

OPINION

by Prof. Ph.D. Rayna Dimitrova Gavrilova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (SU) of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, doctoral program in "Cultural Studies" (Youth in Bulgaria. Public debates, social actions, movements, ideologies, political regimes and institutional structures of the late 19th and 20th centuries)

Author: Petya Valkova Angelova

Topic: "Youth Political Resistance (1944-1949)"

Research supervisor: Assoc. Prof., Ph.D. Galina Goncharova, SU

1. General description of the presented materials

With order ПД 38-403 from 12.07.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (SU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for defense of a dissertation thesis on the topic "Youth political resistance (1944-1949)" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, doctoral program in "Cultural Studies" (Youth in Bulgaria. Public debates, social actions, movements, ideologies, political regimes and institutional structures of the late 19th and 20th centuries).

The author of the dissertation is Petya Valkova Angelova - a full-time doctoral student at the Department of "History and Theory of Culture", Faculty of Philosophy, supervised by Assoc. Prof., Ph.D. Galina Goncharova. The set of materials presented by Petya Valkova Angelova is in accordance with the Regulations of the SU for the application of the ZRASRB and includes:

1. resume;
2. order of the Rector of SU for the appointment of a jury;
2. university diploma;
3. dissertation thesis;
4. summary of the dissertation;
5. scholarly text on the theme of the competition, published or accepted for publication;
6. certificate of compliance with the national minimum requirements for educational and scientific degree "doctor" for the relevant scientific field.

A review of all the proposed documents shows that they fully comply with the requirements.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Doctoral student Petya Valkova Angelova graduated in Cultural Studies from the University of Sofia and obtained a Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology. In the course of her studies, she acquired a solid background in the fields of history and theory of culture and developed an interest in interdisciplinary work, which proved to be a good foundation for her independent research. Her professional acquaintance and work with the scientific supervisor, Assoc. Professor Goncharova since

the time of her studies undoubtedly contributed to her growth as a young scholar. In 2019, she was among the distinguished students of SU "Kliment Ohridski". Petya Valkova Angelova worked as an R1 researcher (Young scientist) during the period 2020-2022,); she led seminars in the discipline "Youth Cultures" (2023/2024 academic year), and she was appointed Inspector of Educational Activities at SU in March 2024.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

Petya Valkova Angelova 's interest in young people appeared already at the time of her graduation in BA and MA,, as evidenced by her first publications. The fact that the topic of children and young people never leaves the agenda of Bulgarian society, both in the field of education and employment, and in discussions about the intergenerational relations and the crisis of values, has undoubtedly contributed to this. The participation and non-participation of young people in political life is another hot topic, especially in the context of the political crisis in which Bulgarian society finds itself today. These factors substantiate Petya's plan to combine the cultural analysis of the subject and the historical approach. Even a cursory glance at the contents shows that the dissertation, formally a historical text, deals with the problems of ideology in its broadest understanding; the media and their participation in establishing the new *Zeitgeist* and the convulsions of democracy, systematically crushed by totalitarian regime. To accept the relevance of a study devoted to events, which happened 80 years ago sounds like an oxymoron, but even if we do not believe that *historia magistra vitae*, modern political life in Bulgaria convinces us every day that the past casts a long shadow over the present: not least because the elderly and the very elderly (60+ and 80+ years old), who vote in elections have personally experienced the exhilaration and disappointment of youthful aspirations. The presented work aims to clarify "the role of youth in the historically significant processes of opposing the establishment of the totalitarian system" (p. 5), by searching, documenting and preserving for our collective memory the history of individuals, events and discourses during the period of establishment of communist power. At the same time, the work offers an anthropological history, a history of man, which only after 1989 could see the light of day.

4. Grasp of the problem

The text of the dissertation shows that Petya Angelova knows well the field, in which she works. In the attached lists, the sources she used are fully, specifically and correctly listed (80 texts from the publications of the opposition parties, 49 documents from the Archives of the Dossier Commission, the Central State Archives and the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past and 14 publications of life histories). At the same time, in a bibliography of 42 titles, Petya demonstrates familiarity with relevant scholarly texts, both by Bulgarian and by foreign authors.

5. Research methodology

The specific tasks of the thesis follow the classic research structure: clarification of concepts; presentation and categorization of the empirical material, collected in the course of the study, and analysis, which is not separated but runs in parallel to the presentation of the material. The method is historical anthropology, and namely, the application of the questions of anthropology to historical materials. More specifically, the two main research methods are predetermined by the tasks: critical reading of the opposition press and archival materials, including those declassified by the Dossier Commission, and the life history method - reflexive search, presentation and interpretation of personal narratives (the main tool of historical anthropology).

