REVIEW

From Assoc. Prof. Violeta Kotseva, PhD,

Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”

for obtaining the degree of PhDoctor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies

For the dissertation titled: **The "Indian" organizations in Europe (ethnographic research on cultural-historical reenactment groups)** with author **Lyunomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev** and supervisors **Prof. Dr.Habil Veselin Tepavicharov** and **Assoc. Prof. Ilia Iliev, PhD**

Reenactment groups for historical and cultural practices and customs are increasingly attracting the attention of researchers from the field of humanities. The reason for this increased interest can be sought in the attempt to restore a more glorious, romantic, heroic past, by means of which reconstruction is sought to build or strengthen specific emphases in new identities. A process particularly intensively developing as a kind of reaction to globalization and the growing fear of losing ethnic/cultural/national identity. This is evidenced by a number of scientific publications and research projects that focus on attempts to restore the past.

The dissertation thesis presented for discussion fits into this process, aiming to study such a group of reconstructions. What makes it particularly relevant, however, is the fact that it does not aim to study groups for the reconstruction of their own past, but one that has nothing to do with the traditions and history of the local population. It is an ethnological and anthropological analysis of North American Indian reenactment groups. The study puts the problem on a broad basis, comparing the reconstructions and the groups that carry them out in different European countries.

PhD student Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev has acquired a master's degree in the specialty "Bulgarian Philology" at the Faculty of Slavic Philology at the SU "St. Kl. Ohridski". His bright CV shows considerable experience, both in secondary school teaching and in research and knowledge of foreign cultures. His work in one of the world's most popular media with an orientation towards presenting different cultural, historical and ethnic patterns, undoubtedly contributes to the overall vision of the presented text. The personal interest of the PhD student, born already in childhood and adolescence, gives density and quality to the dissertation.

Lyubomir Kyumyurdzhiev is a full-time PhD student at the Department of Ethnology of the Faculty of History of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" in the period 2020-2023, as he is currently dismissed with the right of defense. PhD student Kyumurdzhiev submits his work within the legally established deadlines, with all requirements being met. His CV indicates involvement in a number of projects that aim to explore isolated and marginalized communities. The latter helps him to master the ethnographic methodology of work, evident from the entire text of the dissertation.

The proposed dissertation consists of an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography, all 224 pages.

In the introduction, the PhD student clearly outlines the scope of his research, stating the object and subject of research, the goals and tasks of the work. In a broad plan, the object of research focuses on groups for reconstructions of the historical and cultural past with a focus on North American Indians (p. 6), and the object of research is the origin, development and present state of Indian reenactments groups in Europe (p. 7). The PhD student singles out several main points around which he shapes his research: the reasons for the emergence of interest in the Native American population, the stages of development of this process, motivation for participation, organization of the groups and prospects for future development. In the introductory part, the PhD student Kyumyurdzhiev very correctly justifies his choice of the main term, namely Indian, arguing both with the fact that it is already sufficiently established and popular in the Bulgarian environment, and with the fact that the Bulgarian language is the only in which a distinction is made between Native American (индианец) (native inhabitant of North America) and Indian (resident of India). In this way, the term is cleared of the known negative connotations found in some Western European languages and usages. The purpose of the research is outlined very clearly as a result within a dissertation thesis, namely - the main regularities related to the emergence and development of the studied "Indian" organizations (p. 8).

The work is based on analytical and empirical methodology. Particular attention deserves the ethnographic осева иеяеьиъг, which shows an extremely wide observation of Indian communities in Europe, including such in the countries of Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Great Britain, etc. They were carried out in a broad temporal parameter that included not only the time of the specific work on the PhD thesis, but also almost a decade before that. The study and the personal author`s involvement in Native American organizations is complemented by residence and research among Native Americans in North America. The involved observation of the PhD student is, of course, placed on a qualitatively new basis when his object of personal interest becomes a scientific one. Additional research conducted using online ethnographic methods in the years of the Covid-19 pandemic expands the research base. The time frame, in which the PhD student himself is a participant in such reconstructions, as well as the organizer and chairman of the Bulgarian Indian Society "Eagle Circle", provides an opportunity for a reflexive look at the object of the study and a comparative analysis of the individual stages of its development. All this makes the knowledge of PhD student Kyumyurdzhiev in relation to the studied groups and the culture of the communities, which they restore, extremely deep. The personal commitment and emotional attachment of the PhD student to the object of research, contrary to expectations, does not violate the scientific side of the text, but on the contrary - contributes to the depth of the analysis and the overall scope of the study. In parallel, the PhD student demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the literature on the research topic and skillfully handles it for a comprehensive comparative analysis, combining his personal view with that of other researchers. All this contributes to the dissertation for building a comprehensive reflective picture of Indian societies in Europe, in which the necessary research distance is present and in which personal interest and maturity of experience are only pluses in the overall vision of the text. The research ethics of the PhD student, who begins his research on Indian organizations in Europe when he himself already has many years of experience as their member and participant, is impressive. A circumstance that makes it extremely difficult to place the relations between the groups studied by him on a qualitatively new basis, in which an already known hierarchy imposed by the researcher-researched position is introduced.

