REVIEW
regarding a dissertation on the topic:
"Attitudes toward War, Social-Group Identity and Individual Aggression"
for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in professional field 3.2. Psychology, Doctoral Programme in Social Psychology
of Yulian Vasilev Haralampiev,
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I. Relevance and Scientific Significance of the Research Problem

The dissertation addresses an undoubtedly topical and significant issue for social psychology – the intersection between social identity, nationalism, patriotism, attitudes toward war and aggression. Under contemporary conditions of geopolitical tension and conflicts, polarization and security crises, such research is not only timely but also socially useful. The relevance of the topic is clearly justified already in the introduction to the dissertation, where the research niche it occupies among related Bulgarian and international studies should have been outlined more explicitly. The work is in fact an attempt to expand the model of the relations among these constructs, examined earlier in the Bulgarian context by Zografova (2002, 2004) and internationally in the classic works by Kosterman & Feshbach (1989), Feshbach (1990) and Druckman (1994), as well as in more recent studies. The author seeks to build on this line of issues that remain insufficiently explored in Bulgaria, constructing an even more complex social-psychological model which, in addition to the aforementioned constructs, also includes various forms of social-group identity, concern for one's own security, and cultural orientations such as individualism and collectivism in an intergroup comparative perspective.

II. General Characteristics and Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation has a standard scope and structure for this type of empirical work. It includes an introduction, three chapters (theoretical review; design of the empirical study; presentation and discussion of the results), limitations, general conclusions, contributions, conclusion, references and appendices. The large number of references used is noteworthy – a total of 298, of which 17 are in Bulgarian and 281 in English, with about 20% of them from the last 5–10 years, which shows a solid grounding not only in the classical literature but also in more recent scientific research. The work includes 46 tables, 12 figures and 10 appendices. It is evident that serious effort has been invested in collecting, systematizing and presenting the research material.

The text is logically organized and has a complete academic structure. A relative balance is observed among the individual parts of the dissertation, with the sole exception that the section discussing the results is unusually brief, which could have been avoided by merging it with paragraph 3.3. Verification of the proposed hypotheses. Directions for future research are not set apart in a separate paragraph, but they are nevertheless included in the conclusion and in the limitations of the study.

III. Theoretical Review and Preparedness

The theoretical review is extensive, ambitious and demonstrates very good awareness of and orientation in the scientific literature, with a focus on the classical approaches and studies related to the problem. A wide range of theories and studies of the main, as well as related, constructs is presented. The author's ability to place the study in the broader context of the existing Bulgarian and international literature on the topic makes a positive impression. I also appreciate

the author's effort to consider the phenomena in their interrelations rather than in a one-dimensional and isolated manner. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the social-psychological factors and correlates of attitudes toward war and self-identification.

Alongside these merits, it should be noted that the theoretical review could be further synthesized and focused on the research problem. Only three key constructs are mentioned in the title – attitudes toward war, social-group identity and personal aggression – but the study adds to them national identity, ethnic identity, socio-professional identity, nationalism, patriotism, individualism, collectivism and concern for one's own security. The inclusion of such a large number of constructs enriches the model, but at the same time creates a risk of conceptual confusion and dilution of the focus. The conceptual field among the different forms of identity is not always sufficiently clearly distinguished. In some places national identity is considered as a type of social-group identity, and in others as a separate phenomenon, which gives rise to ambiguity, including in the interpretation of the results of the empirical study. In future research and publications on the topic, it would be useful for the author to distinguish more clearly between the main and the auxiliary concepts. Brief conclusions at the end of each main paragraph of the review, including a reasoned choice of the conceptual basis for formulating the hypotheses and operationalizing each of the constructs, would significantly improve the connection between the theoretical and methodological chapters.

IV. Assessment of the Research Design and Methodology

The aim of the empirical study is clearly stated in accordance with the developed theoretical review and reflects an effort to trace comprehensively the relations among the variables under study. The tasks set are logically derived, and the hypotheses, formulated on the basis of the review, are aimed at a consistent examination of the relations among the variables outside a general structural model.

I positively assess the fact that, before the main study, which encompassed 276 participants, the author conducted a pilot study with a relatively large sample of 100 participants in order to examine the psychometric properties of the battery of 7 self-report quantitative tools used. It should be noted that most of the instruments were adapted, including shortened and/or partially modified items by the doctoral student after the pilot study through selection of the items with the "highest factor loading", which substantially increases the economy and methodological value of the work. The comparative design of the study, including the comparison among 3 groups – military personnel/security-sector employees, students and pupils, and persons from other professional groups – allows useful comparisons and group profiles to be derived. The author seeks not merely the general level of the phenomena under study, but also their intergroup variations, which adds value and demonstrates serious empirical work.

In methodological terms, the work has other merits as well. Correctly used for examining the psychometric properties of the scales are analyses of internal consistency, the adequacy of the sample and the correlation matrix for factor analysis, as well as exploratory factor analysis. To test the hypotheses, t-tests, one-way ANOVA with post hoc pairwise comparison tests, and linear regression analyses were applied. This demonstrates mastery of a basic toolkit for empirical research.

