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ABSTRACT

of a dissertation on:

THE "INDIAN" ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE
(An Ethnographic Study on Groups for Cultural-and-Historical Reenactments)

for awarding the educational and scientific degree Doctor (PhD)
3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences
(Ethnology of Transition)

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**SOFIA
2023**

The dissertation work contains 224 pages. It consists of an Introduction, three Chapters, a Case study, a Conclusion and a Bibliography.

All materials are available to those interested in the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of History of the University of “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

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INTRODUCTION

The past has always appealed to the human imagination no less than the future. Its **re-living (reenactment)** is the basis of the tribal dances resurrecting a successful hunt; of the spectacles with which the Hellenes and the ancient Romans presented long-ago battles; of the legendary feats recreated in the Middle Ages; of the spectacular “knight-tournaments” and “medieval festivals” organized in the 19th century – centuries after the historical sunset of the Chivalry. These reconstructions served not only for entertainment or as a tribute to the heroes of the past, but also as bridges to the bygone eras over the abyss of time.

In the 20th century, cultural-and-historical reenactment is more popular than ever. It combines efforts to lift the veil of the past through learning, personal experiences from other times and cultures with opportunities to construct alternative identities – which is increasingly characteristic of today’s world. Alternative identities are like a mirror, in which modern person seeks to recognize the diversity of his/her essence, of what he/she really is and what he/she is not, but deeply desires to be. Entering them, he/she has fun, plays, but also learns to explore his/her interests in the process of their realization, because they characterize him/her in a particularly deep way and seem to be able to give the human being an answer to the eternal question “Who am I?”.

Often, participants in historical reenactment look for some identities that are related to their current affiliation – they take on the roles of Vikings, because they are Swedish, or they reconstruct Romans because they are Europeans who consider Ancient Rome to be the cultural foundation of Europe. However, the existence of groups such as the European “Indian” societies that are the subject of my study not only proves that this logic is not mandatory, but also raises a number of questions for researchers of the phenomenon of cultural-historical reconstructions.

Relevance of the Topic

As noted, cultural-historical reconstructions (a.k.a. **historical reenactments** or just **reenactment**) are becoming more and more widespread and well developed all over the world, including in Bulgaria. The interest of various researchers in them is growing as well. These reconstructions are kind of dramatizations, recreating aspects of a historical event or some period – for example, the Battle of Hastings (1066) or the Italian Renaissance. They are carried out on a voluntary basis, most often non-professionally, but with great enthusiasm combined with good or even deep knowledge of the “restored” era and culture. They combine educational, entertainment and research activities. Of historical reenactments, Vanessa Agnew writes that they contain “the twin passions of work and play, which are generally divorced from each other” (Agnew 2004: 327-339). For these and a number of other reasons, cultural-historical reconstructions are of bigger and bigger interest to ethnology, sociology, culturology, history, and psychology.

My doctoral dissertation presents the results of my ethnographic research on the so-called “Indian” organizations in various European countries with an emphasis on the Bulgarian Indian Society called “Eagle Circle” as **case study**. It is focused on a kind of “phenomenon within the phenomenon”, as these groups appear in relation to other organizations for cultural-historical reenactments. There are basic similarities between the “Indian” groups and the other ones, but also a number of significant differences. Basically, the reenactor groups dealing with the Ancient cultured, Middle Ages, etc., are connected one way or another to the past and traditions of the country from which their participants originate, to its cultural area or at least to the continent where their fatherland is located. This does not apply to “Indian” organizations

in Europe. Their members are people who do not have any Native American ancestry – and many of them have never even visited North America. In the perception of “Roman”, “Viking”, “Medieval” and other such organizations by the general public in a given country, a certain patriotic or/and Eurocentric assessment plays a significant role, which cannot be applied to the “Indian” groups. This also determines the far greater opportunities for official appearances of the “Roman”, “Medieval” and other organizations mentioned above: celebration of local historical anniversaries/monuments, Ancient and Medieval festivals, “Ancestors Days”, etc. Outside of their own (internal) events, the members of the “Indian” groups rarely make public appearances. Usually, they do not look for such, feeling more or less isolated because of the specificity of their interests in the socio-cultural space of their place of residence, country, nation. This makes them more closed and therefore more difficult to be researched. These observations apply not only to Bulgaria, where only a small and young (compared to most European organizations) group is known, but also to countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Finland, where “Indian” societies have a significant membership and have a long history.

Although creatively oriented, my work also contains an applied aspect, as its theme is also related to the “external – internal” dichotomy in game situations, the hierarchy in the studied organizations and notions of authenticity among their members, as well as other problems in the field of ethnology, sociology, psychology. It considers the importance of “living history” as an aspect of experimental archaeology, learning through imitation and creating material culture embedded in a social context. Other topical issues that have found a place in my work are the reactions of members of the “Indian” groups in (then) socialist countries to attempts to politicize their interests and activities by the official authorities; the changes in these organizations after the fall of the communist regimes in 1989, and the establishment of active relations with “Indian” organizations from Western countries; the “kinship-in-spirit” characteristic of the European “Indian” societies, based on Native American traditions, but also on a deep need for a socio-cultural environment of like-minded people; the construction of pan-European “Indian” networks and the severe test to which their principles were subjected by the war that began with Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

Basic Parameters of the Conducted Research

My work is based on results of an **ethnographic study**, conducted over a long period of time among a large number of members of “Indian” organizations from various European countries. Along with the observation and description of the experienced, the dialogue between the researcher (in this case, an **insider**) and the respondents also has an important role for my research. It presents additional details of the internal social life within the studied groups from the point of view of the individual and personal experience of the participants.

The object of my research are groups from U.K., Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bulgaria and other European countries whose members study and reconstruct various aspects of the past and traditional cultures of the North American Indians.

The terminology that I use has an important role in the research itself. I prefer to use **European “Indian” organization** and **members of European “Indian” groups**, but also use the more common for the works of some foreign researches terms **Indianists** and **Indian hobbyists**. Recently, the name “Indians” and its derivatives are considered inappropriate by many – mainly in North America. In Canada, Indians, Inuit and Métis are called “First Nations”, while in the USA they are officially called “Native/Indigenous Americans”. However, I do believe that the use of “Indians” alongside “Native Americans” in my text will

not be taken as pejorative in any way. “Indian”, “Indians”, etc. have long been used widely in Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian language is one of the few that express a difference between “Indians” (**индианци** – indigenous inhabitants of America) and “Indians” (**индийци** – inhabitants of India). Having in mind that my research examines “Indian” organizations in Europe, it would be vague and misleading if I were to use terms such as “European Native Americans”, “Czech Native American groups”, and “English Canadian First Nations clubs”!

In anthropology, self-designations of communities or ethnic groups are prioritized over external definitions. The members of the European organizations in question have adopted as self-names **Indianists** and **“Euro-Indians”**, as well as **“followers of American Indians”** and **European Indian hobbyists**.

The subject of my research is the origin, development and current state of the “Indian” groups in Europe. They have a relatively long history and are a product of a variety of factors. I pay particular attention to:

- the reasons for the specific interest in the Native Americans in Europe, which led to the creation of “Indian” groups in various European countries;
- stages, directions and dimensions of this interest;
- the motivation of the participants in the “Indian” groups and its changes during the different periods of the existence of the groups;
- the membership, organization and hierarchy in the studied groups (building a social environment of like-minded people and the relationships in it);
- the ideas of the participants in the “Indian” groups about authenticity and the methods they apply to achieve it in accordance with these ideas;
- the visions of the future of the European “Indian” groups.

The temporal frames of the study are at first sight quite broad, because they include events and personalities from the Great Geographical Discoveries Age to the present day – but the real focus of my actual research on “Indian” groups in Europe covers the period from the beginning of the 20th to the first decades of the 21st c.

As the main **goal** of my work, I determine the familiarization of the scientific community with the regularities related to the emergence and development of the studied “Indian” organizations, the similar and even identical characteristics they demonstrate, as well as the differences between them and the ones in relation to other groups for cultural-historical reconstructions.

The achievement of the **main goal** passes through **intermediate goals** as:

- an analytical review of the emergence of “Indian” societies with a study of the mechanisms that form the initial core of enthusiasts and its subsequent growth through the inclusion of new members;
- a comparative analysis between the Bulgarian Indianist organization, other ones from former socialist countries and “Indian” organizations from Western Europe;
- study of the attitude of the cited associations towards local societies (alternative to the existing order, escapism, encouraged hobby, etc.) and its influence on the internal dynamics of the associations;

- exploring the formation of international Indianist networks: exchange visits of Indianists from different European countries, international camps, etc.

The **methods** I use in my work cover an analytical review of the existing literature on “Indian” organizations in Europe and the world, structured and semi-structured interviews, open conversations and participatory observation. I used the last method to collect the empirical data during camps and other events of Bulgarian and foreign Indianists. In addition, I conducted 48 interviews and a large number of informal conversations with members of “Indian” groups from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Great Britain and other European countries, as well as with Native Americans and Indianists from the USA and Canada.

Regarding the need for critical distance, I relied on a technique used by generations of Bulgarian ethnographers, ethnologists and folklorists studying our society – the **comparative methods**. Parallels with other “Indian” organizations are not only present in the final text, but were included at every stage of the research – from the drafting of interview questionnaires to the preparation and conduct of the included observation to organizing my previous experience. The constant comparisons with other countries were at the basis of the self-reflexive elements, mandatory not only in research provoked by long-standing personal commitment and interest like mine, but also in any anthropological analysis. Interviews with members of other reenactor groups reconstructing elements of the late Roman Empire, Western European and Balkan medieval history also played a positive role.

The included observations, interviews, conversations and correspondence were carried out over a long period, much of which significantly preceded my enrollment as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Ethnology at Sofia University (February 2020) and the beginning of the work on my dissertation. This is explained by my long-standing desire to learn as much as possible both about the history and traditional cultures of the Native Americans themselves, and about the emergence of the deep and multifaceted interest in North American Indians in Europe and its development that led to the creation of “Indian” groups in many European countries.

The data necessary for my research was collected by me at meetings in Slovakia and Hungary (summer 2010); during a stay in the USA in June and July 2015; at summer camps in Bulgaria (July 2014, July 2017, August 2018, August 2020, August 2021, as well as some earlier ones), including those with the participation of Belgian and Russian Indianists; at international “Indian” gatherings in the Czech Republic (August 2013, August 2016, August 2019 and August 2022); through correspondence carried out mainly through Internet, and in some other ways as well.

As a **basic task** of my research, I can point out the revelation of the inner logic of the aims, decisions and actions of European Indianists as individuals and as groups. The aforementioned establishment of a critical distance towards the object of my study in collecting the empirical data, was a **permanent task** for me. This is a classic problem for any “anthropology at home” (Peirano 1998:105-128). In the course of the fieldwork, my constant priority was to combine the role of an observer, capable of an external and as objective as possible view of the researched material, with my personal commitment. By the way, my aforementioned emotional commitment to the Indianist topic benefited greatly the research itself. Thanks to my accumulated experience, my many acquaintances, and my direct participation in various Indian activities, I have access to information which most outside researchers would find difficult to collect.

The others **tasks**, subject to the goals set in my research, outline the directions in which it is carried out. Among them are:

- finding the existing scientific works on the subject of the dissertation and getting to know their content;
- establishing contact with subject matter experts from the US and some European countries, as well as a sufficient number of European Indianists willing to be interviewed in connection with my research;
- general tracking of the cultural-historical reconstructions as a phenomenon and specifically of the development of the European “Indian” organizations as a “phenomenon within the phenomenon”;
- bringing out the factors determining the roots of the Indianism; phases of interest in the North American Indians; the characteristic appearances of this interest;
- outlining the similarities and differences between the various “Indian” organizations, as well as the ones between them and other cultural-historical reconstruction groups;
- study of Indianism during the socialist rule in particular countries – the image of “permitted America” and its variations;
- research and presentation (as a **case study**) of the first and only up to now Bulgarian (and on the Balkan Peninsula) “Indian” organization.

The results of the assigned tasks form the basis of the analyzes and conclusions offered in the dissertation.

Existing Studies on the Topic

The emergence and development of the “Indian” organizations in Europe have not been examined by many researchers. The article by the English scholar Colin F. Taylor *The Native American Hobbyist Movement in Europe* (Taylor 1988: 562-569) is a classic material on the subject. Its author reviews a large number of European Indianist organizations, clarifies terminology, gives a brief overview of the types of groups and analyzes the very interest in the North American Indians among Europeans, trying to build a general profile of the Indianists. Over half of the text of *The Indian Hobbyist Movement* is devoted to the groups in Great Britain. Organizations in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden are also considered, while those in Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia (then still one state), Poland and Finland are more likely to be mentioned. Taylor presents only general information about the Indianists in the USSR and some interesting details – about those from Hungary. In 1988, when the article was published, certain European “Indian” societies did not exist yet.

The book “Playing Indian” by the Native American Dakota author Philip J. Deloria (Deloria 1998) explores the historical and contemporary behavioral pattern of people in the US who do not have Native American ancestry, but imitate stereotypical images of Native Americans. Although deeply and interestingly presented, Deloria’s research is focused on processes taking place in an “American environment”, therefore only isolated parallels with the Indianism in Europe can be found in it.

Indians and Europe. An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays edited by the Austrian researcher Christian F. Feest (Feest ed. 1999) includes material on the historical European perceptions of the Native Americans, information on early Native American visits to Europe, accounts of European travelers' contributions to American Indian ethnology, and texts on some "Indian" organizations in Europe. Feest is one of the founders and the editor-in-chief of the periodical *European Review of Native American Studies*, published between 1987 and 2007. There have been published some interesting materials on the emergence and development of "Indian" organizations in Hungary (Nagy 1993: 37-42), the former GDR (Turski 1993:43-48), France (Dubois 1993:27-36), and Finland (Hamalainen 1998:13-18).

The most detailed study of European "Indian" organizations I have come across is *Crafting 'the Indian': Knowledge, Desire & Play in Indianist Reenactment* by Petra T. Kalshoven of the University of Manchester, UK (Kalshoven 2012). Her approaches to the subject, her field research, the various aspects of her work were not only deeply interesting, but also very useful for me. Kalshoven spoke candidly about the problems of the outside researcher among Indianists, too – which made me once again appreciate my position as an insider in my research.

Although she includes in her study Indianists from two former socialist countries, Petra Kalshoven's attention is directed mainly to "Indian" groups in Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France) and only partially to those in Central Europe (Czech Republic). It is the same in the writings of the English researcher Christina Welch (Welch 2013:101-116), the American Tara Browner (Browner 2011:71-84) and other researchers of European Indianism. Some – such as Hartmut Lutz (Lutz 2002:167-184), Peter Boltz (Boltz 1999:475-490), Frank Usbeck (Usbeck 2015) from Germany and H. Glenn Penny (Penny 2013) from the USA – even focus only on the emergence and development of the "Indian" groups/movement in Germany, where this phenomenon is particularly impressively presented.

Apart from mentioning of (then) Leningrad group in by C. Taylor, the studies of Jennifer R. Rabodzeenko (Rabodzeenko 1995:56-63) and German Dziebel (USA) of some "Indian" groups from the former USSR, so far there is no research on this type of organizations in Eastern Europe. In his doctoral dissertation, defended at Stanford University in the USA, Dziebel also published some information about the Bulgarian Indianist Society "Eagle Circle" (Dziebel 2006:13, 24, 41, 136, 146, 289, 494, 549). Apart from these mentions, the Bulgarian "Indian" organization, although repeatedly discussed in journalistic materials, has not been the subject of scholarly presentation until now.

Outlines of the Profile of the European Indianist

My fifty respondents are mainly Indianists from Bulgaria, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia and other European countries. Almost without exception, they requested that their civil names not be shared when the results of my research will be published. Most of these people did not want I to quote them by their "Indian" names either. Many did not want to mention their occupations, education, or what part of the country they came from. I have also been repeatedly warned not to publish any photographs of "Indian" camps without the express consent of the people photographed there.

