

STATEMENT

from

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyana Piskova , lecturer in Archival Studies at the Department of History of the Southwest University "Neofit Rilski" Blagoevgrad

Regarding: the public defense of a dissertation work for the acquisition of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" on the topic: "Trauma and holiday. Sacralization and transformation of the commemorative celebration" in direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (doctoral program "Culturology" - Cultural heritage and local identity) with author Iliana Nikolaeva Hubenova

Applicant data

Iliana Hubenova graduated from the Bachelor's program in Cultural Studies and the Master's program in Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and since 2019 she is a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Cultural Studies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Description of the candidate's scientific works

For the purposes of the current competition, Iliana Hubenova has submitted 3 publications on the topic of the dissertation, one of which is dedicated to commemorative celebrations and their uses in their transformation from commemoration to celebration. The other two articles explore the political, media and institutional uses and symbols of commemorations in Batak and Skravena, and also examine Skravena through the lens of Botev commemoration and the War of Liberation.

Evaluation of the candidate's scientific results and contributions

The dissertation is dedicated to the current and unexplored topic of the realization of the narrative of the April Uprising and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 and their heroes in commemorative celebrations, as well as the inclusion of the anniversaries in the modern celebration. The focus of the research is regional celebrations of national holidays and heroes, observed directly on 4 terrains - Batak, Perušitsa, Skravena and Karlovo. The aim of the dissertation is to find out if there is a transformation in these commemorations and what it means today.

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, 5 chapters and a conclusion spread over 141 pages. In addition, it contains a bibliography with 116 titles, including archival materials and Internet sources. Materials from the field research are also attached to the dissertation (

interviews, photographs and other documents created/recorded by the author of the dissertation, as well as archival documents from local institutions).

The introduction is short and mainly reduced to defining the subject of the dissertation. As a real introduction, however, I would accept the first chapter, titled not by chance "Introduction to the problem". It examines commemorative celebrations in Bulgaria, specifically selected and included in the dissertation commemorative historical celebrations and their goals. The main objectives of the dissertation and the questions to which answers are sought are formulated. As the main question, that of the degree of transformation of commemorative celebrations into a holiday has been singled out. The choice of the research areas was justified, allowing to observe the celebrations of dates of national importance, which are also important for the regional cultural calendar. Among the tasks of the research are: establishing whether the observed terrains fit into Pierre Nora's definition of "places of memory"; what is the nature of the audiences; whether there is trauma and what it is expressed in. In the introductory part of the dissertation, the hypothesis about the transformations of commemorative celebrations is also formulated. Research methods are presented - observation, interviews, archival sources, photo documentation.

The second chapter outlines the historical framework of the commemoration based on memoir and fiction, as well as historiographical works and contemporary researchers. The precise selection of the main sources, the critical analysis with a view to their credibility and their in-depth knowledge are impressive, as a result of which Iliana Hubenova justifiably proves that the memoir work of Zahariy Stoyanov, the vase works and the studies of Stoyan Zaimov and Dimitar Strashimirov, as well as psychology of Ivan Hadjiyski's uprising gradually shape the leading narrative of the identity of the Bulgarian people and that as the first transmitters of the events they set the model, which from one moment is no longer subject to consideration and analysis and becomes an event with untouchable frames and symbols, the absolute truth .

A place is also devoted to the echo abroad through examples of the writings of McGahan, Victor Hugo, Dostoyevsky. And last but not least, selected contemporary authors are presented who emphasize the importance of the April Uprising and its symbols and through which Iliana Hubenova substantiates the transformation of "trauma" into bravery and a reason for pride.

The third chapter is dedicated to the emergence of commemorative celebrations and their specifics on each of the four terrains. The tracing starts from the first years after the war of 1877-1878 and reaches the present day. The author outlines the transformations of commemorative celebrations. The first of them is related to the management of St. Stambolov and is the result of the reaction of Russophilism, when the heroes of the April Uprising were sacralized, and the mourning character was replaced by the solemn one. The second transformation was under the conditions of the regime established after September 9, 1944, when commemorations were subordinated to the cult of heroism and religious processions were replaced by the laying of wreaths. It is connected with the ideology of the Communist Party, with the legitimization of the regime and the search for its roots in the glorious past. It

also marginalizes the primary (religious) character of the commemoration and changes its essence into a solemn and secular one.

In the course of her research, Iliana Hubenova verifies and confirms the hypothesis of the transformation of commemorative celebrations into a holiday and thus determines their third transformation.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Profile of the contemporary situation" presents the concrete picture of the field observation, interviews, conversations with attendees and organizers of the commemorative events for a whole five years (2017-2021). The summarized results indicate that the pattern of commemorations has repeated itself over the past 30 years and that anniversaries are among the most important regional events. At the beginning are the lithium processions (the religious part) , and the secular part includes a solemn dawn-check, offering wreaths, reenactment. Other elements of the celebration are a banquet; fair street. Celebrations during a pandemic are highlighted. The audience is also characterized - local and "foreigners", and rockers and their clubs are given a special place in the text.

The last chapter is dedicated to the symbolic and spatial dimensions of commemoration and includes the various fragments – in the religious and the secular part: honoring the dead (religious commemoration), which breaks in the period 1944-1989; reenactments - classical (with local volunteers) and theatrical (with directors, stage, sound) ; ceremonial dawn-check - a military practice introduced after 1878; the guests of honor – who make speeches and legitimize their authority; entertainment program; fair street; modern interventions (with social networks) ; spaces - physical and symbolic, and finally - the monuments, which are permanent bearers of the symbols.

In conclusion - the goals and tasks of the dissertation have been fulfilled, and the questions have competent, scientifically based and unbiased answers. The text is factually dense, thorough, readable, precise. No plagiarism was found in the dissertation. Each chapter and paragraph has an introductory part of a general nature, which connects it with the previous texts of the exposition and, in turn, ends with a final general part with conclusions. Thus, the narrative is fluid, connected, and the inferences and conclusions are justified.

Iliana Hubenova's lasting interest in the topic of transformation of commemorations, which dates back to 2017, undoubtedly contributes to the merits of the work. The dissertation work is an example of building on the studies and already achieved research results in the bachelor's degree, and later in the master's her thesis. The dissertation demonstrates the excellent theoretical training and historiographic awareness of the doctoral student, as well as the in-depth critical analysis of the collected rich empirical source material from field observations. Accumulations naturally lead to density of the narrative, high informativeness, validity and high scientific value of the research. Iliana Hubenova presents the commemorations in the historical context and thus creates the conditions for their in-depth analysis, for the precise determination of the main accents and conflicting moments of the celebrations themselves, and of course establishes the transformations that have taken place and their reflection in modern times. As a result of all this, the conclusions are substantiated, backed up with examples and, together with the collected materials, are useful for a wide

range of researchers. As a merit of the work, I would especially emphasize the precise definition of the terms and the conceptual apparatus in the dissertation.

Undoubtedly, the dissertation has a contributing character: it presents an original conceptual model for the study of regionally celebrated and national holidays and heroes; contains a contribution to the study of commemorative celebrations and to the study of modern festivity; enriches anthropological studies of the transformation of regional identity in modern times; contains contributions in the field of cultural management and last but not least is the interdisciplinary contribution.

In general, the presented text is a success for the author and has all the qualities of a serious and thorough scientific study.

In conclusion

Everything said about the dissertation work and its author gives me reason to express my positive opinion on awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Iliana Nikolaeva Hubenova.

August 1 , 2023,

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariyana Piskova