At the same time, some important comments should be made here. As in most dissertation studies, the sample is non-representative and unbalanced with respect to the sociodemographic characteristics studied (concentrated mainly in the Capital of Bulgaria, with a high share of persons with higher education, and ethnically homogeneous). This requires the results to be interpreted as valid only for the specific sample. The heterogeneity of the group "others –

manufacturing, services, civil administration, teachers" somewhat reduces the analytical precision of the results from the intergroup comparisons, since no correction was applied to avoid Type I errors. This, together with the absence of checks for effect size in the intergroup differences and the comparatively low explained variance in some of the regression analyses, calls for a more cautious interpretation of the differences and effects.

Given that most of the methods are used for the first time in a Bulgarian sample and a large proportion of the items have been shortened or modified, it would be useful to present in more detail the procedure for cultural and linguistic adaptation, the inter-item correlations and the intercorrelations between the subscales for each individual instrument, in order to support content and construct validity. What the author calls "confirmatory factor analysis" is in fact exploratory factor analysis (PCA with Varimax rotation). This is an important terminological and psychometric precision that should be clarified in subsequent publications.

V. Assessment of the Empirical Part – Presentation and Discussion of the Results

The empirical part contains a substantial volume of results from statistical analyses. The author has made efforts to test significant differences by a number of sociodemographic characteristics (profession/occupation, sex, age, education, place of residence) for the set of variables studied, as well as to trace the relations among the key constructs in the overall sample and in separate groups. The results obtained are of interest to social psychology in the Bulgarian context.

Among the key results, the following stand out: - the higher mean values found for national identity, nationalism and attitudes toward war in the group of military personnel and security-sector employees; - the relations between nationalism and attitudes toward war; - the weaker and more complex relation among patriotism, aggression and attitudes toward war; - the associations between concern for one’s own security, some dimensions of individualism/collectivism and aggressive reactions; - an attempt to construct a profile of the different social groups.

The results are presented in a structured and detailed manner and are appropriately illustrated in tables and figures. In places, the interpretation and discussion use terms such as "influence" and "determines", which may imply causality in the relations, whereas the correlational cross-sectional design allows interpretation only in terms of interdependencies. The statement in item 7 about an indirect relationship should be formulated as a hypothesis, since no mediation analysis was conducted.

VI. Assessment of the Contributions

The dissertation has real contributions, which I would outline in the most general terms as follows:

1. In theoretical terms, a large body of scientific literature has been systematized, including theories and models on a topic that until now has not been addressed in the Bulgarian literature in such an integrated form and beyond the key constructs studied earlier by Zografova (2002, 2004). The author succeeds in placing within a common framework various dimensions of social identity, nationalism/patriotism, aggression, attitudes toward war, the cultural dimensions of individualism/collectivism, and concern for one’s own security.

2. In empirical terms, data from a Bulgarian sample are presented on a problem for which there is still insufficient research in the country. This provides grounds for the dissertation to be regarded as a useful basis for future developments.

3. In methodological terms, an attempt has been made to adapt and apply several measurement instruments in a Bulgarian sample. Although this process requires additional

arguments and refinement, it is an important step toward accumulating research instruments in the Bulgarian context.

4. In the scientific-applied aspect, the derived results and group profiles may be useful for civic education and activities related to organizational and military psychology, as well as for further research on group attitudes and perceptions of security.

VII. Recommendations and Questions

In summary, my most important recommendations for future research and publications on the topic are as follows:

1. To strengthen the focus on the key constructs so that the overall model becomes more focused and clear.
2. To refine the terminological distinction among the different types of identity and among the different types of factor analysis.
3. To work with a diverse but also more homogeneous sample by groups.
4. To edit the text and remove some technical, terminological and stylistic inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

The following questions could be formulated for the candidate:

1. How would you justify the inclusion of the construct "ethnic identity" given that the sample is not ethnically diverse?
2. According to what psychological criteria was the group "others" constructed, and what effect might this have on the intergroup comparisons?

VIII. Dissertation Abstract

The submitted author's abstract correctly reflects the structure and content of the dissertation. My only comment here is that on its title page "Dissertation" is written instead of "Author's/Dissertation Abstract".

IX. Publications on the Topic and Fulfillment of the Minimum National Requirements

The submitted documentation includes three publications on the topic of the dissertation, as well as a statement on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements, from which it is evident that the doctoral student not only meets the formal requirements of a minimum of 200 credits/points, but exceeds them by 100 points, reaching a total of 300 points. His activity related to presentations on the dissertation topic at 6 scientific forums also makes a positive impression.

X. Conclusion

In summary, I consider the dissertation to be an independent, topical, complex and comprehensive scientific study on a problem of significance for social psychology. The author demonstrates the ability to analyze and summarize scientific literature, to organize an empirical study, to process data and interpret a complex of interdependencies, as well as to formulate conclusions on an important social-psychological problem. Considerable work has been invested in developing the topic, in collecting data and in analyzing them. Despite some methodological, structural and editorial comments and recommendations aimed at refining the author's future research and publications, I consider that the work has the necessary scientific and scientific-applied qualities to be assessed as a completed dissertation, and that it meets all formal requirements for a doctoral dissertation pursuant to the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Regulations for its implementation. The minimum national requirements under the scientometric indicators have been fulfilled. **On the grounds of the**

foregoing, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation of Yulian Vasilev Haralampiev and propose that the esteemed scientific jury award the author the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology (Doctoral Programme in Social Psychology).

29 April 2026
Sofia

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