Research ethics required me to comply with these conditions. Moreover, since the majority of the Indianists did not wish their names to be quoted, I decided to introduce **all** the interviewed with only their initials. A few asked me to change even the letters of their initials. However, the information about the age and gender of each of the respondents is completely real.

I believe this partial anonymity of the interviewees did not affect the relevance and objectivity of my research. People talked calmly about their interest in Native Americans, about their experiences at camps and other “Indian” events, shared their views on a number of issues, did not hide their worries and hopes.

My respondents are of both sexes, but men predominate. Their age is between 35 and 72 years, with the largest number being those between 40 and 49, followed by those between 50 and 59. The representatives of these two age categories are the most active “Euro-Indians”. According to my observations, in European “Indian” societies there are relatively few people between the ages of 30 and 39, and those under 29 are even fewer. This is due to the declining interest in the Native American subject among the younger generation of Europeans, which leads to a decreasing number of new members in the respective organizations. The Indianists between 60 and 69 years of age are relatively numerous. They are men (less often women) enjoying the status of Elders, who have accumulated knowledge and skills, often serving as an example to the younger members of the groups. People over the age of 70 are the veterans among the “Euro-Indians”. Few of them are still active Indianists.

Among the European Indianists, there are representatives of various professions – doctors, artists, historians, art critics, foresters, long-haul truck drivers, secondary school and university teachers, stagehands in theaters... For those working as foresters and agricultural producers, it is tempting to look for a connection between their profession and the Native American theme, but for those Indianists who are computer specialists or electrical engineers, this logic fades. However, freelancers and people working seasonally occupy a relatively large share of the total number of “Euro-Indians”. The reasons for such a choice are obvious: more time for “Indian pursuits” and less commitment to an office environment and business protocol. There are also few who managed to turn Indianism into their profession. They make authentic replicas of tribal clothing, weapons and ornaments, even entire tipi tents, which they sell to other Indianists, including overseas. However, at least for now, “professional Indianists” are more of an exception.

It is difficult to construct a portrait of the “typical European Indianist”. The Indianists themselves differ in defining those activities and values that most vividly characterize Indianism. The spectrum is wide: from an interest in the old Native American skills for living in nature through ceremonial practices to participating in competitive Native American dances in the style of modern powwow festivals. These components often flow into each other.

Indianists and Indians

In maintaining a critical distance, and in other aspects of my work, my contacts with Native Americans from the U.S.A. (1995 and 2015) and Canada (1998) have been very helpful. I have discussed the subject of “Euro-Indians” with representatives of several North American tribes. For some Native Americans, members of European “Indian” organizations are “spiritual relatives” and for others – “thieves of culture”. Positive reactions are based on satisfaction at the popularity of Native American traditions overseas, on genuine admiration for traditional Native American skills mastered by Europeans, and even on the idea of a kind of spiritual unity between the Native Americans and Indianists. The negative ones are often rooted in revanchist sentiments and accumulated generations of mistrust of the “white man”. Native Americans find it unpleasant that many Europeans are interested in the heroic past of North American Indian tribes, but not in the plight of their modern representatives. A common source of resentment among Native American people today is the notion that many “white Indians” stage sacred ceremonies or use exact replicas of regalia that symbolically mean a lot to the Native descendants of Old-Time chiefs and warriors. The negative attitude may be based on dissatisfaction with the fact that in their “Indian game” many Europeans show more interest

in North American tribal traditions and often know more about them than most young “Indians by birth”.

Each of these reactions contributed to my research and assisted in a more critical and distanced reading of my own membership in “Indian” organizations. That’s why I don’t count the negative Native American opinions as a real part of the difficulties I’ve encountered during my work.

Some Difficulties I Met in the Process of My Work

During my research I encountered problems of various nature. Among the most specific was the change in the attitude of some “Euro-Indians” towards me after I explained that I was engaged in a scientific study of Indianism in Europe. The fact that I myself am a member of an “Indian” group helped me a lot in my contacts with most Indianists from Bulgaria and other European countries, but for some of them this very fact turned out to be a problem. It was evidently difficult for them to accept the idea of an academic study of interests and pursuits that were too intimate for them, and presumably for me. None of these people expressed any visible irritation with, suspicion of, or disagreement with the research I had undertaken, but their direct or indirect refusal to be interviewed by me about their “Indian” activities was a clear enough sign of the aforementioned change in their attitude. However, I’d like to underline that comparatively few of the Indianists with whom I had previous communication refused to assist me in some later moment. In opposite, many of them helped me a lot.

A more serious issue when working on my dissertation was the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic that hit the world in early 2020 – my first year as a PhD (doctoral) student. Almost all prearrangements and plans fell through with the advent of the pandemic. The isolation and complete inability to travel forced me to rely entirely on electronic correspondence, which demotivated some of my respondents. The atmosphere of uncertainty and apprehension, general disorientation, and melancholy emotional adjustment further hampered my investigations.

The war in Ukraine, which broke out at the end of February 2022, also had and continues to have negative influences on me as a person and as a researcher. In addition to affecting me directly (my brother lived in Kiev with his family; they had to evacuate from there, which led to a number of risks and difficulties), the war ended my relations with some Russian Indianists who took very negatively my anti-war position. I lost contact with some mobilized or evacuated Ukrainian followers of North American Indians, too. On the other hand, there was another aspect of my research that opened up to me – undesirable in an emotional sense, but unique in a professional one. I was enabled to study the changes which had taken place in the Indianists from the belligerent countries: as an attitude towards the “others”, “enemies” (many of whom just one year or so ago were like-minded people, associates, friends), as well as towards Indianist ideas, towards the modern world, towards themselves. These observations also extended to some “Indian followers” from other European countries more directly or indirectly affected by the war.

Peculiarities of the Insider’s Position in the Study of “Indian” Groups

Quite often the interest of the European Indianists towards the Native American traditions is related to the spiritual teachings and practices of various North American tribes. This also affects the values, philosophy, worldview of the members of the “Indian” organizations in Europe. Indianism itself is often connected to particular views about nature, technology, the past, the present, freedom, human relations, and so on. There are certainly

similar features in the rest of the groups for cultural-historical reconstructions, but my observations show that in the “Indian” organizations the mentioned attitudes are particularly characteristic. Often this specificity deepens the feeling of “otherness” in the members of the Indianist groups societies towards the “outside world”. The same attitudes also deepen the sense of reciprocity, “kinship-in-spirit” (which I consider in detail later in my work) among the Indianists themselves – especially in the given group, but also in relation to like-minded people from other “Indian” organizations. Therefore, in these societies there is usually a strong collective identity based on shared values and solidarity. In many of them, this leads to a kind of “self-sufficiency” – the socialization of most people in the group is so satisfying that the need to communicate/share about the interests, understandings and activities of the group with representatives of the “outside world” is significantly reduced.

The role of an insider in the research I undertook really brought me many positives – but also some specific difficulties. Part of them came as a consequence of the reactions of some good acquaintances of mine when they learned of my intentions to research European “Indian” groups and write a dissertation based on these studies. Every researcher is also a human being – a person with his or her own personal worries and internal doubts. When I saw the reluctance of some of my Indianist friends and acquaintances to help me, some questions that I had asked myself before, surfaced again. Can I talk officially about things that are intimate to most Indianists (myself included)? Do I have the right to analyze “in public” the understandings and notions of my like-minded people? Is it right to look for generalizations about the living multifaceted phenomenon of European Indianism, which I would turn into more or less schematic conclusions?

What helped me to overcome these hesitations was the fact that my interest in the “Indian” groups of Europe was indeed long and deep one. Also, I really think that research on this topic is not only intriguing, but also useful for both the scientific community and the “Euro-Indians” themselves. At the same time, I realized that I could afford not to “dive” too deep into some particular topics – such as the religious beliefs of my respondents (unless they themselves wished to talk about them), the ceremonial life of groups, etc. – without to affect the scope and credibility of my research.

In the end, I was able to not just silence my hesitations, but consciously reject them. It was a kind of catharsis for me, which I successfully passed thanks to the support of the majority of my Indianist acquaintances and friends, who believed in my idea, in its value and in my ability to implement it.

FIRST CHAPTER: THE MANY ROADS TO THE PAST

Historical Reconstructions, Reenactment, etc.

Since almost all researchers take the European “Indian” groups as organizations for cultural-historical reconstructions, there’s no way to talk about them without considering the phenomenon of the historical reenactment as a whole. In **First chapter** of my work, I analyze the ever-widening spread of this phenomenon in the world and in our country, as well as the expanding research interest in it, based on the works of foreign (Vanessa Agnew, Robert L. Hadden, Jonathan Lamb, Petra Kalshoven, etc.), and Bulgarian scientists (Evgenia Troeva, Ivaylo Dichev, Svetla Kazalarska, Veneta Yankova, Svetlana Velikova, Toma Tomov, Ivo Strahilov, Anna Aleksieva, Iliya Valev). The works of these and other authors related to the subject of historical reenactments are duly cited throughout the text of my dissertation.

Categories of Historical Reenactments

Historical reenactments are a complex of diverse activities that can generally be reduced to three categories:

- Proper reconstructions, in which historical objects, clothes, tools, weapons and technologies of the past are recreated, combat demonstrations are held, etc.;
- Reenactment of significant historical moments – famous battles, coronations, dynastic marriages, etc.;
- Living history – an attempt to live for a while as close as possible to specific cultural-historical conditions through the mastering of old-time skills and routine actions. This category is favored by the most European “Indian” organizations.

The aspiration to create and use replicas that are as culturally and historically correct as possible is inevitably connected with in-depth studies by most of the reenactors. They actively turn themselves into a “tool” for researching the past, often on the basis of systematized knowledge and even their own developments. That is why the activities of some reenactors and groups closely approach “experimental archaeology”.

Origin and Development of Historical Reenactments

Historical reenactments themselves have a long history. During Antiquity, important battles of the past were presented in the form of public spectacles in Hellas and Ancient Rome. Even more impressive were the reconstructions of legendary plots in the Middle Ages, the reenactments of famous battles in the 17th and 18th centuries, and spectacular knight tournaments in the 19th and 20th centuries as well. Large-scale reconstructions of the defense of Sevastopol, the Battle of Borodino, the Capture of the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, etc. date from the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1960s, regular reenactments of famous battles from the American Civil War began. Nowadays, many people from different countries all over the world transform gladly themselves into Roman legionnaires, Celtic warriors, Vikings, Saxons, medieval knights, musketeers, court ladies, Japanese samurai, North American Indians, WWI soldiers, etc.

The emergence of the historical reenactments in Bulgaria started with some “medieval battles” at the Markelli fortress and the Pernik stronghold in the 1960s and 70s. Further impetus to such initiatives was given by the filming of large-scale historical movies such as *Khan Asparukh* by Lyudmil Staykov (1981), *Day of the Rulers* by Vladislav Ikonomov (1986) and some others. The first Bulgarian organization, whose activity can be defined as reenactment, is the Bulgarian Society for Indianist Studies “Eagle Circle” (a.k.a. Bulgarian Indian Eagle Circle Society, f. 1990). Later, there were established the National Society “Tradition” (1991), Bulgarian Celtic Society “Oak Gate” (1998), Proto-Bulgarian Survival School “Bagatur” (2000), Medieval Society MODVS VIVENDI (2002), Association for Medieval Reconstructions “Chigot” (2004), Society for Antique Reconstructions “Mos Maiorum Ulpiae Serdicae” (2016) and some other reenacting organizations.

Eras and Cultures Represented

Attempts to systematize historical reconstructions show that the following periods are most popular among reenactors:

- **Antiquity** – with the historical limits of the reconstructions approximately from the 8th century BC. to about the 5th c.
- **Dark Ages** – approximately from the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476) to the end of the 8th century. In the reconstructions of the Dark Ages, the “Viking Times” (8th – 10th centuries) are often included.
- **Middle Ages** – refers primarily to the European Middle Ages with historical frameworks XI – XV centuries.
- **Renaissance** – with historical boundaries XV – mid-XVII, “extended” by some reenactors until the beginning of the XVIII century.
- **Reconstructions of periods and events of New History** (XVIII – XX centuries) – from the Seven Years War (1756 – 1763) to the end of World War II (1945).

The last one includes the American Revolution (1775 – 1784), the Fur Trade Era in the early history of the United States, as well as the activities of those reenactor groups that reconstruct the traditional life of North American Indian tribes. The reenactments of the American Civil War (1861 – 1865) are also from the same period – and they are among the most numerous all over the world.

A significantly smaller number of reenactors have devoted themselves to reconstructing military conflicts from **the modern era** (like Korean War, Vietnam War, etc.).

In recent decades, some new forms of role-playing games have appeared, taking place in a chosen environment following certain rules and using specific clothes, accessories, weapons, etc. Such are LARP (from English *Live Action Role Playing*) and cosplay (from English *Costume Play*). At least for now, “classic” reenactors do not recognize them as historical reconstructions.

Categories of Reenactors

The commitment of the individual reenactor and the particular group to historical reenactments is a major criterion in a categorization of reenactors that was imposed in the 1980s in the USA. It designates those who devote relatively little effort, time and money to the level of authenticity in their recreations, as Farbs (the meaning of the term is only conjectural). The most numerous category is the “Mainstream” reenactors. They make relatively serious effort to look authentic – but mainly in front of the audience. The “Mainstream” reenactors are ready to afford any inauthentic facilities as long as they are not noticed by others. As for the “hardliners” – the so-called “progressive reenactors” – their goal is to immerse themselves as deeply as possible in the reconstructed era and culture. They seek experience through recreation, trying to live for some time as the people of the given period lived. “Progressive” reenactors are not so much interested in what they will show to an audience – they want to “enter” fully and “stay” for longer in the time they recreate. Most European Indianists fall into this category.

Emergence of the “Indian” Organizations

Some of the European “Indian” organizations were founded at the very beginning of the last century, others – in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s. A large number appeared in the last

three decades of the 20th century. I have no information about such groups founded in the 21st c.

Reasonably, the first “Indian” societies arose on Indian territory – in North America. As early as 1843, the “father of American anthropology” Lewis Henry Morgan (1818 – 1881) became the founder of an organization known as the Grand Order of the Iroquois. The direct predecessors of today’s European “Indian” organizations also arose in America at the beginning of the 20th century. They were inspired by writers and publicists such as Ernest Thompson Seton (1860 – 1946) and Julian H. Salomon (1896 – 1987) who believed that knowledge of animals, plants, and birds, learning about living in nature, and traditional Native American values are favorable factors for the healthy development and proper upbringing of adolescents. In order to put these ideas into practice, organizations such as “Woodcraft League” were founded. Its branches are established in Europe as well. Seton and Salomon published books with eloquent titles: *How to Play Indian* (Seton 1903), *How to Make a Real Indian Teepee* (Seton 1903), *The Book of Indian Craft and Indian Lore* (Salomon 1928) and many others.

CHAPTER TWO: “FREEDOM... WINNETOU”

Reasons for European Interest in the American Indians

The chapter examines the reasons why “Indian” organizations are the most numerous namely in Europe. The emergence and development of these groups are related to significant socio-cultural and political phenomena in European history, which I present and analyze.

The first European navigators to reach the New World were amazed by its native inhabitants. These newly “found” people did not resemble any of the nations and tribes known to date – and they were not described in the Bible either. Christopher Columbus admired the kindness and generosity of the natives (Czerny 1972:51), but on his second voyage to the New World (1493) he loaded his ships with knights armed to the teeth and dogs trained to hunt people. This is the beginning of a 500-year-long conflict, one of the bloodiest and most tragic in the human history. Over time, it acquired the symbolic dimension of opposition between the morally declining civilization of the white man and the “children of nature” of the New World who preserved the original nobility of the human race.

