



OPINION¹

on the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Multiculturalism and Media), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in SJ, issue 61/ 02.08.2022

Reviewer: Prof. Andreana Eftimova, DSc

Candidate (s): Assoc. Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov

I. Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the scientific and educational production submitted for participation in the competition

The publications proposed for evaluation in the competition are respectable with their focus on several important problems for society and with their number - 1 monograph, 11 studies and 12 articles.

In the monograph "Discriminated or it's our own fault" (University of St. Kliment Ohridski, 2021), Assoc. Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov confronts the structural and cultural explanation for the low quality of life and education of the Roma and African-American communities and at the same time uses them as an explanation when comparing them. An achievement is the grouping of the causes of ethnic, racial and religious conflicts: (1) prejudice and ethnocentrism; (2) competition for limited resources and (3) fundamental differences in values and norms (p. 20).

The chapters dealing with the situation of the Roma and African-American communities are built according to a similar thematic-structural scheme. In both the first and second chapters, pages are devoted to the history, main groups and identity layers of the Roma minority in Europe and Bulgaria, as well as to the contemporary situation of blacks in the USA. It makes an impression that the presented data is commented on in the coordinate system set at the beginning - through the clash of the structural with the cultural explanation for the situation of the Roma and African-American communities. This approach allows the monograph to be organized around a clear conceptual core and emphasizes the psycho-social analysis of the phenomena under consideration. The cultural features of Roma and African-Americans, due to which they are usually stigmatized by the majority, are thoroughly examined: self-segregation, early marriages and births without marriage, collectivist attitudes, short-term time orientation, oral cultural traditions, non-compliance with the principles of the macro-society. African-American culture is defined not only as a culture of poverty and the lower class, such as the culture of the Roma minority, but also as a culture of resistance.

A special emphasis is placed on the theories about the determining role of the social environment and stratification (K. Marx, M. Weber) as an intersection of the structural and cultural factors responsible for the stigmatization of the ethnic minority and hindering the integration of Roma in Bulgaria and African-Americans in USA. In connection with the essential question of the integration potential of societies, the five types of relations between

¹ Note: Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages.



majority and minority (extermination, expulsion, assimilation, segregation and integration) are discussed, as well as tolerance, which is overestimated as a community value in our country. In connection with integration policies, the first chapter provides a comparative analysis of the attitudes towards the Roma community and other minority groups - Armenians, Jews, Turks, and in the second chapter - the situation of African-Americans and other immigrant groups - Asians, African immigrants, the Latinos. Prof. Kirilov supports his reasoning through the method of case studies, presenting the situation of ethnic interaction after the flood in "Asparuhovo" (pp. 164-166). In the second chapter, emphasis is placed on the special identity of immigrants - the relationship with their homeland and with the new country. In this context, the relationship between African and Asian immigrants (Somalis, Congolese, Bhutanese, Nepalese, Myanmarese) and African-Americans in the American city of Syracuse is examined based on fieldwork data.

Particularly interesting is the analysis of the possibilities for the integration of the Roma minority in Bulgaria from the point of view of political will and benefit. For this purpose, four prevailing political-ideological discourses in modern Bulgarian society are examined: social democracy, liberalism, conservatism and nationalism. In my opinion, this model in our country would be bipolar according to the acceptance or rejection of the ideology and discourse of political correctness as a strategy for the inclusion of minorities - the liberal political formations, on the one hand, and the conservative, socialist and nationalist political formations, on the other hand.

The presented results for the two communities confirm the idea of concentric circles of tolerance - "groups whose culture is closer to that of the host society can be integrated more easily than those with a different culture" (p. 273).

In the third part of the study, the image of the Roma in mass media and cinema is analyzed through the ideas of ethnocentrism, nationalism, prejudice, as well as through Thomas's theorem (the self-fulfilling prophecy), according to which, if people define certain situations as real, then they subsequently become real. The issue of the language of hate is also treated here, which necessitates the need to formulate the contributing rules for the objective reflection of the different people: striving for a preliminary neutral attitude; search for real facts, not rumors and assumptions; avoiding definite and hasty conclusions; securing the perspective of both groups; avoiding hate speech; avoiding the search for collective responsibility and blame; an attempt at empathy. The analysis of the representation of the Roma in the mass media is based on several specific cases - the clash in "Krasna Polyana" (2007), the conflict in Katunitsa (2011), the murders in the quarter "Dimitar Milenkov" (2013), the clash in Asenovgrad (2017), the conflict in Vojvodina (2019). A detailed chronological follow-up of publications on the conflicts has been carried out, commenting on the debates raised during and after the incidents. The findings show differences in media coverage, noting the search for collective guilt and punishment, the raising of problems of Roma integration and the transfer of conflicts from the domestic to the ethnic level. In connection with the considered cases, the question of the regulation of the Internet space is also raised. A special place is also given to the minority media and their role in overcoming or the danger of intensifying social tensions and conflicts between ethnic groups. The image of Roma in the cinema is based on a broad temporal and geographical context - in Bulgarian, Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav, Soviet and post-Soviet, Hungarian, Polish and Romanian cinema. In the earlier film works, their image is associated with the romantic and exotic image of the group, while the later works are committed to a realistic depiction of the hard Roma life.



