



Review of Doctoral Thesis

Title: **Historical Sociology of the Romani Nationalism: Foundations, Development and Challenges**

Type of work: **Doctoral thesis**

Author: **Mgr. Douglas Neander Sambati**

Reviewer: **Prof Elena Marushiakova, University of St Andrews, UK**

In recent years a growing number of young PhD students have chosen a Roma topic for their dissertation's research. As the interest in the Roma topic increases we are witnessing the appearance of many works of extremely varied quality - from excellent academic works and high scholarly achievements in the field of Romani Studies, to numerous ephemeral, low-quality research projects, and even to manipulative and phantasmagorical publications. Luckily, the thesis "**Historical Sociology of the Romani Nationalism: Foundations, Development and Challenges**" by **Douglas Neander Sambati** belongs to the group of successful research works that can be characterised as a scholarly achievement.

The topic of the thesis is extremely demanding in several respects - it presupposes a good theoretical knowledge in the field Nationalism Studies, as well as in field of Romani Studies. At the same time, it assumes specific capabilities to perform desktop and library research, the ability to conduct field research and to communicate with interlocutors from different countries and with different backgrounds. The thesis develops a historical-sociological approach but, as the author correctly states on p. 19, "neither historiographic nor sociological methods would be enough to embrace the complexity which the discussions require. Therefore, a critical interdisciplinary approach" needs to be applied. Not in the last place, the high-quality processing of answering research questions in the selected field requires analytical skills, alongside skills for contextual interpretation. All these abilities of the Ph.D. candidate have been demonstrated in full in his dissertation work.

The text of the dissertation shows independence and originality of thought and judgement. It is well structured, which contributes to the clarity and rigour of the argument. The language and style of writing is academic, but easy to read. The structure of the text is logical, the individual parts are bound together and complement each other. In many places in the work itself, one can find extremely pronounced formulations that can even be used in student teaching.

The introductory part (p.8-14) presents the research work as a whole, put into its respective theoretical framework, and makes necessary terminological clarifications. The introductory part also includes the positionality of the author who has had experience in Brazilian academia and is writing the thesis within the European academic milieu. Here the Ph.D. candidate confesses also the barriers which he faced during his research, among them, his non-fluency in Romani language. And, I would like to add, also the non-fluency in regional languages which could also be seen from his interviews transcripts. However, as can be seen in the text of the thesis, thanks to the good will of the interlocutors, this impediment has not appeared as a serious obstacle for the construction of a relevant debate.

Already in this short introductory part, the strengths of the thesis are clearly visible, such as a good orientation in state of art of his study, familiarity with the most important scholarly works in the fields of Nationalities and Romani Studies and a solid theoretical background. At the same time, however, some shortcomings can be identified. The argument of the thesis is built through literature research, desktop research of relevant documents and data gathered from social media, but based on only 15 days field research trip to 7 countries, which is clearly too short for gaining high quality interactions with a sufficient number of interlocutors, and for a full understanding of their visions. Further in the introduction, the PhD candidate explains: "It was decided not to reveal the identity of those interviewed, due to a belief that it would not affect the interpretations and the discussions" (p.13). When reading the thesis until the end, it became clear that this was a dubious decision. Not only the interlocutors, but also organisations are anonymised in the text (especially in the Annex). The interlocutors, however, are public personalities who share their public visions; all anonymised organisations are public too and the information about their activities is publicly available. Even more, in the transcripts of the interviews enough data is used to make it easily recognisable with whom and about whom the conversation is; at least, I was able to recognise all personalities and organisations without any difficulties. I am sure that most of the author's interlocutors will find it unfair that their names are not quoted, as most of them are willing to share their visions about the issues being discussed. From an ethical point of view, therefore, the PhD candidate should clarify with his interlocutors whether they are willing to reveal their identity or not, and not take the decision without prior consultation.

The Introduction is followed by Chapter 1 "The Roma social movements as one kind of nationalism" (pp. 15-63). It is focused mainly on the discussion of the concepts *Nation* and *State*, the concept of Roma and *Romani Nationalism*; followed by a debate on whether and why *Romani social movements* might be sociologically and historically seen as nationalist movements. Especially in this part the PhD candidate demonstrates a systematic understanding of his field of study, good knowledge of the academic literature, skills to deal with the available scholarly apparatus and to apply that knowledge. I cannot but agree with Douglas' analysis of the specifics of Romani Nationalism (however, I would prefer not to call it Romani Nationalism, but with the possibly more appropriate, at least in context of Eastern Europe, term of "Roma National Movement"). This part discusses the lengthy Declaration of the Nation in an impressive way. However, it misses to point that this Declaration is almost forgotten even by the activists and has no impact on present-day activities and attitudes. Douglas Neander Sambati's excellent analysis of "how the International Romani Union likes to introduce itself as the main political representative of the Roma people around the world" is compromised by his uncritical overestimation of the role of IRU, and by repeating the myths about decision of the 1st WRC congress. In fact, being part of the Roma National narrative today is based not so much on what has actually happened and was decided, but on what is believed to have happened.