“The Noble Savage”

From the very beginning of the colonization of America, the inhabitants of the Old World have been interested in, and often admired the native peoples of the New World. The Italian historian of the 16th century P. M. d’Angheria claimed that the Indians lived “modestly and innocently” but also freely, thus clearly contrasting America and its inhabitants with Europe and the Europeans (d’Angheria 1530). In his *On Cannibals*, the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne stated that the Brazilian Indian ritual of eating the dead enemies was less barbaric and uncivilized than the European practice of burning alive those who disagreed with official religious doctrine (Montagne 1979:302-307). In the 16th and 17th centuries, the overseas “noble savage” with his life in the bosom of Nature was perceived as the antithesis of religious persecution and the severe consequences of incessant wars in Europe. This is also the age of absolutism, in which the freedom of the American lands becomes an almost mythological thirst for a large number of Europeans: philosophers and adventurers, aristocrats and commoners. For them, the “noble savage” is above all a **free** man – natural, obeying only the laws of Nature.

“The Only Good Indian is a Dead Indian”

The romantic ideas of Europeans about the American Indians did not characterize the attitude of the majority of white settlers in America towards its native inhabitants. The struggle for colonial supremacy between European nations and the continuing westward movement of the “Indian frontier” wiped out entire tribes and drove dozens of others from their lands. The territory of the New World became a battlefield, where in the white man’s opinion the Native people were, above all, mortal enemies. The tribes were pushed out, massacred, and their lands were absorbed by the colonizers. That’s how was born the motto attributed to the American general F. Sheridan: “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” (Brown 1989:186 – 187). In the era of the US wars against the last free Indian tribes, the names of Indian heroes such as Tecumseh, Sitting Bull, Geronimo became world famous; there were born legends that excited entire generations.

Catlin and His Exhibitions: American among the Indians, Indians among the Europeans

The Native American troupe of the American traveler and artist George Catlin's (1796 – 1872), his portraits of Indian chiefs and warriors from the tribes he lived among for eight years, displayed among authentic Indian objects, plus his accounts of tribal customs – all that generated a deep, long-lasting European interest in Native Americans. In addition to the relatively detailed tracing of Catlin's activity and its effects on the European public of the time, I also examine the journeys of European explorers in North America, relevant to my topic.

Europeans in the Indian Lands

Such European travelers were the English botanist John Bradbury (1768 – 1823), the German artist and writer Heinrich Baldwin Mölhausen (1825 – 1905), the English collector William Henry Blackmore (1827 – 1878) and others. The North American expedition undertaken in 1832 by the German scientist Alexander F. Maximilian (1782 – 1867), Prince of the Prussian Principality of Neuwied, and the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer (1809 – 1893) had an enormous influence on the popularization of Native Americans in Europe, comparable only to the effect of Catlin's exhibitions and performances. The prince and the artist traveled thousands of kilometers to the western part of what is now the state of Montana, meeting with representatives of more than 20 Indian tribes. *Travels in the Interior of North America from 1832 to 1834*, with text by Maximilian and illustrations by Bodmer, has been published several times in various European languages (Prince of Wied & Bodmer, 2001).

The Wild West Goes East and Reaches Europe

An extremely large role in spreading interest in American Indians in Europe was played by the “Wild West” show of the former American army scout and bison hunter William F. Cody (1846 – 1917), better known as Buffalo Bill. The tours of his impressive traveling circus began in the United States, but few years later the “Wild West” performed in Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium and other European countries. A controversial but also charismatic personality, Cody really managed to breathe new life into a bygone era, to present to the world – and especially in Europe – the legend of the American Wild West in its full glory. And the most interesting and applauded by the

European audience part of this legend, along with Buffalo Bill himself, was presented by the American Indians participating in the show.

American Indians and Europeans in the Twentieth Century

After the end of the Indian wars and the conquest of the American West, European interest in the Native Americans did not disappear, but intensified. Like their predecessors of the Age of Enlightenment, many residents of Europe look to the Old Days life of Native Americans for evidence of the existence of a kind of “Golden Age” in history, of exceptional human qualities of the “Red Race”. With the disappearing of the last unexplored territories from the world map and the hopes of a “New Age” coming, the American Indians were increasingly idealized by European philosophers and poets. Native American sayings, customs and actions are often presented out of their real historical and cultural context, and the Indian traditions are analyzed in the light of the European social, ethical and religious expectations. The opposition of the Native American tribes to the white expansion was seen as kind of a martyr’s feat, as a spiritual resistance by a doomed, but proud and noble race – a true keeper of primordial human virtues, defending its lands and its way of life, its sublime worldview looking so very much like some universal spirituality. The Europeans did not see their own selves as any part of the said white expansion that took away the tribal lands and freedom from the Native Americans. Characteristic of the novels of the popular German writer Karl May, the opposition “Europeans – Americans” as an attitude towards the Indians is observed to this day in the reactions of the Indianists and other inhabitants of Europe.

The Indian Novels

Fiction was among the most powerful factors in popularizing American Indians in Europe – even more than the documentary writings of travelers and explorers. The American author James Fenimore Cooper is considered the progenitor of the “Indian” novels. However, these novels became favorite reading for millions of people in Europe and around the world, mostly thanks to European authors – like the Scotsman T. Mayne Reid (1818 – 1883), the French writer Gustave Emard (1818 – 1883), and to some extent the Italian Emilio Salgari (1862 – 1911). Several German authors, among whom Friedrich Gerstäcker (1816 – 1872) and especially Karl May (1842 – 1912) stand out, greatly influenced European interest in Native Americans. In my work, I analyze May’s books in more detail, because they play an extremely important role not only for European interest in the American Indians, but also for the emergence of some “Indian” groups in Germany, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. Although dynamic and stimulating the reader’s curiosity, the plots of Karl May’s novels are often far from the real history of the American Indians – and the descriptions of tribal traditions in them diverge even more from reality. These books play a dual role – they create a deeply positive attitude towards Native Americans in the European reader, but they also introduce a number of lasting misconceptions into European ideas about the Indian peoples.

To one or another degree, the same applies to the works of almost all the other European writers. In these novels, the adventure plot dominates historical truth, and cultural authenticity is more or less replaced by long-lasting but clichéd notions. They found reflections mainly in mass European culture, but also influenced some “Indian” groups, as well as the books of later writers such as the Pole Stanisław Supłatowicz, who wrote under the pseudonym Sat-Okh in the second half of the 20th century.

***Deutsche Indianertümelei* and the New German Authors of Indian Books**

According to the German researcher Hartmut Lutz, the popularity of the books written by Karl May (whose positive characters are too often of German origin) is the main reason for the huge interest in North American Indians in German popular culture (Lutz 2020:12). In 1985, Lutz introduced the term *Deutsche Indianertümelei* – “German Indian Enthusiasm”, known in the English-speaking world as *Indianthusiasm* – as the name of this phenomenon.

The reasons why Germany became the “most Indian country” in Europe have been the subject of a number of studies (Calloway, Gemünden, Zantop 2002, etc.). The Germans’ striking affinity for American Indians (or for their own perceptions of them) stemmed from German ideas of tribal spirit, longing for freedom, and a sense of “shared destiny” with the Native Americans (Penny 2013:16,23,179). The fact that Germany was not a typical colonial state is also important. The Germans did not directly participate in the process of colonizing indigenous peoples, which is another reason for their tendency to a better attitude to and even a certain idealization of these peoples.

In the second half of the 20th century, “Indian” books by new German writers were published. These works were distinguished by significantly greater historical and cultural credibility. A typical example is *Blue Bird* by Anna Jürgen (1899 – 1989). However, most influential on the deepening of interest in Native Americans in Germany and Europe – and on the creation and development of “Indian” groups – were the volumes of *The Sons of the Great Bear* (Welskopf-Henrich 1963,1964,1969).

***Sons of the Great Bear* and the Ideas of Socialism**

The author of the mentioned trilogy, Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich (1901 – 1979), wins over her audience with the choices her characters make and stand for. From lonely, proud warriors defending their personal dignity, they grew into fighters for a noble, highly humane cause, looking for a way out in hopeless situations – and now not only for themselves, but also for their people, even for the indigenous people of North America in general. These human ideals and virtues acquire a specific coloring in the conditions of socialism imposed in East Germany (DDR) after the WW II. It is no coincidence that the volumes of *The Sons of the Great Bear* win their greatest success exactly in the socialist countries. Readers from DDR, USSR, Bulgaria, Hungary and so on like them, because they are different from the books promoted by communist propaganda. Furthermore, Welskopf-Henrich’s works tread the path of the specific interest in North American Indians trodden by earlier European writers – being in the same time much more authentic than their works.

After the establishment of the Eastern Bloc in Europe, the criticism against colonialism contained in the “Indian novels” is easily combined with anti-imperialist messages. That’s why the authorities in the DDR, Poland, and other socialist countries do not stop the publication of the old books on “Indian theme” and even encourage the creation of new ones. In addition, the image of the free Indian proves to be deeply attractive to the citizens of a totalitarian society rife with restrictions. This leads to a popular literature that has something to offer both readers and official authorities. Welskopf-Henrich’s *Sons of the Great Bear* and Suplatowicz’s *Land of the Salt Rocks* (Sat-Okh 1964,1972) became socialist bestsellers – and a powerful motivation for founding of “Indian” groups in the DDR, Poland and the USSR. Often these groups are given the status of organizations for “solidarity with the Indian people” and “opposition to American imperialism”. This reduces the fundamental suspicion of the socialist government towards associations that are not part of its political system.

Some Native American activists visited DDR and the USSR, where they met with representatives of “Indian” organizations there as well. This gave young Europeans a feeling that they could provide real help in the struggles of Native Americans for civil rights.

The East German model of representing American Indians in literature is popular in socialist countries, but it is even more successful in the field of cinema there. DEFA’s “Indian” films were watched in the Eastern Bloc countries far more than American Westerns and even more than Western European adaptations of Karl May’s novels. Together with the novels, they contributed to the emergence of groups of “Indian followers” both in East Germany itself and in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Bulgaria...

The Indian Films

With the development of cinematography came the first films related to the Native Americans. Some of them are adaptations of the “Indian” novels discussed above. Others present original stories created by writers and directors especially for the big screen. An interesting fact is that the first film of the Western genre, to which many also consider Native American films, was not made in America, but in Europe: this is the short film *Kidnapping by the Indians*, shot in England in 1899. Of course, the numerous US films about the old Indian life produced in the following decades (and up to the present day) had a strong influence on Europeans interested in Native American traditions and history, and especially on members of European “Indian” organizations. However, in this respect – at least for a certain period of time – European cinema is almost as active as American one.

Novels by Karl May were filmed in Germany as early as 1920 and 1936, but these films based on his works, which remain in the history of European “Indian” cinema, were realized in the period 1962 – 1968. They gained great popularity throughout Europe. Photographs from the 1960s show the influence of these film-adaptations on the perceptions of participants in German “Indian” camps. In 1969 – 1970 were shot four German-French-Romanian co-productions with a lower budget, conditionally based on novels by J. F. Cooper. It is noteworthy that both the higher-grossing and more modest European “Indian” films are noticeably different from almost all “classic” American westerns released up to that time. They cast Native Americans as positive characters in the drama of the conquest of America decades before the appearance of *Dances with Wolves* by the US trio Kevin Costner, Michael Blake and Jim Wilson, which won seven Academy Awards in 1991.

This applies especially to the so-called “Red Westerns” of socialist European cinema. Between 1966 and 1983, the East German film studio DEFA produced twelve “Indian” films starring the Yugoslavian actor Gojko Mitic, who became popular thanks to them, in the lead roles – and one without him. In many ways, they are the antithesis of American westerns – and to some extent of films based on Karl May’s novels – because the main characters in them are Indians. The “Red Westerns” are aimed at denouncing the inhumane treatment of the USA and former colonial European countries towards American Indians. Their historical credibility is higher than the one of the films based on Karl May’s novels, although the realistic representation of Native American cultures is only somewhat achieved in them. DEFA productions engage the audience emotionally by vividly emphasizing the greed and injustice of the white conquerors, contrasting them with the stoicism, bravery and nobility of the Indians – victims of the merciless historical conflict in the New World. Their effect on the “Indian” organizations in the (then) socialist countries was very strong. The star of these films, Gojko Mitic, met and talked with young people from East Germany and the USSR, becoming an honorary member of some such groups.

For many of their viewers, these films have another meaning. Although socialist propaganda relies on the political coloring of DEFA “Indian” films, they educate a huge

number of young people not only in love and respect for the Native Americans, but also in love of freedom, in readiness to defend their own understandings and values, inciting them to search for alternatives to the life in a totalitarian society.

The European books and films about Native American traditions and history create some romantic ideas, a thirst for exoticism, but also for freedom (especially in the socialist countries), political suggestions, hopes for the revival of high human values, a desire for adventure, a closer to the Nature way of life, etc. This amalgam has some points of contact with the actual history and authentic cultures of the North American tribes, but largely constructs a “parallel reality” reflecting mostly the dreams, desires and understandings of European audiences.

Analysis of interviews and conversations conducted with various European Indianists regarding novels and films popular in socialist countries about the history and struggles of Native Americans shows that they, among other things, offer an official image of the “allowed West”. These works create an atmosphere of freedom; they transport their readers and viewers away from stifling totalitarian reality. At the same time, it is an ideologically acceptable freedom, because it opposes the American (and West European) imperialism that threatens it. The Indian America is actually the unforbidden America that the socialist citizen can approve of and even imitate without becoming a dissident.

Back to America

European interest in the American Indians is inevitably linked to the North American continent. Already in the 1960s and 1970s, residents of Western European countries interested in Native American customs, beliefs, past and present visited the USA and Canada in search of authentic information. The impressions accumulated in America make many “Euro-Indians” to forget about the novels of Karl May and pay serious attention to the rich Indian collections in museums, and look more closely into the manifestations of still preserved tribal traditions. This had a strongly beneficial effect on the authentic reconstruction of Native American material culture in many “Euro-Indian” groups. Literature and cinematography again stand out among the main factors for a deeper insight into the historical fate of Native Americans and the spiritual dimensions of their traditions – but these are no longer European books and films.

In 1970, the book of the American historian and writer Dee Brown *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Brown 1989 – in Bulgarian) was published. It's a fusion of documentary literature, philosophical ideas and vivid social messages. It quickly became a bestseller in the USA, where it went through several editions. Translated into 17 languages, Brown's work continues to be bought and read to this day. It is highly regarded by many European Indianists and has long since become one of the “Bibles” of the Indianism.

About 40 years before *Bury My Heart* another “Indian Bible” was published in the USA. It emerged from the accounts of a Lakota spiritual leader born and raised in the last free years of Plains Indian life, recorded by the American poet, writer, amateur historian and ethnographer John G. Neihardt (1881 – 1973). Since its first publication in 1932, *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt 1995 – in Bulgarian) has been reprinted many times. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and later into Russian, Lithuanian and Bulgarian. Her admirers are Carl Gustav Jung, the philosopher Frithjof Schuon and other famous Europeans. Many members of the “Indian” organizations in Germany, France, Great Britain, Bulgaria, Russia, etc. search in the messages of the Black Elk (1863 – 1950) not only authentic information about the history and old traditional life of Lakota people, but also spiritual guidance for themselves. That is why

the book about the life of the Black Elk is perceived by most “followers of the American Indians” in Europe as a revelation.

The New Age of Shamanism and Anti-Western

In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, interest in the Native American religions, the spiritual messages of tribal cultures, Indian tribal shamans, healers, and visionaries grew in the United States and Western Europe. These new directions are related to the struggles for racial equality in the USA, South Africa and elsewhere in the world, anti-war protests, the final collapse of the colonial system, Hippie generation and the New Age movement. After the end of the socialist period, the people of the former Eastern Bloc have access to more books, films and in general to wider and deeper information. The picture becomes more complicated, including in the “Indian” societies. Spiritual quests, often combined with eco-attitudes, interest in alternative medicine, denial of the aggressive atheism of communist ideology, and often also of the official religion of the given country (various denominations of Christianity) are added to the generally straightforward messages of the previous period. Calls for a return to Nature, to “Mother Earth” and to “tribal spirit” point to the familiar and from previous eras alternative for disillusioned Europeans in the image of the “noble savage”. This time he is above all a shaman, sage and mystic, knowing the secrets of the natural world - a relative of rocks and trees, talking with eagles, dancing with wolves.

