Position

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Regarding the dissertation work of Anelia Sasheva Ovnarska-Milusheva on the topic "Development and transformation of Bulgarian traditional clothing from the middle of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century through the prism of performing arts" with academic adviser Prof. Mira Markova, PhD, presented for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences.

1. Applicant data. Ms. Ovnarska-Milusheva has a master's degree in ethnology and cultural anthropology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in 2019 and submitted necessary proof on the required exams, doctoral minimum and publications. According to the attached reference, diplomas and published texts, her record exceeds the minimum national requirements and meets all the criteria for obtaining a doctorate.

2. Her dissertation consists of 258 pages, including 178 standard pages of main text, an extensive bibliography in several languages, and appendices. The main text consists of an introduction, four chapters, each of which contains independent conclusions and a general conclusion. The work combines serious field studies, some of which were carried out in the course of intensively involved participant observation, data on local and national ensembles from various sources, as well as an analysis of the existing literature on the subject. As far as I can judge, the doctoral student knows the contemporary Bulgarian publications on the subject and approaches them in a professional manner.

I found no plagiarism in the text. It is an original piece of research, the product of many years of disciplined work by Mrs. Ovnarska-Milusheva Ilieva and her scientific supervisor.

3. Essentially, the work is dedicated to the folk costume as it was presented on stage after 1878, its transformations and the main actors – from state authorities to organizers and choreographers to professional performers or amateurs of authentic folklore. The topic is relevant, given the growing interest in folklore and the gradual increase in the number of participants in folklore ensembles and their increasingly diverse social profile.

The introduction clearly and distinctly defines the goals and tasks of the work, the methods used and the conceptual apparatus. Mrs. Ovnarska-Milusheva defines the main concepts she will use, the goals and tasks of her work.

The first chapter (pp. 33-57) is dedicated to the stage presentation of Bulgarian traditional clothing until the middle of the 20th century. The main materials are from the interwar period and show the gradual imposition of traditional costumes as a key element in the construction of national identity. Mrs. Ovnarska-Milusheva gives convincing examples of how the role of individual choice, personal taste and decision in the selection of elements in the stage version of the folk costume is reduced at the expense of the unified presentation and how from an expression of an individual identity it becomes a symbol of the collective. This part of the thesis would have benefited if the parallels with similar developments in other European countries, for example interwar Romania and Italy, where a network of folklore festivals unfolded, were developed more.

The second and most voluminous chapter (pp. 58-95) examines the period of socialism and is dedicated to the construction of the network of the so-called artistic self-activity from professional folklore groups such as "Filip Kutev" ensemble, to local associations. Mrs. Ovnarska-Milusheva convincingly shows the incomparably greater scope of this network compared to the previous period, as well as the far more serious investments made by the socialist authorities in the stage presentation of classical folklore.

The tendency to unify costumes within an ensemble, which appeared in the first half of the century, remained and was even reinforced by the system of evaluation the authenticity of clothing and of preparing costumes for the professional and semi-professional groups. All this is part of a purposeful social policy, in the analysis of which the doctoral student shows an excellent knowledge of modern Bulgarian research in the field.

The third chapter (p. 96-122) examines the structural features of the stage presentation of costumes. Special attention is paid to the stylization of traditional clothing when presented to audiences, the procedures for assessing its authenticity (including the emergence of institutionalized expertise), and the creation of an informed public through the media, mass attendance at folk art gatherings, and the tourism industry.

Particularly valuable are analyzes of how a compromise is sought between perceived authenticity and performer comfort – for example, replacing heavy woolen fabrics with lighter ones. The comparison of where the border between stylization and authenticity crosses between professional ensembles such as "Filip Kutev" and small amateur groups such as "Alino" is also useful.

The fourth chapter (p. 123-159) examines the modern representations of traditional Bulgarian clothing. This part of the thesis contains the most contributing elements and relies on precise data collected through interviews and embedded observation. Although relatively short, it shows the new trends that appeared after the collapse of the centralized system. One of these trends is the increasing role of individual choice, skills, taste and, last but not least, means, to the extent that participants in most groups join voluntarily and at their own expense. The figure of the expert is also changing, as instead of the institutionalized system for assessing the authenticity of the costume, people with a different social and educational profile appear, who build their authority on a variety of sources - independent searches, memories of elderly people from the village and family, discussions in social networks, etc. Last but not least, the market is a kind of arbiter, as the last part of the chapter examines trade and, more generally, the exchange of traditional clothes.

The conclusion repeats and summarizes the main conclusions of the chapters.

4. The dissertation is the product of many years of disciplined work. It is based on impressive empirical data collected by Ms. Ovnarska-Milusheva from archives, published texts, interviews and participant observation. She knows the modern academic literature on the topic and uses a clean, clearly explained conceptual apparatus.

The work could benefit from comparisons with nearby countries. For example, Katherine Verdery's research on Romania shows how, for authoritarian and totalitarian societies in our region, a major attraction of nationalism is its tendency to present society as homogeneous, uniform, devoid of internal contradictions, divisions and struggles (including class ones).

This could explain both the clear tendency towards the unification of folk costumes in the interwar and socialist period, as well as the construction of institutionalized expertise and a system for assessing the authenticity of the costume. It could also explain the emergence of a new trend towards individualization and of new, far more diverse expert figures these days.

5. Conclusion

The dissertation work of Mrs. Anelia Ovnarska-Milusheva, her academic contributions and publications fully correspond to the professional direction and the required indicators for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

That is why, without hesitation, I give a positive assessment and recommend to the respected scientific jury to award Mrs. Ovnarska-Milusheva the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences.

Sofia, 17/04/2023 Ilia Iliev