The results of everything done are systematized in the conclusion, which summarizes that the systemic and cultural explanations for the situation of these ethnic groups are interrelated - discrimination and racism of the macro community drive the development of lower class traits and the culture of poverty in these communities. The lack of a workable integration model leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy - the reinforcement of the notion that Roma and African-Americans cannot integrate. Taking into account the division of "us-groups" and "them-groups", as well as concentric circles of tolerance, is an important step towards understanding conflicts, and the care that citizens get used to and accept cultural diversity should be taken by the institutions, the media, educational structures and civil society. Skepticism in Bulgaria towards multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism is due to political influences, immigration, terrorism and civil wars in Middle Eastern countries.

A major contribution of the study is that it contains data from field studies and qualitative methods such as observation, informal and in-depth interviews. Data are supplemented by secondary analysis of representative surveys, statistics and media publications. The parameters of the field studies in Bulgaria and in the USA are described in great detail - duration, location and zoning, brief descriptions of the localities. The choice of the field of the study was motivated by a significant event, due to which the area came into the focus of the media. As a result of this information, it is possible to assess the huge time period (about 10 years) in which the research procedures were carried out, as well as to take into account the difficulties associated with the orientation and understanding of phenomena functioning in a foreign sociocultural environment, with which Assoc. Prof. Kirilov has done more than brilliantly.

The theoretical basis of the research covers studies in Bulgarian and in English, whose ideas are included unobtrusively in the text of the monograph, and their list at the end of the book respects with an impressive volume and variety.

In addition to the monographic research, the colleague presents 11 studies and 12 articles in renowned domestic and foreign editions. His texts focus on the problem of media coverage of war conflicts and minority groups, as well as their treatment in cinema. The points of view to the problem go through the information war, intercultural dialogue and tolerance as a valuable cultural orientation.

The presented research has a high scientific, scientific-applied and educational value. In addition to bringing new facts through the application of various methods to confirm key explanatory theories, the results of Assoc. Prof. Kirilov's research have a significant social effect - they help to understand the slipping integration of minorities and to optimize integration policies. Without unnecessary escalation of differences, a clear interpretation of the current situation of minorities is offered, taking into account all factors influencing their interaction with the majority, with other minorities and with institutions. The resurrection and renewed interpretation of concepts used in American sociology from the beginning of the 20th century is a contribution to the reading of the processes taking place in culturally heterogeneous societies. The conclusion that even within minorities "us-groups" and "them-groups" are constructed has a high explanatory value when considering social tensions. Highlighting the role of the media (news media and cinema) in the representation of social, national and religious conflicts brings the essential educational capacity of the research. By demystifying the techniques of propaganda and manipulation, Assoc. Prof. Kirilov intervenes in the current debates about the need to increase media literacy.

II. Notes and recommendations



Assoc. Prof. Kirilov is a recognized and quoted author by a number of our and foreign researchers. He is the supervisor and/or member of six projects that are closely related to the research issues outlined in his publications. He also supervises dozens of graduate students, as well as doctoral students, one of whom successfully defended his thesis. In recent years, Assoc. Prof. Kirilov actively participates in the activities of the faculty - a brilliant moderator of panels in scientific conferences; responsible member of committees whose decisions depend on the development of young scientists and doctoral students and the scientific activity of the teaching staff; Head of the History and Theory of Journalism Department. By his own example, he maintains the academic atmosphere of tolerance, respect and autonomy of thought and speech on a daily basis.

The documentation of the colleague for application in the announced competition for professor is complete. The minimum national requirements under art. 2b of ZRASRB are covered and even exceeded.

III. Conclusion

Based on my high assessment of the overall scientific, teaching and academic activity of Assoc. Prof. Svetlozar Kirilov, I propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to support his election as a "professor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Multiculturalism and Media). I will definitely vote in favor of his election.

Jury member: Prof. Andreana Eftimova, DSc

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