Biographies of Native American “holy men” were also published in the earlier decades of the 20th century, but from the 1960s and especially from the 1980s onwards they became much sought-after reading. The interest in the old free life of the “Buffalo Days” Indians remains the leading one, but plus the fascination of the wisdom shared by modern Native American traditionalists, healers and spiritual mentors in more and more new books on the subject. These works are American – the novels written by Karl May and Liselotte Welskopf-Henrich cannot serve the spiritual direction toward which a large part of European Indianists is already oriented. The films that are the screen equivalent (one way or another) of this literature are also American – such as the work of the Canadian director George McCowan *Shadow of the Hawk* (1976) or the miniseries *Dreamkeeper* (2003) by Steve Barron and John Fusco.

At the very beginning of the 1970s, two Anti-Westerns were released in the USA and received a wide international response. Their titles were *Soldier Blue* by Ralph Nelson and *Little Big Man* by Arthur Penn. While the former shocked with its naturalistic pictures of violence, Penn’s Anti-Western showed the “Wild West legends” with undisguised sarcasm. In it, Native Americans are the last positive characters – victims of immoral US policies, but exalted in their wisdom based on tribal life and everyday connection with Nature. Both films quickly gained popularity on the Old Continent, too, becoming favorites of a large number of European Indianists. Others such films include Abraham Polonsky’s *Tell Them Willy Boy Is Here* (1969) and Robert Altman’s *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976). This line was revived in the 1990s with the acclaimed *Dances with Wolves* (1990), followed by *Black Robe* (1991), *Thunderheart* (1992), and others. These films have had a significant impact on the world (including European) audiences’ perceptions of Native Americans. Their influence is particularly strong on the members of the “Indian” organizations in Great Britain, Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

David Attenborough’s 1999 film *Grey Owl* did not gain wide popularity worldwide, but it was liked by many members of “Indian” organizations in various European countries. The main reason for this is the story of its main character.

“White Indians”

Grey Owl is the Native American name of the Englishman Archibald S. Belaney (1888 – 1938). For most of his life he lived among the indigenous people of Canada, where he learned and practiced their traditional woodland life skills. He declares himself everywhere that he is a “half-breed” whose mother is an American Indian.

Under the influence of his Native American wife Anahareo, Grey Owl gradually becomes a staunch environmentalist. The British-educated “White Indian” wrote several books and numerous articles. Active in North America and in its fatherland England, Grey Owl plays an important role in the protection of the Canadian nature. His work has a strong impact on a number of European Indianists and entire “Indian” organizations.

For the rest of his life, Belaney claimed to be of Native American descent. That was finally disproved (mainly after his death), but the truth of his European ancestry did not diminish the posthumous glory of the Englishman who became an American Indian by his own choice.

“White Indians” like Grey Owl are Europeans with a specific life (and work) who play a significant role in popularizing Native Americans in Europe. One way or another, all of them identify themselves as representatives of particular North American Indian tribes. Without exception, they are active promoters of traditional Native American values and quite often – authors of books about the Native American worldview, “primitive” (but important) skills, living in harmony with nature, etc. Most of them build a legend about their Native American origin, changing or completely falsifying their biographies for this purpose. Some even publish books with fictional accounts of their “Indian” childhood and/or youth among an Indian tribe.

The Pole Stanisław Supłatowicz (1920 – 2003), better known by his “Indian” name Sat-Okh, was a typical “white Indian”. He had an active role not only in popularizing the Native American theme in Europe, but also in creating some of the first “Indian” groups in his native Poland. Today a “white Indian” could be called Adolf Gutöhrlein, because his mother was a Hungarian and his father – a Swiss, but Adolf himself lives for more than 50 years among the Blackfeet Indians in Canada. He has been ceremonially adopted by some of the Blackfeet Elders and was given ceremonially a Blackfeet name – Hungry Wolf. However – unlike Grey Owl and Sat-Ok – Adolf Hungry Wolf never claimed any Native American ancestry.

Although it has long been clear that they fabricated their “Indian origin”, Grey Owl and Sat-Okh still have loyal fans among a large number of “Euro-Indians” from Bulgaria, Russia, Poland. Some of these people simply do not want to accept the well-known facts about the real origin of Belaney and Supłatowicz, continuing to believe in their Native American ancestry. On the other hand, the “unmasking” of Grey Owl and Sat-Okh gives a basis of a new cult: although born Europeans, these two men have become **“Indians” by choice**. That makes them even closer, more comprehensible to the Indianists from European countries.

Although rare, it does happen today that some European Indianists are ceremonially adopted by Native American families. That does not always mean that the Europeans in question live like “white Indians”. However, for many “Euro-Indians” such adoption is not only a great honor, but also a kind of “guarantee of authenticity”.

Captives and Relatives

As definition, “white Indians” does not only include Europeans posing as people of Native American descent and/or leading a lifestyle reminiscent of that of the North American tribes. This is also a historical term. It refers to white people of the 17th, 18th and 19th

centuries who were captured by the American Indians or – in rarer cases – went of their own free will to live among the tribes. Of course, many of the captives were killed, but some were adopted into Native American families in place of a dead son, brother, or deceased sister, daughter. Obviously, the different origin of the adoptees did not bother the adopters. From the so-called “captive narratives” we learn that after a special ceremony the “white Indian” was given the name of the deceased whose place he/she occupied. From then on, he or she was perceived as a full member of the family and could rely on the clan’s care and the protection of the tribe. When opportunities arose later for those people to return to English or American society, the “white Indians” almost without exception refused to do so.

Many European Indianists are fascinated by the stories of Euro-Americans captured by various tribes, adopted by them and becoming “white Indians”. They see them as a historical proof that it is possible to become **a true Indian**, even if you weren’t born such. The Indianists also see these stories as evidence that skin color did not matter to the Old Time Indians. This contrasts sharply with the negative reactions of some contemporary Native Americans to the European “Indian” organizations.

The Return of the Tribes

“Being Indian is not a matter of blood-percentage, but a Path in life” – said the Native American traditionalist from the Lakota people Archie Lame Deer in a conversation with European Indianists in Germany (1983). For many of them, these words have become a motto. They enthusiastically embrace other ideas that Lame Deer has shared with them – for example, that the future of humanity belongs to the tribal organizations. These ideas remind of the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli’s theories of Neo-tribalism, predicting a breakdown of modern institutions and culture that will lead to a nostalgic search for new societal directions in the organizational principles of the distant past (Maffesoli 1996). More or less, they are supported by other social and political researchers, too – although scholars like the American archaeologist Lawrence Keeley warn that the “noble savage” and “peaceful tribes” are myths created by the seeking alternatives European civilization (Keeley 1996). During his encounters with the German Indianists, Lame Deer’s ideas about the “tribes of the future” found a fertile ground. Similar “tribal” views are also professed among Slovak, Ukrainian and Russian Indianists – often pointing out that centuries ago the ancestors of the respective European peoples lived like the historical Native Americans.

The parallels between European ancestors and Native Americans are an interesting example of idealizing one’s own past by looking into the Native American past. At first glance, these parallels are based on the understanding that the present day of “primitive” peoples is the past of “civilized” ones – like elements of 19th century evolutionism in the spirit of Edward Burnett Tyler (1832 – 1917). The main reason for these parallels, however, is rooted in the persistent search the European Indianists for a connection, a reason that could answer the question, “Why did I choose exactly the Native Americans?”

CHAPTER THREE: WOODCRAFT, BUFFALO DAYS AND POW-WOW

A Brief History of “Indian” Organizations in Europe

The earliest documented European groups that may be considered the forerunners of the contemporary “Indian” organizations on this continent originated in Germany. At the very end of the 19th century, a group of young Germans appeared at the annual Taucha fair dressed as American Indians (Taylor 1988:567). The first German Indianist club was founded in 1902

in Stuttgart. Such groups were also established in Frankfurt, Dresden and Munich. Their members were inspired by the tours of the Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows in Germany and by the performances of the legendary Sarrasani Circus, which featured the Native American dance troupe Two-Two (Turski 1994:19). These Indianist societies disbanded after a few years, but in 1928 a new group called "Manitou" appeared in the Dresden suburb of Radebeul, where the home of the famous writer of "Indian" novels Karl May is situated. By the way, later May's home has been converted into one of the first North American Indian museums in Europe. "Manitou" can be considered the oldest European "Indian" group. Rebuilt after WW II, it still exists today under the name "Old Manitou."

The emergence of the first "Indian" organizations in the Czech Republic was also influenced by the tours of Buffalo Bill's show in Prague, but also by the ideas of Ernest Thompson Seton and his Woodcraft League. These ideas were taken up by the young Czech teacher Miloš Seifert, who in 1913 organized the first "Indian" camp in the country with tipi tents, appropriate clothing and corresponding activities. In the imagination of many young Czechs, the American Indians were kind of role-models – freedom-loving, physically and mentally strong, living in harmony with the laws of nature. This popularity of Native Americans in the Czech cultural environment is also connected with the great interest in the novels of J. Fenimore Cooper there. Translated into Czech language as early as the 1850s, they present the Indians from the Mohican and Delaware tribes as noble heroes. It was among these tribes in the 18th century that the so-called Moravian Brethren preached – Czech and German Protestant missionaries who emigrated to North America after the 30 Years War in Europe. The Czech Kingdom was annexed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and remained under the rule of the Habsburgs until the end of the WW I. For many Czechs, the Moravian Brothers were a historical connection to the North American tribes, and because of the political situation in their homeland, the Czechs easily likened themselves to the Delawares and the other fighting for their lands Native Americans (Jehlicka 2008:112-130).

The Czech branch of the "Woodcraft League", founded by Ernest Thompson-Seton, still exists today. During the 1920s and 1930s in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (which became one state, Czechoslovakia, in 1918), youth groups that were inspired by the League, but existed independently of it, spent some time in nature, pitching tipis and dressing in Native American clothes made by themselves. These were the first "classical" Indianist organizations in Czechoslovakia.

The first group in Hungary, whose members were interested in the traditions of North American Indians and reconstructed them in their own ways, was founded in 1931 by Erwin Baktay (1890 – 1963). He was a writer, artist, orientalist and traveler. On one of his trips to Canada, he met Grey Owl (the Englishman Archibald Belaney, that time still believed to be of Native American origin). After returning to his homeland, Baktay translated into Hungarian and published three books written by the "Indian" author. He also formed a group of young people with whom he shared his knowledge and enthusiasm about Native American traditions and history. The group was quite closed – joining it was only possible with an "insider" referral. Its members camped on an island in the Danube River, which location they tried to keep secret. After some time, Baktay left that Indianist group in order to devote himself to his Orientalist research. Nevertheless, the organization he created existed until the end of the 20th century.

The history of these earliest "Indian" organizations in three of the European countries provides insight into the reasons that led to the emergence of other such groups on the continent. Before the WW II, such were established in Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Great Britain (Taylor 1988: 562-567). The war stopped their activities everywhere. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, they recovered and new "Indian" groups appeared – mainly in Germany, France and the Netherlands.

In the countries that formed the socialist bloc after 1945, the “Indian” organizations were viewed with some suspicion by the official authorities as they were not part of the socialist political system. Gradually, their activity began to be interpreted as an expression of solidarity with the Native American peoples – victims of the American imperialism. This is the time when socialist literary and film works were created on the subject – such as the Welskopf-Henrich novels and the “Red Westerns” of DEFA. They try to impose political accents in the interest of young East Germans, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Russians, etc. towards the North American Indians, but played a significant role in the spread of this interest.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, the European Indianism entered its heyday. New groups are being founded – in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania and elsewhere. European “Indian” groups are more numerous than ever. In Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, hundreds, sometimes thousands of “Euro-Indians” gathered in international camps. The number of Indianists in other European countries is also significant. The accumulated experience makes the “Indian” activities more diverse and interesting, creates a rich fund of knowledge and skills and attracts new enthusiasts. The great changes during the period are also extremely important for the mentioned flourishing – from the “perestroyka” line taken in the USSR under the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev, through the movements for democracy in a number of countries, to the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in the former socialist bloc in Europe. These political, economic and cultural transformations led to different, more receptive public attitudes towards unusual to most Europeans (especially citizens of former socialist countries) activities such as Indianism. In addition, new, much bigger opportunities for obtaining information and materials needed by Indianists emerged – especially in the former socialist countries. Difficulties in international communication, previously imposed by political systems, disappeared, and the possibilities to travel between European countries and even to North America increased.

All that facilitated the practice of Indianism in European countries and popularized the activities of the “Indian” groups themselves much more widely. International relations between organizations also expanded. Gradually, a kind of unification of the theory and practice of Indianism in Europe came about, although some groups retained their distinctly specific appearance.

Directions and Dimensions of the Interest in American Indians

The American explorer of the Great Plains tribes, Michael Terry, widely known by his Indian name Bad Hand, has reached to a curious classification of the phases of the interest in the Native Americans among white Americans. Below, I offer some quotes from that classification, because it largely corresponds to my observations of the emergence and development of interest in Native American traditions and history among representatives of various European nations. (All Terry’s quotes are from personal correspondence with him – April 2017).

- **Phase I:** The Rapture stage – it started “...when you first experience serious interest and are struck by the beauty, inspiration, and deep sense of freedom that emanates from the old Indian way of life, tribal cultures, and religion. Many remain in this phase forever. They read New Age books that are not based on serious historical studies of the Native American material and spiritual cultures. People of this group react with indignation when they learn some real facts about the Indians that do not correspond to their romantic ideas

– and are often unwilling to accept them, even in the presence of irrefutable evidence.“

- **Phase II:** “Stage of Grief and Indignation” - the emphasis is on the tragic fate of Native Americans: the seizure of tribal territories, the killing of a huge number of Indians and the destruction of their traditional way of life by the white conquerors, the humiliating system of human reservations, attempts at assimilation, etc. „This stage is filled with horror, disgust and hatred. People read... accounts of massacres – but only of those committed by whites upon Indians; those about Indians slaughtering whites or Indians slaughtering other Indians are ignored. Many never leave this phase and turn their interest into an accumulation of bitterness and regret – often a form of self-pity, because they identify with the unjustly treated Indians.”
- **Phase III:** “Stage of Questions and Inquiry” – it is entered when a person feels a “...need to learn more to understand how and why such bad things happened to American Indians.” The search for these answers initiates in-depth research, providing real information: “The more you study, the more you realize that **the first phase** is far from reality, and you start accumulating evidence that Indians also killed, disfigured, scalped, raped – and not just white people, but other Indians as well.”

According to Terry’s observations, the third phase "overcomes" some people and they completely lose interest in the Native American subject. However, if this does not happen and the thirst for knowledge about traditional tribal cultures does not wane, one reaches...

- **Phase IV:** “Things as they are” – “After a serious amount of research, you come to the conclusion that you don't need to condemn or glorify the Indians, as well as other people of their time – and you begin to accept history as it was. You find yourself interested in the real Indians of the old days and like them as they were.”

As I mentioned, many Europeans with interest in, respect to, and affection for the North American Indians go through similar phases most often – including the members of the “Indian” groups I study. Of course, Michael Terry’s system isn’t perfect; sometimes it is difficult to judge which phase a person or group is in. However, it sheds light on the most characteristic development of interest in the Native American traditions and history (and also in the contemporary American Indians) among the majority of white Americans and Europeans.

My intensive contacts with representatives of various “Indian” organizations in Europe have convinced me that they could be divided into:

- scouting-type “nature schools” combining learning of Native American life skills with educational goals;
- organizations with predominantly “gaming” goals of their functioning;
- organizations emphasizing American Indian traditional material culture and history;

- organizations emphasizing traditional and newer American Indian spiritual teachings;
- organizations with a political focus.

Often these groups combine several of the characteristics listed above or flow from one type to another.

My research is mainly devoted to those “Indian” organizations in Europe that are an aspect of the phenomenon of cultural-historical reconstructions; I provisionally call them “classical” and “typically Indian.” Although they are not devoid of specificities related to the respective country and people from which they originated, they demonstrate more similarities than differences among themselves.

