarism in the dissertation, the abstract and the publications on the topic of the dissertation and I accept that these texts are the personal work of the author.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the relevance and significance of the issues developed in the dissertation, the achieved scientific results and contributions, I confidently give my positive assessment and propose to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Iliana Nikolaeva Hubenova, in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, PhD program "Cultural Studies - Cultural Heritage and Local Identity".

July 14, 2023

Reviewer:

(Prof. Sofia Vasileva, PhD)