**REVIEW**

By Prof. Margarita Karamihova, Dr.Habill

on PhD thesis developed at University of Sofia, Faculty of History, Department of Ethnology

3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

3.1. 3.1 Social, Economic, Social and Cultural Sciences (Ethnology of Transition)

Author: Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdjiev

Topic: “Indian” organizations in Europe (Ethnographic research on cultural and historical re-enactment groups)

***1. PhD, dissertation, abstract and publication data.***

Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdjiev was enrolled as a regular PhD student at the Department of Ethnology of Sofia University on 24.01.2020. During his PhD he has completed all the tasks stipulated in his individual study plan. The dissertation was discussed and he was granted the right to defend it by the Council of the Department of Ethnology at the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, held on 1.02.2023***.***

In the progress and implementation of the entire procedure until the referral of the work for public defense, no irregularities were committed and the requirements laid down were complied with. On the basis of the submitted documents, there are all grounds to conclude that the procedure for the development of the doctoral thesis and its referral for defense has been carried out in full compliance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application, as well as with the internal Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions at the Sofia University. The further course of the procedure fully complies with the requirements of the aforementioned regulations.

The dissertation contains 224 pages. It consists of an introduction, three chapters, a case study, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Before presenting the Thesis, I am obliged to note that for the first time in my 23 years of serving on scientific juries, I have no comments to make about this study. In the process of reading and reflecting on the text, I had no question that was not answered. Moreover, the Thesis is written in brilliant academic language, a skill that is increasingly rare. Right here I would like to express my admiration for the work of the Ph student and his supervisors - †Prof. Dr.Habill. Veselin Tepavicharov and Assoc. Prof. Ilia Iliev, PhD, both for the precise formulation of the excellent chosen topic and in the development of the text.

In accordance with established academic tradition, the **Introduction** has a classical structure, in keeping with the best standards. A brilliant justification of the main terms is made. A clear scientific goal is set and the tasks to achieve it are defined. The scientific methods are justified, and the full palette used is presented. The PhD student could also mention visual anthropology as part of the methodology he uses, as is evident from the text.

Lyubomir Kyumyurdjiev demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the achievements of the leading figures in the research field by presenting his critical comments.

The author has developed an excellent profile of the respondents - in their dynamics in the context of sub-urbanisation. I find particularly valuable his commentary on Native American attitudes towards Indianists/”Euro-Indians” (p. 18). Challenges in the field are correctly described, from the refusal of people to be surveyed, to the refusal of audio/video registration - problems we have all encountered in our work as fieldworkers. An analysis of the reasons for respondents' insistence on anonymity has been made.

The author demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the dynamic political map of the world in the twentieth century. In the course of his work, he has encountered, but also benefited from, two severe challenges - the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The text presents and analyses the different effects of the two cruel ordeals.

**Chapter One** is entitled “The Many Paths to the Past”. It logically sets the research framework of the Thesis, clearly defining *cultural-historical reconstructions*, often called *historical reenactment*. The Ph student has an excellent knowledge of the state of research in contemporary academic literature. He accurately categorizes cultural-historical reconstructions according to different indicators – i.e. era, different tactics of various reenactors[[1]](#footnote-1).

The exclusion of “authentic folklore groups from the category of reenactment” is perfectly argued “by the same logic that Indianists do not define as historical reenactments the efforts of the Native Americans to adhere to their own tribal traditions” (p. 35).

**Chapter Two** is titled “Freedom... Winnetou” Reasons for European Interest in the American Indians.” In it, the doctoral student logically traces the “discovery” of the Americas and the consequences for both indigenous peoples and Europeans. The pathways for the emergence and cumulative European interest are meticulously outlined - an exhibition, a book, George Catlin's living paintings; nineteenth century explorers; the notorious Wild West show - Buffalo Bill; the media; philosophers; fiction - the special influence of Karl May and Mayne Reed. Contributes a detailed tracing of the path to the construction of Europe's romanticized, heroized, yet templated and generalized image of Native Americans. Important is the commentary on the affirmation of this image as a backlash against institutionalized racism, and the presentation of the phenomenon of *Indianthusiasm* (Indian enthusiasm) as a mirror of the dreamed German nation.

Lyubomir Kyumyurdjiev, following the chronological approach, presents the dynamics of the use of the image of the Native Americans in the Cold War period on both sides of the Iron Curtain and after its fall. Of interest is his thesis that the parallels between the heroes of a European nation's history and North American Indigenous People are an example of the idealization of one's own past by looking into the American Indian history.

**The third chapter** is entitled “Woodcraft, Buffalo Days and Powwow: A Brief History of 'Indian' Organizations in Europe”. It critically and in detail presents the background of the emergence of Indianist societies in Europe. The causes and characteristics of the different schools based on the multiple approaches to Indianism are commented. This chapter unfolds the qualities of the doctoral student as a fieldworker. His many years of work in collecting empirical ethnographic material and his ability to use it in analysis are impressive.

The ordeal that threatens the basic principles of the pan-European experience of Indian brotherhood is the war in Ukraine. Here, as throughout, the field material is delicately and convincingly presented, clear of judgements.

The typology of the various organizations and their impact on the daily lives of their members is a model for research.

**The fourth chapter,** which the author has chosen not to number but to title “Case Study: the Bulgarian Indian “Eagle Circle” Society is an example of the combination of self-reflexive ethnography and objective case study. A psychological analysis of the founders and participants of the Bulgarian Society is clearly present in this chapter. The accumulated knowledge of European organizations of this type allows the author to accurately situate and typologize the organization in whose creation he participates, but also whose dynamics he explores. The factors of the rise and decline of the Society's activity are shown, as well as the external impetus for its reawakening. And in this chapter the field material is organically incorporated.

**The Conclusion** develops the author's thesis about “the last of the Mohicans” of Europe. I fully accept his analysis of the causes and dynamics of the European passion for the “Indianness”, sustained in different ways and intensities in different countries for over a century. Achieving the goal and solving the problems is presented.

The abstract is 56 pages long. It concisely and correctly presents the content of the dissertation, the scientific contributions, acknowledgements, list of publications on the researched problems and bibliography. The abstract fully corresponds to the doctoral thesis.

The PhD student reports 6 publications in Bulgarian and one article in print. With these he meets and exceeds the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application, as well as the internal Regulations for the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and occupation of academic positions at SU.

The abundant and excellently presented field material, collected by various methods for nearly 30 years, the correct citation of authors whose texts the PhD student knows and the original theses developed in the exposition show that this is a completely original work. I categorically declare that there is no plagiarism.

***2. Scientific contributions***

I fully accept the scientific contributions described by the PhD student.

***3. Recommendations:***

I recommend that the Thesis be printed and well advertised in order to reach as wide a readership as possible.

***4. Conclusion.***

Proceeding from the objective requirements for dissertations for the degree of PhD, and taking into account the achievements of the Bulgarian and European Ethnology, I express my positive opinion and recommend the members of the scientific jury to award to Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdjiev the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in Ethnology in the scientific field 3. 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences for Thesis “Indian” Organizations in Europe (Ethnographic Study on Cultural and Historical Reenactment Groups).

24.07.2023 Professor Margarita Karamihova, Dr. Habill.

1. A personal digression - the text helped me situate myself more clearly in my memories as a participant in the reenactment of the Battle of Culloden (USA, 2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)