Communication between groups is one of the main ways of acquiring knowledge and skills related to their favorite topic. The interests and values of most “Euro-Indians” create specific codes that facilitate their communication and more or less align their lines of activity. The presence of this cultural capital builds trust and a sense of closeness between the members of these organizations.

Relations are even more friendly within the particular “Indian” group. This is also due to a feeling of “tribalism” among the members of the respective organizations. The common rituals and solidarity between people build a stable group and personal identification. Very close and even permanent friendships are established. Some acquaintances turn into love and family relationships – quite many “Euro-Indians” find marriage partners within their “Indian” group.

Membership, Organization and Hierarchy in European “Indian” Groups

Motivation for joining a European Indianist group is most often related to childhood and adolescent admiration, sparked by the mostly romantic image of Old Time Native Americans and their idealized traditional life-style portrayed in adventure books and movies. In most cases, it gradually developed into a passion for a real, in-depth knowledge of the history and traditions of North American Indian tribes, and later into a desire to correct the mistakes in the average European's perception of Indians. Particularly important is the need to build a social environment of like-minded people.

In most “Indian” organizations, membership is a matter of desire. If a person has an interest in the American Indians and is willing to participate in the activities of the particular group, this is enough for his or her acceptance into it. A number of Indianists share their views on a “necessary minimum” that a newcomer must meet. It includes an acceptance and appreciation of Native American spiritual traditions and historic tribal cultures, a sincere respect for contemporary Native Americans, and an active search for new knowledge that “verifies” the given Indianist’s personal ideas about Native Americans.

Indianists from Bulgaria, Lithuania and other European countries remember some “Elders” from their groups who judged how serious and deep the “Indian interests” of candidate members were. Over time, this trend has faded, although there are still “Euro-Indians” who insist that their organizations not admit people who do not have a serious, deep, and abiding interest in Native American traditions and history. Some of them cite problems caused in the past by the uncritical acceptance of anyone who shows just some sympathy for the subject of Native Americans.

Referral from a Friend

Often the recommendation of one or more established members of the “Indian” group is very important in the acceptance of the candidate. The one who gives it assumes responsibility for the new member’s conduct. A “kinship” relationship (“Indian style”) is established between the recommender and the recommended: “older and younger brother”, “older and younger sister”, etc.

With Hungarian “Indian followers”, a recommendation from an established member for the candidate is more than desirable. Their organization is “closed to outsiders” (as they told me) so you can’t fall into it by accident. Acceptance of new members – at least in the past – has depended most on acquaintances, personal contacts, even family ties. Indianists from Hungary recall first being brought to camp by their fathers, older brothers, or other relatives. Some proudly share that they are second or even third generation Hungarian “Indians”.

The “Indian” group that camped in Bakony mountain range is today the most numerous in Hungary. The so-called “war games” are among its main characteristics. In Bakony, the “representatives” of different “tribes” camp separately or according to historical tribal alliances. The “warriors” of one camp attack that of the “enemies” at every opportunity – especially when the “attacks” are most unexpected. There is a clear regulation of the “battles” fought with rubber-tipped spears and arrows – it specifies the symbolism of “feats”, “victories” and “defeats”, but does not include any agreements about when and how the “attacks” would take place. Future members must be well versed in the organization’s rules (mostly related to the aforementioned “war games”); they must have decided which Bakony “tribe” they would join. According to their decision, they must have provided at least basic garments and accessories characteristic of the respective tribe’s traditional culture. New members are introduced to the “tribe” by a close friend or relative who undertakes the goal to mentor and train them for the first year after their admission. As a general rule, during this first year, the new member is not allowed to participate in “tribal battles”.

Acceptance of girls and women in Hungarian groups is more informal, facilitated. They are almost always partners, sisters or daughters of some of the “warriors”.

A deep interest in North American Indians is a necessary condition for acceptance into the given group of the German Indians, too. The candidate must have read at least the more popular but still culturally and historically authentic books on the native American theme. Some time ago in many German organizations there was a probationary period for candidate members: from six months to one year. However, this is not practiced recently.

The Many Approaches to Indianism

There is no official membership in the largest Polish organization “Movement of Polish Friends of American Indians”. Anyone who is interested in, respects, and likes the indigenous peoples of North, Central and South America and their traditional cultures is welcome. Every summer there are gatherings of the Movement with Native American songs, dances, games and contests, lectures, workshops and other activities.

The Movement is led by a legally registered “Society of Polish Friends of American Indians”. Its members pay membership fees, organize all events and publish a quarterly newsletter. Criteria for membership in the Society include a serious attitude towards its work, the ability to communicate and a thorough knowledge of American Indian history and traditions. All members have Native American clothing and accessories.

Knowledge of Native American cultures and history is a decisive criterion for membership in “Bronisław Malinowski Polish Ethnological Society” – an official non-governmental organization with an annual membership fee and a more academic focus. Its

members are scientists, university professors, graduate students or doctoral students, teachers, many of whom are also members of the Movement.

Some Polish groups have broken away from the Movement to devote themselves to their interest in a specific period of history and the traditional culture of a particular Native American people. They make tribal clothing, accessories and tools from the 19th century, which they use in their camps. The criteria for authenticity are strict, modern items and materials characteristic of the time after 1890 are not used. The camps themselves are organized in remote natural areas; they are closed to outside visitors. These are the “traditionalists” among the Polish “Indians” – groups such as “Takini”, “Yellow Dogs”, etc. All of them devoted themselves to studying and reconstructing the traditional life of the tribes of the Great Plains of North America.

In recent years, the Polish group “Monongahela 1755” has also been very active. Its purpose is to promote, through various events, the traditional life of the Native American tribes of the Northeast Woodland region and the Great Lakes area of North America. In its activity, this “Woodland Indian” group is also aimed at working with the public, exhibitions and seminars (including with children and youth), while the other cited “traditional” groups (like “Takini” and “Yellow Dogs”) are mainly interested in achieving greater cultural-historical authenticity during the time of their camps in nature, closed to outside visitors. “Monongahela 1755” also has high standards for the authenticity of its members’ clothing and accessories.

Those Polish Indians, who have focused their efforts on organizing and participating in Indian festivals in powwow style, are also making more and more serious demands. The festivals themselves increasingly resemble those held by the American Indians in the USA and Canada. Excellent knowledge and mastery of different dance styles for men and women, observance of the rules in making dance costumes and accessories, authentic performance of songs – these are some of the mandatory conditions for participants in the annual powwows in Uniejów, Katowice and other places in Poland.

There is also another type of organization in this same country called simply “Indian Village”. They organize “Indian camps” for children and teenagers, and some of them also for adults, where horseback riding and “real canoeing” are offered, together with feather decorations, face painting and dancing around the camp-fire, plus archery and lasso throwing competitions. The very nature of the “Indian Village” initiative, where visitors are customers, enroll in pre-set programs, and pay to experience some “Native American adventures” and learn “Native American skills”, makes it inevitable to accumulate a number of stereotypes in the presentation of Native American traditions and history.

Similar to the Polish “Indian Village” in terms of activity is a group from Hungary, which often camps in the large Nomadia Park near the town of Ajka. Its members also pay special attention to youth and children who want to learn more about Old Time North American tribes and learn “Indian skills”. Some of the group-members have camped in the mountains of Bakony, but are now developing their activities in other directions. However, they have maintained their exactingness towards the historical authenticity of their Indian clothing, decorations and tools. The “Native American dress code” for guests – understandably – is reduced to separate, rather symbolic accessories.

In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, “Indian” groups in the UK also ran tipi camps in natural areas. Their members also participated in the so-called “rendezvous” where “trappers”, “mountain-men” and other fans of the Old American West met, had fun, competed, and traded. All strove to be as authentic as possible in appearance, accessories, weapons, behavior and skills. Lectures and seminars were organized for new members, also for children and adolescents, and sometimes for an adult audience (outside of the group members). In recent decades, however, all this activity died out; it was completely displaced by the powwow festivals.

Welcome to the Powwow

Powwow festivals with performances of Native American songs and dances have been held in Britain since the 1970s, but for a long time they were few and comparatively rare. In the 1980s and 1990s, many English Indianists traveled to the United States and Canada, where they attended powwows and even had opportunities to learn songs and dances there, as well as the rules of conducting these festivals. This new wave of information significantly changed the face of “Indian” activities in Britain. Gradually, the powwow became a main activity for almost all the English groups. The search for historical authenticity of Native American dress and lifestyle is being replaced by many UK Indianists by the goal to learn about and observe the rules of modern Native American festivals. Today, there are a dozen singing and dancing groups and at least three powwow committees that help organize the festivals and act as judges at the competition performances. People from the judicial commissions often initiate events in support of Native American protests against the pipeline in North Dakota, USA, or gatherings that explain the goals of the Missing and Murdered Native American Women (MMIW) movement.

Powwow festivals are becoming more and more popular not only in the UK, but in other countries of Europe as well. Their annual program in Great Britain and Poland increasingly resembles that of the US and Canadian provinces. One can visit such festivals also in the German cities of Taucha and Frankfurt, Czech town of Kladno, Dutch city of Rotterdam, Danish capital Copenhagen, etc.

Modern powwows are held in a special arena or hall, costumes and regalia are unified in many ways, dances and songs are categorized. My English respondents say that these powwow-oriented Indianists have “bridged the temporal gap” between today’s “Euro-Indian” and the object of his interests, the Old Time North American Indians. In fact, the participants in the European powwows cannot be seen as historical reenactors. The requirements for historical credibility to the European Indianists practically disappear; they have been replaced by conditions for knowing the rules by which the contemporary Native American cultural phenomenon (powwow) operates.

However, most “Euro-Indians” prefer to reconstruct the historical tribal cultures of North America from the 18th – 19th century. Some of them also participate in powwows, but they say that they are most inspired by the historical Indian life. Others see the powwow as a product of modern pan-Indianism that is outside their particular interests. Some of the “Old School” of English Indianists are disillusioned with the state of things today – according to their view, the mentioned festivals have become tourist attractions.

Most Active are Most Authoritative

The disillusioned “Old School” Indianists in England are men of great experience, the founders and long-time leaders of “Indian” groups in this country. They’re inspirers and guides, they’re chiefs.

There are no official chiefs among the Lithuanian Indianists. However, specific people make the important decisions, choose a place to camp, prepare a program of activities during the camp, etc. They are usually among the oldest members of the group, but what makes them the most authoritative is the fact that they are the most active in it.

The “Elders” in the Bulgarian “Indian” society are also people who have proven that their interest in the Native Americans is deep, serious and lasting. Over the years they have demonstrated thoroughness and even dedication to the “Indian” subject. These characteristics, combined with their activity in the group, also determine their high place in its hierarchy.

The term “hierarchy” evokes different reactions among the members of the “Indian” society in Bulgaria. Most of them do not accept that a formally specified hierarchy exists in the “Eagle Circle”. The very idea of hierarchy is opposed by the friendship, solidarity and mutual aid among the members of the organization who believe that their close, respectful, fair relations actually ensure its functioning. According to the official statutes of the “Eagle Circle” the organization is led by a chairman and a board (that is a “Council of Elders”). However, many Bulgarian Indianists emphasize that these positions are given on merit and only if the elected agree to occupy them, without a specific mandate. Important decisions are taken by the general assembly of the Society (something like a “Tribal Council”). According to the interviewees, the hierarchy in their organization is more like relationships in a large family. It is often defined as “tribal”, as a kind of “kinship”.

Some of the Bulgarian “Indians” though see some negative aspects in this type of hierarchy. Discussions between people are too long, decisions are made slowly. Some of the respondents shared that their idealistic understandings in their younger years caused them to miss the period when every organization should adopt its own clear rules and concrete procedures. They explain that certain “Indian” groups in Europe function well precisely because they have set “rules and procedures”, which their members follow. These Bulgarian Indianists underline that this was also the case with the historical Native American tribes in North America.

Still, for most Indianists, the term “hierarchy” clearly contradicts the ideas of freedom and equality that not only symbolized in their mindset the historical American Indians, but were also among the core values of the European “Indian” groups. They pride themselves on making important decisions democratically, with broad discussion and giving every member a chance to express their opinion.

The division between the participants in the studied groups is mainly based on experience. However, there is another criterion that often dominates even over experience - and that is the individual’s activity in “Indian” activities, in tasks, in the life of the group. In short, **most active are most authoritative**.

We observe a similar combination between building hierarchies and avoiding associations with bureaucratic structures in the Russian case, where the rejection of formal categorizations is, as it were, more extreme. The analysis of what was shared by the Russian Indianists shows that the individualism characteristic of their environment is perceived as a kind of reflection of the cult of personal dignity among the historical Native Americans.

In German organizations, formal rules and hierarchical structures are not perceived as contradicting the free Indian spirit. German respondents say that while the group is small and all its members know each other well, decisions are made easily and implemented enthusiastically. However, when the group grows, a clearly formulated and respected hierarchy is a sure guarantee of its successful functioning.

Evidently, all European Indianists sought a compromise between the spirit of freedom that had driven them to group membership on one hand, and the need for ground laws for cooperative activity on the other. A good solution is found in the wording “game” – insofar as the game implies both freedom and general rules.

According to many Hungarians, the hierarchy in their Bakony camps is as close as possible to that of the Old Days North American tribes. The war games between the “tribes” are particularly important for the activity of the organization as a whole, as well as for the relations between its members. The main decisions in the group are made by a Council of Chiefs, in which each “tribe” is represented by its own “chief”. If the Council of Chiefs cannot reach a unanimous opinion, then the opinion of the Council of Elders is sought, consisting of four respected and experienced men elected every four years by the Council of Chiefs.

Hungarian Indianists emphasize that “battles”, shared values, and experiences build bonds between them that “have no parallels in modern urban life”.

Belgian “Indian followers” also shared that they only conformed to this hierarchy, which was based on Old Times Indian social and spiritual rules – but would not tolerate a hierarchy of the military, business, or of any similar type.

The hierarchy in the camps of these groups in Poland, which reconstruct aspects of traditional tribal life, is also based on the organization in the historical villages of the Great Plains Indians. According to my Polish respondents, this is part of the experience of the past, but at the same time it is also a use of a proven working social system based above all on unity and mutual aid.

“...in a Spirit of Support, Friendship and Empathy”

We could accept **solidarity** for a keyword on relations in “Indian” organizations in Europe. Indianists from various groups point to numerous examples of support and mutual aid among themselves, not only during the camps and other “Indian” events, but also in their daily lives as modern Europeans. They argue that it is these relationships that are the primary bond between people in an Indian organization – and these relationships make a membership in it something unique. According to the “Indian followers” from Bulgaria, Hungary, Russia and other countries, the historical tribal communities have survived for so long thanks to mutual support and empathy – and because of their increasing absence in modern human society, it is on the decline. Many Russian, Bulgarian, German, Slovak and Latvian Indianists are convinced that however important the hierarchy in their organizations is, it should not overshadow the friendly relations and solidarity between the members, because they are the main, the most essential thing. They stress that if good organization is something that can be learned, the loss of enthusiasm cannot be compensated for by anything.

Despite all, it is obvious that the organizations studied could not carry out their activities without a corresponding hierarchy. However, it has specific dimensions – because it is about voluntary organizations, and also because of the socio-cultural influences of the topic, which unites people in these organizations and gives them specific characteristics.

The analysis of what was shared by various members of European “Indian” organizations shows that for the successful construction and functioning of relations within the group, they mainly trust the Native American traditions, which they recreate, and the friendship between themselves. “Tribal consciousness” and “kinship in spirit” are among those characteristics of Indianism that make “Indian” groups a specific manifestation of the phenomenon of cultural-historical reconstructions. Many Indianists point to “tribal” relations as one of the most important achievements of their organizations. As mentioned, the manifestations of these “tribal” relations often have an international character.

