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**Review**

**of the dissertation of Radostina Borissova Antonova**

**“The influence of in-group belonging on the life perspectives among young people  
of Bulgarian and Roma origin”**

**for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field**

**3.1. „Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies” (Sociology)**

**1. General characteristics of the dissertation - volume and structure**

The dissertation structure includes an introduction, six chapters of (original) research work, a summarizing discussion, a bibliography and three appendices. Its total volume is 426 standard pages.

The dissertation seems rather large. To some extent, this is justified: the topic is both inter- and intra-disciplinary. On one hand, the doctoral candidate aims to study the influence of ethnicity on the social and emotional development of the personality in young people aged 14-25 years - ethnic Bulgarians and Roma; on their life prospects; on their experiences related to in-group affiliation and intergroup interactions, on their feeling of autonomy or fatalism in their life planning and life-prospects. This presupposes the knowledge and application of specific psychological and social-psychological concepts and research methods. On the other hand, a good knowledge of specific sociological theories in different sociological disciplines/fields is also necessary (e.g. in social stratification; sociology of race, nationalism and ethnicity; sociology of the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic society, sociology of youth, urban sociology and the ghetto, etc.) to understand the impact of nationalism and social exclusion mechanisms on the formation of a vulnerable minority youth life prospects. In addition, the doctoral student was not satisfied with a snapshot of the studied phenomena, but set herself the goal to study the changes in the life prospects of young ethnic Bulgarians and Roma people during the first two decades of the 21st century based on two surveys conducted by herself in 2002 and 2017. However, she cannot be spared the remark

that she could present more concisely both the theoretical concepts and preconditions and her own results from the empirical research.

Ms. Antonova could also improve the structure of the dissertation body text: it is not clear why the goals, objectives and hypotheses of her dissertation, the limitations of the research and the methodology used are presented only in the third chapter.

## **2. Theoretical ground**

Radostina Antonova has a BA in psychology and a MA in psychology of development, culture and education and clinical and counseling psychology. Since 2018, her doctoral studies have focused mainly on the sociology of race, nationalism and ethnicity, the sociology of transition, and the sociology of youth. Her selection of renowned researchers in the field of both social psychology and sociological disciplines deserves admiration. Among them are: A. Tajfel, whose theory of intergroup relations has remained a major scientific paradigm in social psychology for decades; E. Gellner – one of the founders of the sociology of nationalism; W. Wilson J. – one of the most influential researchers of race; L. Wacquant - a brilliant student of P. Bourdieu, one of the most serious researchers of the modern ghetto and in general, the sociology of race and nationalism, as well as cultural anthropologist P. Bourgois. An important role in her theoretical formation play also the publications of some of the most influential theorists and researchers in the field of sociology of transition - I. Szelenyi and P.-E. Mitev, as well as the significant researchers of adolescence and youth P.-E. Mitev and J. Arnett. Ms. Antonova represents their views and main theoretical achievements accurately. It is clearly stated what are their main theoretical positions which she relies on in explaining the social phenomena she explores in her dissertation. Of course, it should be noted the role of her supervisor - Prof. Maya Grekova, for the successful theoretical training of the doctoral student.

The bibliography of the dissertation contains 179 titles, of which 68 in Bulgarian and 111 in English, German and Russian - all of them are important publications in the field studied.

It should be noted also that Radostina Antonova has been working as a psychological consultant, social worker, trainer and researcher in Roma neighborhoods and ghettos for more than 15 years. This, together with her good theoretical training, helps her to analyze the dynamics of the

ghettoization and the processes of social exclusion of Roma in Bulgaria, as well as the influence of ethnicity on the personal development and life prospects of the young representatives of the majority and the most marginalized minority in the country for the last 20 years.

### **Methodological approach**

Radostina Antonova uses a variety of scientific methods of research and analysis:

- desk research (although this is not explicitly noted in the relevant section of the dissertation);

- participant observation of the processes of marginalization and / or development in the "Fakulteta" neighbourhood and of the changes in the gender relations of the different sub-groups in this neighborhood. This qualitative method is not explicitly mentioned in the methodology section, but some of the insightful conclusions in the text in my opinion are based on Ms. Antonova's long-term observations in the neighborhood and not so much on the results of the two empirical surveys she performed in 2002 and 2017;

- two empirical surveys (in 2002 and 2017), whose methodology includes: Richard Harvey's Stigmatization Scale (for Roma youth); adapted questionnaire for measuring identity management strategies, developed by A. Mummendey et al. and by Roberts, Feeney et al.; Dijker and Koomen's questionnaire on accumulated personal experiences during inter-ethnic relations and on the emotions and attitudes towards the other based on personal inter-ethnic experience; a short version of Katz and Brayley questionnaire on ethnic stereotypes; R. Antonova's questionnaire on life perspectives, including questions about plans for the future (next 5 years) and community values; R. Antonova's questionnaire on fatalism.

### **4. Significance of the obtained results, interpretations and conclusions**

The doctoral student carefully outlines the limitations of her analysis and of her empirical research.