Chapter one outlines the research framework. It examines historical reconstructions as a whole, outlining the differences between them, their goals, tasks and not least the reasons for their occurrence, which are usually rooted in the specific processes in a society, related to the experience of some historical or imagined/invented identity. Attention is paid to preferences for certain eras for reenactment, depending on the particular circumstances. The author very carefully draws the line between reenactments, the subject of his work, and the recently popular role-playing games (LARP) and cosplay, delineating the differences between them, thus clearly demarcating the object of his research. A particular focus of this chapter is the historical development of Native American organizations, how they evolved globally to become what they are today.

The second chapter traces the emergence of interest in Indians among Europeans. The dissertation follows the change in the attitude of the conquerors towards the indigenous inhabitants of North and South America, through the notion of the so-called noble savage, the role of the exhibitions of J. Kathleen and Buffalo Bill's traveling show in the process. The increase of interest in the indigenous population of America with the onset of the 20th century and the transfer of the attitude towards the Indians to a new basis - they are now looking for special qualities lost to the Europeans. Of particular interest is the fact that in this whole process of birth and avalanche-like development of the European interest for the Indians, he excludes the feeling of guilt for the conquest and deprivation of their natural habitats and livelihoods. The process of popularization and subsequent study of Native American culture and the attempt to preserve it by Europeans is clearly traced. The chapter also examines the role of fiction and filmography in the boom of interest in North American Indian culture, taking into account the fact that Indian culture (or at least what is represented by it) fits the socialist ideology dominant in Eastern Europe after the end of World War II. The author also very clearly shows the turning point in the interest of the Europeans towards the Indians, connected with the outflow of the popular Indian literature and the attempt to make it known and presented as authentically as possible. After the 1970s, more and more Europeans headed to North America to experience Native American culture live.

The third chapter traces the development of Native American organizations in Europe. The PhD student examines their emergence at the end of the 19th century and their gradual spread throughout Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. Almost like an avalanche, this trend conquered all of Europe. The role of the Buffalo Bill Traveling Show in this process is reflected by the Ph.D. The Second World War interrupted the life of these organizations, but after its end they were restored, initially in Western Europe, but subsequently also in those of Eastern Europe, where, as the author emphasizes, the existence of such organizations and their membership was perceived as a sign of solidarity with the indigenous inhabitants of North America, victims of American imperialism (p. 112). The peak of the Indianist movement in Europe occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, and the author logically connects this with the processes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the communist regimes. In this chapter it is clearly seen that Indian organizations in Europe are sub-community type organizations which share their own rules, principles and norms of communication, have requirements for admission, clothing, skills etc.

The fourth chapter traces the birth and development of the Bulgarian Indianist organization "The Eagle's Circle". As one of the organizers and main supporters of the idea of its existence, the PhD student from the position of an insider analyzes the ups and downs in its history. Linking its existence to the processes that occurred in Bulgarian society after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and the troubled decade of the 90s turns this part of the dissertation into not just recreating the history of an organization, but a socio-anthropological analyze of a cultural phenomenon.

The main conclusions drawn in the course of the research and based on extensive field material, as well as an analysis of the available literature on the subject, are summarized in the conclusion.

The PhD thesis, proposed for discussion, is a complete and extremely interesting account of the history of Native American organizations in Europe and Bulgaria in particular. Written in an engaging and logical manner, it represents a qualitative and contributing scholarly study in the analysis of reenactments groups. At the same time, it reflects a process that, in a broader plan, contains contributions to the history of socialism in Bulgaria, to the anthropology of childhood, to identity studies, etc. All this makes the text particularly helpful without closing the topic for new research in this direction.

The dissertation presents the PhD student as an accomplished and well-prepared researcher, with a perspective for new interesting ethnological studies in the field of traditional cultures and their transformations in the conditions of modern society. Proof of this is the author's publications on the topic of the dissertation research - a total of 6 in number. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation. Plagiarism and incorrect citation are not detected. The dissertation is a contribution research in the field of the processes of recreating the historical past (own and foreign).

The procedure corresponds to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application, as well as the internal Rules for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and for occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Therefore, expressing my categorical positive opinion, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Lyubomir Georgiev Kyumyurdzhiev for the dissertation research on the topic "Indian" organizations in Europe (ethnographic research on groups for cultural-historical reconstructions)" and I will vote it.

14. 08. 2023 Signiture:

Sofia Assoc. Prof. Violeta Kotseva