The War in Ukraine and the De-Indianization

The numerous examples of “kinship” relations between Indians – especially when they are of different nationalities – can lead to idealized generalizations about the existence of an informal international “Indian” community in Europe with its own manners based on common spiritual and social codes. The idea is attractive and its specific manifestations are indeed frequent and varied. But an unexpected and cruel test – the war that began on February 24, 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine – showed, if not its failure, then at least its easy vulnerability.

For many years, representatives of various nations whose republics made up the USSR communicated freely within its borders. This was also true of the Indianists in the vast federal

state. Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Russians often organized joint “Indian” camps, which were also attended by Belarusians, Latvians, Estonians. After the collapse of the USSR, communication between Indianists from the former Soviet republics faced a number of difficulties, but visits and general events did not completely die out.

The start of the war in Ukraine drastically changed all that. Neither the long-standing friendships, nor the many common camps and activities managed to preserve the “kinship in spirit” between the majority of Indianists on the warring sides – and not only between them.

A large number of Russian “Indians” prefer to remain neutral, simply avoiding any topics related to the war. Others express their hope that “it will all be over soon” and “things will return to normal” without going into specifics. There are also those who disagree with what is happening, but cannot oppose it openly. The Russian Indianist Facebook group *Pow Wow Russia* (which recently changed its status to “closed”) strictly adheres to an official decision not to publish any materials or comments about the war in Ukraine, but only those related to the Native American theme. Few Russian Indianists openly disagree with the invasion of Ukraine and Vladimir Putin’s policies. They are generally isolated from the rest. The group, expressing full support for Putin’s policy and a militant anti-Ukrainian position, also does not find an official expression on the field of *Pow Wow Russia*. These Russian Indianists state their positions primarily through their personal Facebook profiles, as well as at any other opportunity. Most of them content themselves with general calls to support the Russian army and the policy of “denazification” of Ukraine. Only a few are really aggressive: hurling threats at Ukrainians, extolling Russian imperial might in the past, raising revanchist slogans and calling opponents of the war “brain-washed idiots” and “traitors”.

Messages from Ukrainian Indians in *Pow Wow Russia* (where Ukrainians had access before the war as well) were deleted soon after appearing there. Most of them were aggressive and accusative ones.

Because of my clearly stated anti-war position, some Russian Indianists cut off all communication with me. Individual Ukrainian respondents also stopped writing to me, although for other reasons. Those Ukrainians with whom I have continued to communicate often express a bitter disappointment with their former Russian “relatives”, some of whom have written to them things like “You will all die – and you fully deserve your fate”. My respondent from Kharkiv shared his conviction that his Native American altar had protected his home and loved ones during the intense Russian shelling of the city. Another accuses the Russian troops who invaded his country of violating normality, the natural order of life. A third is sharper in his attacks on the Russians, with his main accusations against the Russian “Indians” who betrayed their common dreams, their “kinship in spirit”, and even the very idea of Indianism.

The war in Ukraine intervened in the relations between the Indianists from other countries, too – first of all, those whose countries were part of the former USSR. Most of them took openly anti-Russian positions. Some tried to appeal to all Indianists – Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, etc. – to stay friends, to remain “relatives-in-spirit”, not to be influenced by the politics of their countries, not to allow hatred to divide them. This position did not find much support.

Two Slovak Indians expressed a negative attitude towards Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, but their position was not supported by the other “Euro-Indians” from the former Eastern Bloc. In general, among the European followers of the Indians, the decision not to discuss political topics prevails. The war in Ukraine brought some disagreements in the Bulgarian “Indian” group as well, but the idea of not allowing the relations between the Indianists to worsen for political reasons restored the balance.

The clash of positions and opinions between the “Indian followers” in Russia and Ukraine, as well as between those in other European countries, showed that in severe socio-

political crises such as the current military conflict, the “spiritual kinship” between them is put to the test, which in some respects is unable to overcome. The attempts of individual Indianists – sometimes even entire groups – to isolate the conflicting topic from their communication with each other, so that it does not destroy their unity, are striking.

The topic will be continued.

Notions and Criteria for Authenticity in European “Indian” Organizations

The search for authenticity is of leading importance in the activities of reenactor organizations and largely determines their very existence. What is meant by **cultural-historical authenticity** and how it is carried out in the conditions of modern reenactment are questions leading to ambiguous answers. Between the historical events and the human cultures related to them on one hand and their reconstruction after time on the other, there are always some – often serious – discrepancies. The degree to which they are dealt with determines the approaches and status of the particular reenactor group.

It can be said that the history of European “Indian” groups is constructed by their members’ notions of authenticity, changes in those notions, and their application in reconstructing aspects of the North American indigenous past. These organizations were formed on the basis of the enthusiasm generated in their founders by works of juvenile literature and adventure films on Native American themes. At this early stage, their members’ understandings of authenticity are determined by what is presented in similar literary and film works. The first two Hungarian “Indian” groups in the Bakony area of the early 1960s were formed by “followers” of the Delaware and Apache tribes (Nagy 1993:37-38), because the members of the first group liked the novels of J. F. Cooper, praising the Delawares, while others preferred Karl May’s books describing the exploits of the Apaches. The clothes and decorations of the two groups did not differ much. It wasn’t until they started visiting the library of the Hungarian National Ethnographic Museum and getting interested in the history and traditions of the tribes, which they represented that the young people realized that the Delawares and Apaches were too different from each other. This inspired them to study harder and recreate some real aspects of Old Time Indian cultures.

The example is classic regarding the formation and development of most “Indian” groups in Europe. Many people become members of such groups in their adolescence or early adulthood, when fascination with Native Americans as romantic heroes is particularly strong. Those who join at a more mature age are more likely to seek the philosophical and spiritual value of traditional Native American cultures and/or have scholarly interests in their pursuits.

The game is a fundamental element in the creation of the “Indian” groups in Europe, and their further development is built on the symbiosis between the spirit of the game and the authentic representation of the Native American traditions and past. The relationship between these two basic aspects also determines most of the differences between Indian organizations on the Old Continent. According to my observations, most participants in European “Indian” societies are initially attracted to the game. Their attraction could be explained (as the Indianists do) by a search for “special meaning”, for “original truths” – and this is not a delusion. The game offers an “exit” from everyday life, and its territories are “temporary worlds inside the real, intended for the performance of special actions” (Huizinga 2000:39). Establishing an “Indian” group is a special action. It carries something of the Thompson-Seton’s desire to **play Indians** – and thus to achieve the “wisdom of the forest” (Seton 1968:261), which bestows important experiences and fundamental human virtues. The creation of such a group is often inspired by adventure novels and films with Native American heroes – brave, free, with magnificent decorations of eagle feathers, dancing with wolves and talking with buffalo. Its further development is most likely connected with the messages of

Black Elk or other Native American sages from the Old Times. Sooner or later the members of the Indianist group focus on **the culture** of the tribes, including on its material dimensions, on the authenticity of the old Indian way of life, considered in the light of traditional beliefs. Of course, the path of the various European “Indian” organizations does not always follow exactly this order, but in almost all cases it concerns variants of it, in which the play leads to the culture.

The Bakony Indian Games

Over time, the Hungarian Bakony groups accumulated serious knowledge and skills related to the traditional material and spiritual culture of their chosen tribes. However, the main emphasis of their activity remains the “war games”. They have become their “calling card”. The camps and “battles” themselves are conducted in ever more complete harmony with the authentic history of the tribes of the Great Plains of North America, with maximum respect for their military customs, purposes of hostilities, etc. This atmosphere is enhanced by the realistically made tribal clothing, accessories, household items and traditional Indian dwellings that the “representatives” of various Indian tribes there use from the beginning of the camp to its very end. The last days of the stay in Bakony are “Peace days”. People from separate camps visit each other or even move their tipis to camp together. The festive atmosphere is complemented by authentically performed old tribal songs and dances, fraternization rituals, friendly competitions and so on. The Hungarian Indianists use a specific “Indian” style of speech in their communication, full of metaphors and descriptive expressions such as “sweet white sand” (sugar) and “black drink” (coffee), “the stone tents” (the nearby village with its houses) and the “snarling carts” (cars crossing the roads beyond the hills) (Nagy 1993:40-41).

Active participants in the “Indian” camps in the highlands say that the pursuit of authenticity in clothing, songs, communication, etc. mostly serves the war games themselves, but they in turn feed the atmosphere of believability with the experiences they bring. Many “Bakony Indians” are not interested in the other European “Indian” organizations, and even in the rest of the Hungarian groups that do not conduct war games. According to them, the necessary level of authenticity has not been achieved there, especially since the members of some of the other Hungarian “Indian” groups do not wear their Indian clothes during all the time of their camps.

The members of the Hungarian “Indian” organization camping in Nomadia Park do not engage in war games. Because of the special attention they give to children and youth who want to learn more about North American Indians, they try to look authentic in their Indian clothes and the whole camp setting is as authentic as possible. The authenticity of the Native American culture presented by the group is important to its members, but they also see it as an important part of their duty to the young people who come to their camp.

A few years ago, some of the Hungarian “followers of the Indians” that camped in Bakony created a new project – the “Two Aspens” camp. It is held at another place and no war games are held there. The aspirations of the participants in the project are focused on the most authentic reconstruction of Old Time Native American clothes, regalia, household items and their application in camps in nature.

Buffalo Days Retreat

The participants in the so-called “Buffalo Day Camps” (BDCs) which are conducted in Germany, Belgium and some other European countries, also do their best in trying to represent the Old Time (Buffalo Days) Plains Indian life as authentically as possible. Unlike

Two Aspens camps, which welcomes Indianists “representing” different Native American cultures (e.g., both Plains and Woodland “Indians” in one and the same camp), BDC uses only garments and household items typical for the Great Plains Indian tribes of the past. The Hungarian group accepts people re-enacting North American tribal traditions from any historical period, while at BDC the re-creation spans about half a century, from the 1830s to the 1870s. The greatest number of samples of the traditional material culture of the Plains Indian tribes were collected within these time-frames, with the upper limit of the period marking the last free years of the Plains Indians. As a rule, there are no “trappers”, “mountain-men”, nor “cowboys” or “soldiers” of the historical American army at these gatherings. BDC participants do not conduct educational activities or any other events directed at external audiences. Their goals have to do with achieving ultimate authenticity with respect to Great Plains Native American traditions within the organization itself. It is sought both in clothing, accessories and tools, knowledge and skills, as well as in the activities during the camp.

It is believed that the very idea of BDC was brought to the Old Continent by European Indianists who participated in the “traditional” camps of the mentioned Michael Terry in the US states of Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota and Colorado.

The Czech Camps and the “Indian Week” in Germany

Almost all “Indian” groups in the Czech Republic do not follow the model of “Buffalo Days Camps”. Their gatherings show similarities to other German annual events: “Indian Week” in East Germany (former DDR) and “Indian Council” on the territory of West Germany. Here, too, maximum authenticity of the vision, actions and hence the experience is sought, but the participants are given greater freedom. Those wishing to use during the camp only materials, utensils, clothing, food, furniture, etc., which fully correspond to the “originals” of the 18th and 19th centuries, are of special respect. However, in the gathering and all its activities, can also participate people who observe the general rules of authenticity, but use factory rather than brain-tanned (although natural, too) buckskin, decorate their Indian clothes with cheaper contemporary beads instead of very expensive old-fashioned ones, under their Indian blankets in the tipi tent they put tourist air-mattress, etc., etc. The basic principle is that there should be no modern objects, food, clothing, tools and so on in the camp space outside the tipis or wigwams, and in the dwellings themselves. All things that are not authentic to the reconstructed era should be hidden under blankets, skins, etc. The common goal for all the participants is to protect from modern “noises” the general atmosphere of another space and time.

Despite its title, a typical “Indian Week” gathering in Eastern Germany usually lasts 10 days. This impressively large “Euro-Indians” camp first took place in 1973 and since then has been held every summer. It is characterized by the large number of participants: up to 2000 in more recent years, quite a bit less recently. For many Indianists, this is the highlight of their activities throughout the year. In order for this big gathering to proceed satisfactorily for its participants, everyone follows pre-specified rules, the aim of which is to create the most authentic atmosphere possible in the camp itself and in the activities carried out there. They are identical to the requirements described in the Czech camps.

Some of the members of the “Indian” groups make specific efforts to achieve a resemblance to the physical appearance of Native Americans. Almost all men and women wear long hair, but few dye it “Indian black”. Most wear distinctive tribal hairstyles. Some resort to wigs, waxing and trying to get a darker skin tone. However, I reckon that the members of the European “Indian” organizations are not bothered by the insurmountable physical differences between them and the Native Americans. Their efforts are focused on building other aspects of their “Indian authenticity”.

Mandans of Taucha, Cheyennes of Budapest, and Carpathian Indians

The reenactment of the Native American past is directly related to specific tribal traditions – to the individual Indianist's choice of his or her “own tribe”. This is a way of focusing the interest and achieving greater accuracy in cultural-historical reconstruction based on the specific differences between the Native American tribes. Those interested in the same tribes often unite in subgroups or create a new, separate group – like “Mandan - Taucha”, “Lakota – Bautzen”, “People of the Long House” (Germany), “Cheyenne Wolf Society” (Czech Republic), “Dog Soldiers” (Hungary) and others.

The “Carpathian Indians” of Slovakia reconstruct the traditions of the Great Plains Indians in general, because they like several tribes of this region and do not wish to limit themselves in their choices. They say it is also a way to build a separate identity of their own, their own identity (“Carpathian Indians”) without imitating a certain tribe. However, other Slovak groups prefer to follow specific Native American tribal traditions.

It seems that in all European countries most numerous are the “followers” of the Lakota tribal alliance, and of the Great Plains Indians in general. These tribes are particularly popular because they oppose white expansion with extreme implacability and are the last to lose their freedom. Their traditional material culture is very impressive, and a large number of books and films are dedicated to them. The number of Indianists recreating the traditions of the Woodland tribes of the Northeast region and the Great Lakes area of North America is also growing. The search for authenticity there often manifests itself in emphasizing the similarity between the natural features of the cited American regions and those of the native lands of the corresponding Indianist.

Another aspect of accepting a “Native American identity” is the Native American name. Along with their European names, most Indianists also have Native American ones. No one takes seriously a member of an “Indian” society who “appropriates” the name of some famous Native American hero from the past. Most Indian names express characteristics or qualities that the particular Indianist exhibits. Relatively often, obtaining an Indian name is achieved in a classic for the reconstructed cultures way – through a mystical experience during sleep or deliberate seclusion for a certain period in an isolated natural place without food and water. At significant events in the biography of the particular European Indianist, he or she may receive a new Indian name.

On the Old Indian Trails – in Garments or in Costumes?

Petra Kalshoven writes of a member of an East German group who advised her to pay attention to how individual Indianists call their Indian clothing and accessories. If they call them “costume”, it means that they are mainly interested in appearance, copying. By taking off his/her “Indian costume”, such a person takes off everything that made him or her an “Indian”. On the other hand, those who call their Indian clothing “garments” and the specific Native American accessories “regalia”, definitely know what they are wearing and could explain the meaning, the symbolism of their clothing, showing a deeper, multifaceted, and probably more lasting interest (Kalshoven 2012 :188).

Many of the members of the European “Indian” groups gained a solid knowledge of the history and traditional culture of the North American tribes. The skills of some of the Indianists in the field of the Indian crafts impress even contemporary Native Americans. It is important to take into account that the traditional dwellings, clothing and objects made and used by the “Euro-Indians” are not only authentic as tribal specifics, but also fully adapted to a life in nature. They are expert replicas, created not for museum purposes, but for use in

conditions as close as possible to those that are studied. This allows Indianists to “live the past”, exploring a different reality on and through themselves.

For most “Euro-Indians”, insight into the choices, understandings, and worldviews of the historical Native Americans is a highly desired goal. However, they also see it as an exploration of themselves. They believe that as Indianists they express most vividly their deep essence, which is only partially manifested in their professional and daily social terms. According to a number of European Indianists, their deep respect for Native American cultural patterns had long gone beyond imitation to acquire moral and philosophical dimensions. There also are opinions that the study of authentic Native American traditions and their faithful application leads to a more mature attitude in the Indianist not only in connection to the Indian theme, but also in his/her entire life.