6. Assessment of the thesis

The hypotheses that organize the research and legitimize the conclusions, and which the doctoral student calls "expectations" are 1. that the youth "have a key role in the acts of opposing the new government"; 2. that this fact "is due to complex processes, which marked the first half of the 20th century in general, related to the attempts by political actors to capture youth's vital elan and direct it in politically acceptable directions"; 3. that "the most daring acts of resistance will come precisely from the young", although they are aware of the attempts to be used by political formations; and finally 4. "assumption" that the youth will put aside their political differences for the sake of uniting against the ominous one-party rule. I should immediately point out that these assumption in themselves sound self-evident, but the construction of a factual foundation that goes beyond the "self-evident" (the superficial common everyday knowledge) constitutes the main contribution of the research; the text illuminates a period that may well be remote in time but whose understanding is important when trying to make sense of the processes at the beginning of the Twenty-first century.

In the Introduction, Petya Angelova clarifies the definitions of the two main concepts with which she will work - "political" and "resistance", both borrowed from Hannah Arendt, and they are discussed in detail in in the Chapter I, mainly through Arendt's idea of multiplicity of individuals and the efforts of the totalitarian regimes to destroy precisely this multiplicity "by means of specific mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and above all of processing and reworking" (p. 11). H. Arendt's concept of power and her emphasis on people rather than institutions is introduced as well. The importance of the totalitarian power's efforts to destroy the political by severing, or I should say subverting, the relationships between individuals, the horizontal connectivity, is specially discuss. This, we may call it, theoretical part successfully connects the political science concepts with the topic of the dissertation and sets the directions in which the specific phenomena and facts in Bulgaria will find their interpretation.

Chapters Two, Three and Four unfold (and introduce) in several aspects the context of the study, without which an understanding of the "text" would be impossible. I appreciate the doctoral student's efforts to introduce a neat structure of the work, although the themes of major events, political upheavals and their effect on opposition parties; of youth organizations, and of the press are not easy to separate when trying when trying to making sense of a period. The overview of youth organizations and ideological currents is rich and informative, I would note only the difference in the presentation of the young anarchists, where a place is given to motives and the reader begins to see the methodological advantages of studying history with the methods of anthropology. The author is aware of the difference with the parts, devoted to other organizations, but still the dissonance is felt (both in volume and in content).

Against the reconstructed background, we see in Chapter V the ideology of the Soviet-type totalitarian regime: the concept of the "new youth" and its shaping, articulation and imposition in Bulgaria. This ideological trope elucidates and connects the individual facts and processes: Petya Valkova has achieved a very dense narrative, drawing from the classical and the new historical and political science literature and her own interpretations. General commentaries are complemented with excerpts from texts from documents and personal narratives, and I find this to be one of the contributions of the dissertation. The topic is further developed with study of the opposition periodical press, which "plays a crucial role in fulfilling the objectives of the present study" (p. 101). The careful tracking of the themes in these publications on the "youth" and the conditions of their circulation is, as far as I know, a first attempt in Bulgarian research tradition.

Chapter VII returns to the concepts of Hannah Arendt, but already on the ground of concrete facts: the attempts to homogenize youth movements and, in practice, liquidate the political essence. In parallel, the efforts of some of the youth organizations and movements to oppose these attempts are presented. Some of the circumstances and experiments are covered in publications after 1989, but the overall presentation is, again, first in its completeness and methodological enlightenment.

The final chapter examines the actions and activities we usually think of as resistance: the efforts of youth to resist totalitarian pressures in the form of illegal resistance. It is worth noting that the author presents and comments on the facts in a balanced way; some of the material and interpretations included are already known to the interested public, the author's contribution is in drawing on memories and life histories that present a more complete picture. Moreover, this "concise representation of the lives" of specific individuals, in the words of Petya, illustrates how the concepts of totalitarian ideology drive the "isolating mechanism of the socialist state" (p. 225). The conclusion summarizes the contributions of the work as the author sees them and adds an omission that the author is aware of: the lack of discussion on the role of women in these events, which could, probably, become a topic for further research.

7. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice

I pointed out the contributions that I saw in the text above but I would like to single out the two main one, in my opinion: the thesis achieves the most complete picture of the place and role of a particular social group in one of the key periods in Bulgarian history. Secondly, and more importantly, the text is an example of a different way of thinking and writing the history of the recent past: a comprehensive history drawn from different sources and texts, which takes into account the many different factors that shape historical processes, on the one hand, and a parallel consideration of the big *histoire événementielle*, and the small history of the men (and, hopefully, the women).

8. Assessment of the publications on the theme of the thesis

The doctoral student has submitted 5 publications on the topic of the dissertation for the competition and they meet the requirements.

9. Abstract

The abstract is 21 pages long and correctly presents the subject, hypotheses and research methods, as well as the content of the dissertation.

10. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no other remarks and recommendations, other than the one mentioned above.

11. Personal impressions

I have known Petya Valkova Angelova since the time of her studies in the University and I have excellent impressions of her. She possessed both the discipline of a serious student (then), and of a researcher (now), together with the broad thinking and ability to see beyond the facts of a true scholar of culture.

12. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

I would recommend to published the text.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific results, which represent an original contribution and meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Doctoral student Petya Valkova Angelova has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills for independently conduct an academic research.

In light of the above, I confidently give a positive assessment to the presented dissertation and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Petya Valkova.

01.10.2024

Signature:.....
Prof., PhD, R. Gavrilova