In this part, one can also discover another shortcoming; namely an uncritical quotation of data available in the literature, without prior verifying them with the works of other authors, or with

sources. For example, in the table provided on p.21, an unknown organisation in Switzerland from the 15th century is mentioned, alongside another one in Kisfalú from 1879, the existence of both of which being under reasonable doubt, as also expressed by other authors, who are not quoted in the reviewed PhD thesis.

The Second Chapter (pp 64-115), entitled “*The Roma Nation: From intellectually internationalized representations to local practical instrumentalization*”, debates how the PhD thesis sees Romani Nationalism. In this chapter, one can find the most elaborated theoretical parts and some inspirational thoughts. It is not necessary to point all the excellent and convincingly presented ideas and analysis found in this chapter, but I wish to point at least some of them, which I find especially fruitful: the analysis of Roma representation, which underlines their search for recognition and legitimation from stronger international organisations (p.85) and the “legitimation through public consent” (p.86); the analysis of how the WRC/IRU played the rules “knowing how to manage the game of power, inserting oneself within the scheme” (p.90); the change in the character of Romani representation (p.104); the issue of directing the Roma elite to methodological nationalism (p.98), based on the analysis of the internationalisation of the Romani movement and of the role of Western donors in the development of a Roma political agenda (p.92-93); the revealing of the role of Soros, OSF and CEU as a “different arm of Roma nationalism” (p.101) and the legitimisation of OSF right to speak in name of Roma (p. 103); the meaning of being “Roma”, the significance of the language and thoughts that united Gypsies/Roma (pp.108-110). I would like to emphasize here also the courage and the ability of the PhD candidate to deal with difficult topics, such as Holocaust, and connection he makes with Roma nationalism (p.110).

In this chapter, alongside the above mentioned excellent parts one can also, however, discover some inattentively formulated sentences, such as “the so-called socialist countries which, in great majority, were following a Stalinist approach upon Gypsies/Roma, enforcing them as proletarians and not an ethno-national group” (p.95). In fact, this is a mistaken generalisation and it should not be forgotten that it was under Stalin, in the 1920s and 1930s, that the ethno-national development of Gypsies was actively pursued in frame of the so-called policy of ‘korenization’. A similar unjustified generalisation is made on p. 112: “In Romania, a state ruled by Ion Antonescu – a soldier acquainted with Nazi-Fascist ideals – the Gypsies/Roma were transported to the region of Transnistria, where those who were not killed died of cold and starvation”. It should be noted that those transported to Transnistria were only one relatively small part (according to available data, around 25 000 persons), of the numerous Romanian Roma communities.

The third chapter (pp 116-161) discussed in an excellent way the 9 Gypsy/Roma museums (two located in America, four in Eastern Europe and three in Western Europe), and their role as *lieux de memoire*, which are both the outcome and supporters of *Romani Nationalism*, reproducing the practices of representations and the representations of practices, and aiming to create a space where Gypsy/Romani history can be safeguarded. These museums are extremely well-suited to illustrate the main ideas presented in the PhD thesis under review. Douglas Neander Sambati treats them as part of Roma nationalism, where a funding myth is created, repeated and preserved, containing essentialisation, exoticisation and generalisations, all of which are needed for the establishment and development of the National Narrative.

The PhD thesis ends with a summarising chapter, entitled Final Consideration (pp 162-170), References, a List of Images, a List of Tables, and an Annex with transcripts of anonymised interviews conducted with representatives of the Roma activist elite.

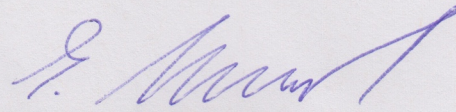
The reviewed PhD thesis shows a high level of professionalism, a good understanding of the subject matter and its research target group. It is an interesting account of the pathways of Roma emancipation as it has been occurring in recent decades, following the experiences of nation building on an international scale. The dissertation examines the current phenomenon of *Romani Nationalism* as “a moving cloud which is appropriated by Romani and Romani-Friendly local NGOs, governments and other organizations adapting the *Roma Nation* to their needs and, in exchange, endlessly changing the set of representations over and over, on and on” (p.10). An in-depth analysis of this "moving cloud" is, in fact, the most significant academic contribution of the reviewed work.

I consider the thesis “**Historical Sociology of the Romani Nationalism: Foundations, Development and Challenges**” by Douglas Neander Sambati to be an important and valuable dissertation which will merit international refereed publication. The text convincingly proves that Douglas Neander Sambati is able to contribute significantly, within academic and professional contexts, to intellectual, social and cultural progress.

Since, as visible from the text of the thesis, the PhD candidate Douglas Neander Sambati is an experienced researcher and his work is of good quality, I have no fundamental objections to the work, that would hinder his successful defense. Therefore, the aim of the minor criticisms in the review is, rather, to direct the author in working towards publishing it, which I personally recommend.

The presented work, both in its content and formally, clearly complies with the PhD thesis criteria. I recommend the work to be admitted for a defense. Because of the importance of the issues tackled and the high intellectual and analytical quality of the work I consider Douglas Neander Sambati worthy to be awarded the academic title "philosophiae doctor" (PhD.)

St Andrews, 16 Nov. 2018



/Prof. Elena Marushiakova/