My observations however show that even the most “traditionally” minded Indianists consciously or unconsciously modify to some degree the Native American traditions brought from other eras and cultures in order to fit them into their worldview and daily lives as modern Europeans.

The Changing and Unchanging Dimensions of the Indianism

For many European Indianists, the attitude towards the Native American theme itself changes over time. Often this also has something to do with the question of authenticity. As noted, most English “Indian followers” no longer practice old-fashioned “Indian-style” camping in the wild, but have turned to organizing and holding powwow-type Indian festivals. Thus, they come out of the shadow of a more or less imaginary past and stand in solidarity with modern Native American traditions, becoming their supporters and distributors.

Some “Euro-Indians” eventually come to the idea that Old Time Native American garments and accessories, camping in tipis and dancing Indian dances are not absolutely necessary to “maintain an Indian spirit, an Indian attitude towards the world”. The reasons for this change can be different – getting older, change in marital status or work; reduction of free time; reorientation of interests combined with reluctance to completely abandon “Indian” pursuits; disenchantment with a particular group... These people emphasize that we are not living in the Buffalo Days anymore, so the clothes, habits, the very way of the Native American life have changed a lot. Therefore, what is really important, they say, are “the immutable dimensions of the Indianism – the attitude to the Earth, to the sacred, to the world **every day.**”

CASE STUDY: BULGARIAN INDIAN “EAGLE CIRCLE” SOCIETY

The Bulgarian answer to the “Indian groups” in Europe is the Eagle Circle Society. This is the first and – so far – the only Bulgarian Indianist organization. Although it is non-profit, non-political, non-ethnic and not created on a family basis, it has existed for more than 33 years. It was also defined as the first group for cultural and historical reconstructions in Bulgaria (Strahilov 2021:343), which to one degree or another helped to create some of the later such organizations in our country. However, some of the features of the “Eagle Circle” connect it more with similar organizations in other European countries than with groups for historical reconstructions in Bulgaria. At the same time, this group was created and developed on Bulgarian soil and – quite naturally – is directly connected with the Bulgarian society (in the broadest sense of the term) and the processes taking place in it, with the Bulgarian national psychology, sensitivity, etc.

The “Eagle Circle” was founded as club for sharing common interest in the spring of 1990 – only a few months after the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria. It has emerged amidst a motley palette of political parties, trade associations, Eastern martial schools, esoteric societies, etc., etc. In the background of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society lies a keen interest in the North American Indians. It was shaped by the factors that created and developed the same interest in thousands of other Europeans: adventure books and films, various materials about the tragic fate of the North American Indians, published in the magazines and newspapers, rare but impactful reports on national television. Scientific and popular science literature on the indigenous peoples of North America in Bulgarian is almost absent, but individual titles can be found in Russian, which language many Bulgarians use well.

One of the first difficulties that the Bulgarian Indianists have to overcome was the attitude towards the Native American theme in Bulgaria, considered by many to be romantic and interesting, but at the same time futile, childish, even infantile. Some members of the “Eagle Circle” remember their negative experiences from the time before they joined the Bulgarian “Indian” organization. Many of them then believed that they were the only Bulgarians interested in the traditions and history of the American Indians. This delayed the creation of an “Indian” group in our country. However, those Bulgarians whose interest has surpassed childhood hobbies were looking for new horizons for its development. A positive role was played by the publication in Bulgarian magazines of materials about “Indian” groups in Germany and Hungary. The release of Dee Brown’s famous book *Bury My Heart in Wounded Knee* in our country (1989) also had its role in the consolidation of Bulgarians interested in the Native American history and cultures. With the changes in the political and social life of the country that occurred after November 10, 1989, it was only a matter of time before they tried to get in touch with each other, in order to share their excitement, knowledge and searches.

The founding meeting took place on March 10, 1990, in “Musagenitsa” district of the capital Sofia. Attended 86 people with different professions and education (an interesting fact was that the ladies were more than men), mostly from Sofia, but also from other settlements. The first chosen name of the Bulgarian “Indian” organization vividly reflects the idealistic atmosphere and conceptual ambiguity during its formation – it was Indian Club “The Spirit of the Buffalo”.

The club’s primary mission was to dissociate itself from the notions of the Native Americans created by popular adventure literature and films. Among the prevailing enthusiasts there were a few people with a more established, deeper interest who have accumulated some information about the real history and authentic traditions of the American Indians. Two of them managed to make contacts with members of “Indian” organizations from the still existing USSR and Germany. That gave additional clarity to the ideas about the activity and development of the Bulgarian club. Educational courses were started within the organization itself, aimed at broadening and balancing the knowledge about the various Native American cultures among all club members.

It soon became clear that the original idea of “The Spirit of the Buffalo” – to unite all Bulgarians interested in the indigenous population of both Americas – was not working. The interest of most people was obviously directed to the native inhabitants of the territories of today’s USA and Canada. The Bulgarian interest towards different geographic regions of the Native American cultures matches that of the other European Indianists: primarily the Great Plains, to some extent the Northeastern Woodland region, and partially the Southwest of North America.

With the time, the practical activity of the club began as well. The members of the club started making their first moccasins, “Indian” garments, accessories, tools. The first “Indian”

camp in a natural environment was planned, too. All that rose the question about the proportion between the activities of the club related to the material and spiritual culture of the North American tribes. Some sharp disputes were raging, which may seem strange today, but they mirrored the characteristics of their time. The consequences of too long imposed communist idea of religion as “an opium for the peoples”, combined with the invasion of various sects in Bulgaria in the 1990s. Among the members of “The Spirit of the Buffalo”, the initial anti-religious period soon gave way to an almost totally opposite process. It was also related to the peculiarities of the first years of the democratic process in Bulgaria, in which there was also an increased interest in mysticism. Among the diverse literary and journalistic works on this topic, the books of Carlos Castaneda (Castaneda 1984, 1992 – in Bulgarian), Florinda Donner (Donner Grau 1996 – in Bulgarian) and other New Age “magicians”, “shamans” and “spiritual teachers” were particularly popular. Gradually, these disturbances among the early Bulgarian Indianists became balanced. As accumulated information about particular tribal beliefs, understandings, and practices, the members of “The Spirit of the Buffalo” came to a deeper understanding about the authentic traditionalists, healers, and spiritual leaders among different tribes of the Native North Americans.

Meanwhile, a second Bulgarian “Indian” organization appeared in the town of Lom – “The Spirit of the Prairie”. Contacts were established between the two groups. However, due to internal disagreements “The Spirit of the Prairie” did not survive. Its last member joined “The Spirit of the Buffalo”. Other new people, residents of different Bulgarian cities and towns, also joined the club. Some of them were interested in Native American cultures different than the Great Plains tribes. More and more of them started to think that the name “The Spirit of the Buffalo” conjures up a sense of some adventure romance and cheap mysticism. After active discussion, a new name for the first Bulgarian “Indian” organization was chosen: “Eagle Circle”. Due to the increased membership, it was decided that the it would no longer be defined as a “club” but as a “society”. Thus came the full name – Bulgarian Indian Society “Eagle Circle”, which remains to this day.

The lack of in-depth, detailed information about the real history and authentic cultures of the North American Indian tribes initially led to some “homegrown”, more or less naïve and stereotypical understandings of traditional Native American values and worldviews in the “Eagle Circle” members. Getting into contact with Indianists from Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium, and later with historians, ethnologists and writers on Native American subjects in Europe and America, as well as with representatives of indigenous peoples from the USA and Canada, gradually changed that. In 1991, a member of the “Eagle Circle” visited the USA, where he spent some time among the Omaha Indian tribe. From there he brought a special gift to the Bulgarian Indian Society – an Indian sacred pipe.

Those “Eagle Circle” members who used well English and other foreign languages managed to acquire some books, which have been recognized as “Indian Bibles” worldwide. That way the Bulgarian “Indian” Society became acquainted with the messages of Black Elk, John Fire lame Deer, Frank Fools Crow, and other Native American spiritual leaders. It also welcomed the first visit of a foreign organization member – a Belgian “trapper” who was a typical representative of Western European “Wild West” reenactment. From his stories and the numerous photo and video materials the Belgian brought, the Bulgarians got some ideas of the “Indian” groups in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. The delight at the achievements of the Belgian, French and Netherland Indianists was somewhat darkened by the awareness of the Bulgarian “Indians” about the deep chasm that separates them from the Western Europeans – in terms of available information, experience, number, of the quality of the materials for the particular Native American tribal clothing, accessories and other items. Most of the “Indian” garments and other items of the “Eagle Circle” members are made to “look more or less like something Indian”. To a large extent, this was due to the poor choice

of leathers and fabrics, the compulsion to work with low-quality beads from China and Middle East countries, which have little in common with those used by the historical Native Americans. The low standard of living in Bulgaria had a bad effect on the practical activities of the Bulgarian Indianists. On the other hand, the audio and video tapes they receive from their Belgian guest and other European friends allowed the “Eagle Circle” members to begin learning authentic Native American songs and dances.

It was striking to the Bulgarians to see that many of the Western European Indianists wear clothes and regalia of tribal chiefs and great warriors, testifying to exploits and status such as those Belgians, French and Netherlands could not possibly have achieved. This raised the question about the line between play and taking Native American traditions and history seriously, about the balance between masterful imitation and sincere respect.

The first years after the establishment of the Bulgarian organization were mainly a period of correcting misconceptions and accumulating new knowledge about the past and traditional culture of different Native American tribes, searching for authentic information, self-education and establishing contacts with more advanced associates from abroad. An important role in this regard was played by the Russian “Indian” groups, most of which had a much longer history than the Bulgarian one. Their members generously shared their experience with the Bulgarian Indianists, sending photocopies of articles and books, schemes for making Native American objects and stories about their own activities. The interest of the Russian “Indian followers” in the material tribal culture was unequivocal, but the main emphasis for them fell on the Native American philosophy, the legendary Indian connection with Nature, the Indian worldview, the specifics of the Indian spirit – real, romantic or in between. This approach found favorable ground among the people of the Bulgarian organization as well. Captivated by the messages of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and the Black Elk’s biography, they largely adopted the “motto” discussed earlier in this study: “Being Indian is not a matter of blood percentage, but a Path in life.”

This approach to the “Indianness” became a characteristic feature of the “Eagle Circle” for years. The Bulgarian Indianists admired the traditional clothes and regalia of the various tribes and sincerely tried to learn more about their material culture, but made far less efforts than their Western European “colleagues” to reconstruct it. The making of old-style “Indian” clothing, accessories, and tools was mainly geared toward their use during the Society’s camps, but their cultural and historical authenticity was observed only to some degree. The camp itself, the time spent in nature in a friendly atmosphere, the feeling of “tribal unity” – these were the main values, the realization of which the Bulgarian Indianists have been striving for years. However, their enthusiasm and the accumulation of knowledge led to a gradual increase in the level of authenticity at the camps, where songs of different tribes were performed better and better, archery competitions and Native American games were arranged, mythological stories were told around the fire, and Sweat Lodge ceremonies were held.

Such was the practical activity of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society, carried out mainly under favorable weather conditions and the presence of a sufficiently long period of free time. In other cases, the activity of the “Eagle Circle” was mainly theoretical and included gatherings, most often held at the home of some of the members, where people shared new information, discussed what has been read, heard and seen on the favorite Native American theme. Some Indianists activities could be defined as combining the “theoretical” and the “practical” features – such as the study of Native American songs in an urban environment, holding of events aimed at introducing some aspects of the traditional culture of the North American tribes to a wider Bulgarian audience, research, translation and publishing activities.

In the 1990s, three of the members of the “Eagle Circle” – separately from each other – managed to visit the USA and Canada and even to make contact with some Native people there. This gave a significant impetus to the development of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society.

The new information that came from America enthused many Bulgarian Indianists to study more Native American songs, dances, and new details of tribal religions, but only few of them were directed toward a more active reconstruction of the traditional Indian material culture. Most of the people in the Bulgarian "Indian" organization were still satisfied with only the bare minimum of clothing and accessories, usually made of the easiest to find and cheapest materials.

The "Eagle Circle" had a number of appearances through which its members tried to create interest in the history of Native Americans among more Bulgarians, to promote the authentic cultures of North American tribes. Such is the book publishing activity of the organization as well. Some Society members offered particular titles to Bulgarian publishing houses, entered into negotiations for their copyrights, translated and edited the texts, aiming to publish in Bulgaria books about the North American Indians, which have become world-famous as classic works on the subject. The Bulgarian Indianists gave lectures devoted to various aspects of Native American history and tribal cultures at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" and New Bulgarian University. In cooperation with the US Embassy in Bulgaria and the American Corner in the Sofia City Library, the "Eagle Circle" has organized over the years several „Native American Evenings" at which traditional songs and dances of North American tribes have been presented to a Bulgarian audience. There were also children's holidays with mastering some Native American skills, telling Indian stories and playing various Indian games. There were some – although rare – opportunities for the Eagle Circle members to interact with Native Americans in Bulgaria. These contacts, as well as the ones made in the USA and Canada, showed the Bulgarian Indianists that their ideas and activities were received mostly positively by the American Indians themselves.

The Bulgarian "Indian" society met the beginning of the new century in a much different situation compared to that of the first years of its existence. Its membership has halved. Visits of Russian Indianists in 2000, 2001 and 2005 activated to some extent the interest in acquiring new skills related to the traditional material culture of various North American tribes – but not for long. Only few individuals from the "Eagle Circle" were actively engaged in making Native American objects and clothing, mastering specific Native American skills, etc. Even during the camps in the nature most of the time lots of Indianists wore tourist clothes and sports shoes; Native American clothing and accessories were used only on festive and ceremonial occasions. The conversations were still friendly and interesting, but rarely involved aspects of the Native American theme. Most people from the "Eagle Circle" worked, some were already married and had children. Many have faced the problems of low salary or unemployment. Some members of the society have experienced life dramas, others no longer felt the same interest in the topic that brought them together more than a decade ago. Many Bulgarian Indianists felt tired of their daily life in the city.

This attitude gradually led to the dilution, weakening and finally abandonment of many activities that were characteristic of the Eagle Circle camps. The emphasis was put on spending good time with friends in nature, without rushing, with no burdens and commitments. The systematics in the activities of the Bulgarian "Indian" Society is gradually slowing down; events are organized rarely, mainly spontaneously, in an outburst of enthusiasm in more people at the same time and under favorable circumstances. Hierarchy, which in the "Eagle Circle" was always second to friendship, completely lost its outlines, and together with them – its organizational role. Hierarchy, which in the "Eagle Circle" has always been second to friendship, completely lost its outlines, and together with them – its organizational role. The goals and objectives of society are understood somewhat "a priori", but almost no one is able to articulate them clearly. The Native American theme no longer predominates even at the weekly gatherings of the Society. As the activity of the "Eagle

Circle” gradually died down and the “Indian theme” was displaced from the real focus of the conversations and activities of its members, its internal structure almost ceased to function. At the end of the first decade of the new century, the “Eagle Circle” functioned rather by momentum, mostly thanks to the close relations between its members. The lack of new challenges – or the reluctance to accept such – has an increasingly negative impact on the state of the organization. Apparently, some of its members have lost their initial interest in the North American Indians, but they feel well in the company of their friends from the organization, so they do not leave it, but also do not get involved in its already dying activities.