She precisely described how the respondents were selected and acknowledged that the data were only partially representative. According to her opinion, the samples are small (156 Roma in 2002 and 103 in 2017; 153 Bulgarian youth in 2002 and 106 in 2017) and "are not representative of the Bulgarian and Roma community as a whole" (it would be more correct to state that they are not representative of young people aged 14-25 from both ethnic communities).

It should be noted that the selection of the Bulgarian respondents in the both waves was also not intended to be representative - they "were recruited both in an informal environment (e.g., gardens/parks and other places for informal communication) and in a formal environment (school, university)". The doctoral student herself comments on the shortcomings of the sample, which are absolutely reasonable. I agree with her self-reflection on the methodology.

Ms. Antonova presents a true and convincing picture of the deepening processes of ghettoization in the Roma neighbourhood. She discusses the impact of decades of mass and deep poverty and social exclusion on the life plans and prospects of Roma youth. Her statement (and its explanation based on Guillaumin, 2002) that members of a repressed minority do not have the freedom to determine their own identity and to choose their own life-plans because they are constantly confronted with both the constraints imposed by the macro-society and those arising from their in-group membership, is very important to note. Her work as a clinical and social psychologist has made her particularly sensitive to the gender roles' differences and gaps, but also to the positive changes of the last twenty years, which are mainly driven by young women and young people with secondary and higher education in Fakulteta neighbourhood. My research in the Hristo Botev neighbourhood in Sofia, in the Roma neighbourhoods in Byala Slatina, Montana, Razgrad, Stara Zagora, the Nikola Kochev neighbourhood in Sliven and in dozens of Roma ghettos in the country gives me the basics to confirm the validity of her observations, their interpretations and conclusions.

As for the Bulgarian youth, the registered results for the growth of conservatism, ethnocentrism, traditionalism / neo-paternalism and fatalism, even among many young people in Sofia make a strong impression, especially against the background of the constant statements by sociologists that Sofia is still a relative "Island of modernity and tolerance" in the country. Her insightful conclusion is that the rapprochement of Bulgarian and Roma youth on the axes of "conservatism", "traditionalism / (neo) paternalism", "fatalism" (i.e. sharing the same / similar values) does not lead to increased trust to peers from the other ethnic group, nor to the experience of positive emotions and experience in their interactions. To a large extent, I also accept her explanations for the observed fact.

## **5. Critical notes to the dissertation**

My critical remarks focus on how to present the comparative empirical data from the two waves of the study conducted by Radostina Antonova. Insufficiently large samples always carry the risk of unjustified generalizations. However, when the data from these small samples are further disaggregated and correlated on more than two grounds (e.g., by gender, educational status, work experience and attitudes), the results should be interpreted with utmost caution. I am afraid some of the comparative data and/or correlations in the text are not presented this way.

## **6. Scientific contributions**

I accept the report on the scientific contributions formulated by the candidate, although I believe that it needs more clarity and specificity of the wording of the first three contributions.

The doctoral student has established and presented many new scientific facts, which is a scientific contribution. They confirm the truth of the theories explaining them and enrich these theories, increase the sphere of their validity - they show that they are valid under Bulgarian conditions. These new facts and explanations could be applied both in the formulation of better targeted policies and more adequate measures to reduce interethnic disparities and to stop the processes of ghettoization in the country, as well as in the specific work of professionals providing pro-social services in marginalised communities.

I accept the reference for the fourth contribution - the author herself has developed structured questionnaires for life prospects and for measuring attitudes on the axis of autonomy / fatalism. This methodological contribution is original.

## **7. Assessment of the quality of the doctoral student's scientific works related to the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for the respective scientific degree**

Radostina Antonova has published three scientific articles in Bulgarian scientific journals, each of which has been reviewed by at least two scientists working in the field and finalized in accordance with the recommendations adopted by the author:

- Antonova, R. (2002) The laws of the ghetto. *Psychological Research*, 5 (2), pp. 99-114;

- Antonova, R. (2011) Life prospects for representatives of Roma origin. *Clinical and Counseling Psychology*, 3 (9), pp.25-33;

- Antonova, R. (2019) The influence of education on the experience of stigmatization and life prospects for young people from the Roma ethnic community. *Sociological Problems*, 51 (2), pp. 609-633.

With these publications, Ms. Antonova meets the minimum national requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree. In addition, she is a co-author of at least two more scientific publications in the field of social psychology, close to the dissertation topic.

#### **8. To what extent the research on the dissertation is mainly a personal work of the candidate**

I know well a significant part of the publications of Bulgarian authors on the problems of ethnicity (and especially those on Roma) and I confirm that the research and the dissertation are mostly a personal work of the candidate. The used sources of scientific information are correctly documented and cited according to the standards in force in the Republic of Bulgaria.

#### **9. Conclusion**

I recommend that the Scientific Jury and the Scientific Council of the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University should award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.1. "Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences" (Sociology) to Radostina Borisova Antonova.

Sofia, October 25, 2021,

Prof. Dr. Ilona Tomova