However, some of the “Eagle Circle” members do not put up with this kind of lethargy. They came to the idea that an outside example should be followed – taken from some European countries, where “Indian” organizations apparently are doing well. The choice fell on Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In 2010, two of the members of the “Eagle Circle” met and talked with Slovak and Hungarian Indianists in Bratislava and Budapest, and a third Bulgarian joined an “Indian” camp in the Czech Republic. The results were very encouraging. Three years later, seven representatives of the “Eagle Circle” went to the Czech Republic where they camped with over 60 Czechs, two Slovaks and two Polish “Indian followers”. The Bulgarians carefully observed the daily life in the camp, numerous activities there, the introduced and strictly observed rules. They had a lot of conversations with Czechs, Slovaks and Poles, and tried to remember everything in order to make later some correct conclusions and workable proposals. In the fall of the same year (2013), a council was held in Bulgaria, at which – in addition to the seven people who camped in the Czech Republic – five more members of the “Eagle Circle” were present. A few of the other Bulgarian Indianists turned down the invitation to come, others objectively did not have the opportunity to attend the council, and later it turned out that there were some who did not understand about its holding at all. At the meeting, a number of important decisions were made for future changes in the activities of the “Eagle Circle”. Taking into account the characteristic features and concrete achievements of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society, the gathered members decided that it’s time to synchronize much more its activities with the principles and actions of those foreign “Indian” groups that have existed for a long time, have obviously gained a lot of experience and continued to be successful in their endeavors. A number of things were borrowed from what was seen at the camp in the Czech Republic, and some problems and opportunities specific to the Bulgarian conditions were reconsidered. On the basis of all that, a project was drawn up for the further activities of the “Eagle Circle”, and just a little later – presented in a written form to all its members. Almost all the Society members who have not attended the council, have been unresponsive to the project. After some more time, it was officially acknowledged by those who drafted it and agreed to its clauses. Mandatory requirements were introduced for maximum authenticity (relative to the particular reenacted era and tribal culture) of the materials, clothing, tools and everything else used at traditional Eagle Circle camps from their start to their official end. A decision was made to increase the activity of the group through various events, and specific future goals were set. Visits of foreign guests to Bulgarian camps and further participation of “Eagle Circle” members in European “Indian” initiatives were planned. Such were carried out in 2016 and 2019.

The activity of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society was being revived, but at the cost of the number of its members – almost 1/3 of them left the “Eagle Circle”. Attempts to reach compromises did not yield results. The “Eagle Circle” camps had been activated again in the “Indian way”, but recently they are joined by fewer than 20 people.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic that swept the world in early 2020, many plans have been postponed. Almost all activities of the Bulgarian Indian Studies Society have been suspended. In the summer of 2021, an “Eagle Circle” summer camp was organized in Bulgaria again. Only 10 people joined, but the gathering was full of interesting activities and good

mood. In August 2022, seven Bulgarian Indianists left again for the Czech Republic, where joined a 10-day “Indian” camp with over 100 participants. The Bulgarians were welcomed like old friends. The program of the event was diverse, the meetings and conversations – interesting and useful. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, deepening signs of a global crisis and the still-unrelenting Covid-19 pandemic, the camps in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic give hope for the future.

CONCLUSION

The Last of the European Mohicans

Founded in an era of great changes as an interest club, during its more than thirty years of existence, the Bulgarian “Indian” Society “Eagle Circle” has been building and expanding its activities. Its stability over time is impressive, but the declining number of its members makes some Bulgarian Indianists believe that they are the “last of the Mohicans” and their organization will disappear with them, since the Indian theme apparently does not excite today’s children and youth. Such are the views of many English Indianists. German “Indian followers” watch with anxiety the decreasing number of participants in the “Indian Week” and “Indian Council”; my respondents from Germany say that almost all groups there have not had new members for a long time. The Hungarian “Indians” also think that the days of camps, “battles” and “tribal” dances are passing away – but they hope to have another 5-6 “Indian” years before they completely indulge in memories. The Indianists of Lithuania have come to the conclusion that they are all representatives of (roughly) one generation – and Indianism will depart from their country with that same generation.

However, there are some more optimistic Bulgarian, English, Hungarian, Latvian and Polish Indianists, too. They hope that the idea of tribal unity and “kinship in spirit” is deeply rooted in human nature. They emphasize the Native American attitude to nature as the basis of ecological consciousness, on the development of which the very life on Earth depends. They remind that the North American Indians are among the brightest symbols of human freedom and believe that this ideal will never fade. These people believe that the real history and authentic traditions of Native Americans are still not known in Europe – and they are convinced that they can do a lot to change this situation.

Basic Extracts

The deepest roots of the “Indian” organizations in Europe must be sought far before their origin – in that intense looking into **the other**, typical of European culture since the end of the Middle Ages. It is related to the expectation that the New World will confirm the existence of a “golden age” and a “garden of paradise” here on Earth – and its inhabitants will be “noble savages”: unaffected by the vices of civilization, embodying the original God-made, natural man. These ideas changed over the centuries, but their core is surprisingly timeless. The American Indian remains a symbol of the freedom to which the European aspires, but at the same time fears that various negative manifestations of his own society - religious fanaticism, industrial revolution, political totalitarianism or consumer mentality - have already taken it away from him.

Due to the specifics of historical circumstances, Native Americans have had the privilege – or misfortune, depending on one’s perspective – of not being fully incorporated into Western economies built on their dispossessed lands: neither as slaves, nor as subjects, nor as equals. That’s why they stay **outside the border** – that of the civilized world and its

laws, but also of the social inequality, coercion and exploitation, beyond the negatives of the European colonial society and the American society that inherited it. This makes them an eternal alternative to European civilization since the time of Montaigne and Rousseau, through the era of George Sand, Prince Maximilian and the “Wild West” of Buffalo Bill, to the philosophers and writers of the 20th century.

The foundation of the first “Indian” groups at the dawn of the twentieth century is related to the idea of the Canadian-American writer, naturalist, artist and publicist Ernest Thompson-Seton for the proper upbringing and healthy development of children and youth based on knowledge, skills and traditional values of Native Americans. Among other things, it's a call for **passing the border** of civilization in its trivial and limiting image, in search of freedom through a return to nature, whose highest symbol for Seton are precisely the American Indians. Soon his appeal found a response in Europe.

The Old Continent remembers the excitement of George Catlin's exhibitions and shows, and especially of Buffalo Bill's tours. These are pure-hearted excitements, because Europeans feel no guilt over American policies toward the indigenous people of the New World. On the contrary – the more Europe is alienated from America for economic and political reasons, the closer the Indians oppressed by the Americans become to Europeans. European writers provided their many readers with romantic stories with Native American protagonists aided in their struggle against hostile tribes and (mostly) against American imperialism by their “white brothers” from Europe (like the German Old Shatterhand, etc.).

Native Americans themselves are increasingly becoming role models for young Germans, Czechs and other Europeans. The impressive affinity of the German nation to the Indians – formulated by H. Lutz as “German Indian enthusiasm” – makes many researchers, including today, look into its diverse manifestations, searching for the deep reasons for them. One thing is certain – in 20th century Germany becomes the “most Indian” European country. Many of the lines of Indianism development in Europe start from there.

Little is known about early “Indian” groups in Hungary, Great Britain, Sweden and Belgium. The spread and development of such organizations began in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In Western Europe, the “Indian” followers gravitated between romantic notions inherited from adventure literature and further fueled by European and American “Indian” films, ethnographic interest in the material culture of North American tribes, and the messages of Native American shamans. Although significantly poorer in terms of information and materials, Indianism in socialist countries is particularly interesting with its characteristic aspects of manifestation. Criticism of colonialism and imperialism is implicit in the Indian theme. This not only allows it to be bypassed by political censorship in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, but even turns it into an “ideological weapon” against American capitalism. Socialist literary and cinematographic works reveal the tragedy that came to the Indian tribes as a consequence of the aggressive policies of some European colonial states and the United States. Historical truth favors the political goals of the authorities in the countries of the Eastern Bloc. The “Indian” organizations that arose there were watched with suspicion, but relatively quickly were rehabilitated (and controlled) as some kind of societies of solidarity with the Indian peoples. Here, too, freedom is invariably associated with Native Americans. It has been taken away from them by American imperialism. That's why the “Indian” societies in the socialist countries were given some opportunities to deal relatively freely with the history and traditions of the North American tribes – victims of the USA. The Indians became a symbol of an acceptable, permitted America – a land of endless prairies, mountains and forests, a free America. In turn, the romance of tribal traditions and the sense of freedom characterizing the old Native American life gave the Indianists the opportunity to escape at least somewhat and for a little while from the totalitarian reality of the socialist states of the second half of the 20th century.

This essentially East German model was adopted in Poland, where its suitable hero was found – the former Polish resistance fighter Stanisław Supłatowicz, better known as Sat-Okh, who also happens to be “the son of an Indian chief and a Polish revolutionary”. Czechoslovakia was ready to accept the model as a socialist extension of Thompson Seton’s ideas. It also worked well in Russia and other countries of the then Soviet Union, where the first “Indian” groups participated in anti-American marches and protests against convictions of Native American political activists handed down in the US. In Hungary, it did not come into effect due to an unfortunate coincidence – Sándor Borvendég Deszkás, author of “Indian” novels and himself a prominent Indianist, was imprisoned for “anti-Soviet activity”. Deszkás was later released, but Hungarian Indianism was already hiding from the authorities, and this continued until the fall of the communist regime in that country.

Perhaps the most atypical is the Bulgarian case. In our country, too, books and films about Indians (mainly German, and even some American ones) were quite popular between the 1960s and the 1980s, especially among younger people – but it was not until 1990 that an Indianist organization was created here. As the main reasons for this, I was initially inclined to determine mainly some negative features of our national mentality, but the results of my research, carried out with the help of numerous contacts, conversations and active correspondence outside Bulgaria, gave me an additional perspective – or, at least – a broader base for further thinking. Our country turned out to be the only one on the Balkan Peninsula in which an “Indian” group exists at all. There are none in Romania, where there are otherwise several significant re-enactor organizations and major Roman, Dacian and medieval festivals, nor in Serbia, where the popular “Indian” actor Gojko Mitić hails from, nor in Croatia, where in the 1960s eleven films based on Karl May’s novels were made, nor in Greece, Turkey, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Kosovo, etc. I have yet to investigate the reasons for this more or less strange fact.

After 1989, lots of new options opened up to the “Indian” groups of the former socialist countries. They are mostly related to the much better contacts with the Indianists of Western Europe, as well as to obtaining more detailed and in-depth information about the North American Indians. The new motives and models initially lead to the flourishing of Eastern European groups and to the activation of their activities. Later, a crisis occurred in most of these groups.

Both boom and bust have a common root cause. In the colorful palette of numerous new possibilities, it is often difficult to keep the focus on “Indianness” itself; the searches become too divergent, and the former enthusiasm begins to cool. There is also another, purely financial reason for the crisis – over time, it becomes clear to the Indianists from the ex-socialist countries that it’s too difficult to find/buy the expensive Venetian beads, original trade-cloth, buffalo skins and other authentic materials available to the “Euro-Indians” from the West-European countries. The disparity in living standards and purchasing opportunities between people on both sides of the recent “Iron Curtain” also manifests itself in Indianist organizations from the East and West of Europe.

However, common characteristics unite the “Indian” groups of the various European countries. First of all, these are the pursuit of authenticity (as an appearance, as an experience and acquisition of characteristic “Indian” skills, and as relationships), as well as the typical search for a balance between freedom (a basic “Indian value”) and a hierarchical system necessary for the implementation of the group’s activities. A joint field is being built between the various European “Indian” organizations for the exchange of ideas, materials, knowledge, for mutual assistance. Concepts such as “common path”, “kinship in spirit”, “tribal consciousness” and others play a key role here. They illustrate the ideals that drive – along with the search for freedom as an alternative to modern life and a particular interest in the Native Americans – most “Indian” organizations in Europe.

Many “Euro-Indians” are connected by long-standing friendships, joint camps and mutual assistance rendered in various ways. They really feel like a kind of kin to each other and tend to elevate their “Indian” relations to a supranational level. However, the limitations of this “kinship” and its vulnerability were demonstrated unequivocally by the reactions of Russian, Ukrainian and other Indianists after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Although engaged with the history and traditional cultures of North American Indians, the European Indianism is a product of its time – the 20th and early 21st centuries – and also of the societies, in which it arose and developed: the various European countries. Its existence is directly related to the possibility of perceiving alternative identities and their functioning in the reconstructions of different cultures and eras. With its search for freedom, desire to return to a more natural way of life, and dreams of tribal kinship, Indianism is only one of the possibilities for constructing alternative identities that the modern world offers. This is a field whose future development can hardly be predicted, especially given the ubiquitous advance of the virtual sphere. However, the existing Roman, Celtic, Proto-Bulgarian, Medieval and other groups - including the "Indian" ones - most likely contain in their specifics some potential answers for the future, although their interests are directed to the past. For it is there, between the past and the future, in search of basic human values, that our deepest, most essential identity manifests itself.

Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation

The present work contributes to the development of the research on cultural-historical reconstruction organizations in Bulgaria and Europe – and in particular, on a specific manifestation of the phenomenon of historical reenactments that has been relatively little considered so far: the so-called European “Indian” groups. It is the first comprehensive academic study of these groups by a Bulgarian.

My work is not a “snapshot” of the European “Indian” organizations at a given period of their existence. It is built on the basis of a long-term, multifaceted research that began significantly earlier than my enrollment in a full-time PhD program at the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of History of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (February 2020). It contains not only historical, but also current information about the state and activity of the studied organizations in recent times.

The description of “Indian” groups from the countries of the former socialist bloc (although I do not consider them only), with a main emphasis on the Bulgarian “Eagle Circle” Society, is another contribution of my work. It is the first presentation of such an organization not only from Bulgaria, but generally from Southeast Europe, too, in the academic literature.

My work provides new source material personally collected through the methods of ethnographic research among a large number of Indianists from various European countries. It provides a comparative analysis of the factors that led to the creation and specific development of these organizations in Europe over the past decades, which places the Bulgarian case in a more general context and allows its specifics to be highlighted. As has been repeatedly emphasized, in the present text the European Indianism is considered as a “phenomenon within the phenomenon” of cultural-historical reconstructions.

The position of the researcher itself is also related to the contributions of his or her work. Cases, in which such research has been done by a person who appears to be an insider towards a given “Indian” group, are rare. As such insiders can be named the Hungarian researcher Imre Nagy and Birgit Turski from Germany, but they both describe the “Indian” groups from their native countries only. German Dziebel was for a period a member of a Russian “Indian” group, but took up the study of Indianism after leaving the group. The

German researcher Hartmut Lutz was also a member of a German “Indian” organization before devoting himself to scientific activity.

I have been actively involved in the activities of European “Indian” organizations for many years and I am an official member of the Bulgarian “Indian” Society “Eagle Circle”. That is why my work is based on an **up-to-date insider’s view**. This approach not only implies a detailed knowledge of the subject of European “Indian” organizations, but also provides innovation in the study of its manifestations.

Of course, any further study of the “Indian” groups in Europe – and of Indianism itself as a phenomenon – would certainly provide a number of new facts and perspectives, leading most likely to new conclusions, too.

Acknowledgements

No matter how strong my personal motivation was for the realization of this research, no matter how long-standing and deep my interest in its topic was, I would not have been able to carry out, systematize and finalize it without the trust of the specialists from the Department of Ethnology of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and without the invaluable help of my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ilia Iliev. He and Prof. Dr. Mira Markova, Prof. Dr. Irina Koleva, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violeta Kotseva-Popova, Senior Assist. Dr. Kremena Yordanova, Senior Assist. Dr. Petya Grueva, and some others generously shared their experience and knowledge with me, answered my many questions, provided me with truly valuable guidance and encouragement throughout my three years as a PhD student and beyond. I am grateful to them both because I really learned a lot from them and because of their sincere friendly attitude towards me, even though they were the Teachers and I was the student.

I certainly want to express my deep gratitude to Prof. DCS. Vesselin Tepavicharov, my first scientific supervisor, to whom I largely owe the decision to turn my long-standing interests in European “Indian” organizations into scientific research. His premature death in September 2020 was a heavy shock for his family, for his colleagues from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, for the scientific community in Bulgaria and beyond its borders, as well as for me personally.

The support of my family and friends was among the main reasons to continue actively working on this dissertation even in some difficult periods.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all my respondents from Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Russia, Belgium and other countries who believed in me, in my idea to carry out this research and to record its results in the form of a new and (I hope) substantial and useful work devoted to “Indian” organizations in Europe.

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