

REVIEW

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Review of the scientific output of Associate Professor, Doctor of Sociological Sciences Milena Yakimova Yakimova, applicant for the academic position “Professor”, announced by the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Faculty of Philosophy, higher education area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology - Sociology of Power) in issue 65 of *Durzhaven vestnik* (State newspaper – official legal bulletin) of 28 July 2023.

Associate Professor, Doctor of Sciences Milena Yakimova is the only applicant for the academic position “Professor” in professional strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology - Sociology of Power), announced by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. The position requirements are comprehensively matches by the academic, scientific and educational profile of the applicant, comprising her professional accomplishments, her work as a university lecturer and research output.

Milena Yakimova was born on 20 May 1969. She received MA in Sociology from Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ in 1992. In 2003, she obtained a PhD in Sociology after successfully defending her thesis entitled “Late Modernity and Identity (Sociological Conceptualizations of Modernity)”. From October 1996 to September 2002, she was an assistant professor at the Department of Ethnology and Sociology of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, from October 2002 to September 2010 - a senior assistant professor, and from October 2010 - an associate professor at the Department of Sociology of Sofia University. She teaches courses in Political Sociology, Sociology of Power, and Qualitative Methods in Sociology, Social Theory and Pragmatism, Sociology of Personality, Sociology for Non-Specialists and Civic and Intercultural Education. In 2016 she defended successfully her second dissertation on “Social critique and practice: theoretical dilemmas and practical mechanisms” and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Sociological Sciences. She specialized in Phenomenological Sociology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, November 1991 – February 1992, Social History and Urban Studies at the House of Sciences for Human and Society, Sofia – Paris, 2006 – 2007 and critical social theory: american readings at Dartmouth College, USA, February – May 2014.

The extremely significant professional activity of associate professor Milena Yakimova systematically and undeterred focuses on academic work, in which she

uncompromisingly demonstrates both committed and responsible, as well as impressive in its results personal presence. Yakimova's academic and public appearances reveal a critical orientation towards a thorough reflection on key, extremely topical and thematically relevant, socio-historical problems. His entire oeuvre (consisting of three authored and four co-authored monographs (two in English), five studies (two in English), forty-nine articles (thirteen in English) plus nine edited volumes, seven issues of the Critique and Humanism journal, and two of anniversary volumes, as well as a co-authored 11th grade Civics Education textbook) represent "the opus of a human life", recreated in academic terms, that is distinguished by methodological and theoretical innovation of author-created ideas, combined with an intensely developing analytical sensitivity to empirical reality. It is a confirmation of a full-bodied fulfilment of life experience in which the understanding of a profession inseparable from the notion of a vocation is rooted in the principled coincidence between extraordinary sociological competence and penetrating cognitive ability through the ceaseless searching for and finding of the profound personal meaning of one's own scholarly endeavours. To be humanities scientist-professional in our global contemporaneity means to be a creator, architect, and ambassador of new knowledge about human being in his historically varying social world. Our mission is not to strive, albeit with unremitting persistence, care, patience, modesty and attention, for what is socially acceptable and scientifically recognized, what is legitimate to know, but instead at what allows us to liberate ourselves from our own selves. How significant would our will to know be, how valuable would our pursuit of knowledge be, if it were to ensure only the acquisition of knowledge, and not the questioning of the knower, the knowing subject? For what is humanitarian reflection in one of its indispensable parts if not the critical work of thinking over oneself? Moreover, if instead of legitimizing what already really known, does it not consist in the endeavour to understand, how and to what extent it is possible, to think in a different way? "Experience" – which is the changing trial of the self in the endless games of truth, not the elementary appropriation of the other for the purposes of communication - is the foundation of sociological science on the principle condition that it to be understood as an opportunity for systematic critical work on our own thinking.

Milena Yakimova has a vitally calling to create new humanitarian knowledge, thinking creatively and constantly re-creating herself.

Associate professor Milena Yakimova fully complies with all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the internal regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the position "professor". She

participated in the competition with an impressive volume, content and quality of scientific production, which substantially exceeds the set normative criteria repeatedly, and which published after her habilitation. Her monograph *Fear and Propaganda*. "East-West Press", Sofia, 2022, 238 pp. is immediately accompanied by four studies (two in English), sixteen articles (six in English and one in Russian; three co-authored) and four authors chapters of collective monographs, published in prominent scientific journals and academic collections. Virtually all of the publications are at not only an extremely high professional level, but also integrated into an overall coherent research programme whose sociological significance, originality and innovation are superlative. Furthermore, this agenda has also transforms into an educational one, because it shapes the academic profile of the lecture courses that associate professor Yakimova teaches and through which many students from different educational levels have passed. This conclusion supported by the fact that she has been the supervisor of five PhD students in sociology, who have successfully defended their dissertations: at present, three of them, already hold the academic position of senior assistant professor. Undoubtedly, she ranks among the most dedicated, respected and praised lecturers both at the Faculty of Philosophy and at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The ability to recreate systematically sociological research into academic teaching by fully constructing/modulating the relationship between a researcher and a lecturer through the key function of the scientist-writer is extraordinary challenge, which associate professor Yakimova overcomes successfully by consistently matching these two professional roles.

The monograph of associate professor Milena Yakimova *Fear and Propaganda* is extremely topical (in terms of the genealogy and archaeology of the new anti-liberal propaganda), significant (in terms of the current state of philosophical and scientific reflections on the analysed social problem), original (in terms of the methodological approach used and the selection of the empirical material), grounded (in terms of the degree of argumentation and the level of evidentiality of the author's conclusions) and contributory (in terms of the reliability of the results obtained and the validity of the conclusions drawn) sociological research.

First, why does this monograph constitute topical research? Because the critical-reflective choice of an extremely important social problem, its precise formulation into a rigorous scientific task and the correct fixation of the limits of the sociological subject are its irrevocable and acknowledged achievements. To think, understand and interpret

propaganda as a direct, immediate, but “invisible to the naked eye”, therefore, unprematized and unthematized in/from everyday consciousness comprehensive impact on mass attitudes through manipulative transformation of the mental categories through which people perceive themselves, orienting themselves and non-acting in global reality, in short, to bring the social effects of the propaganda picture of the world into the analytical focus of one's scholarly interest is to uncover and justify key historical conditions of (dis)possibility of human agency in contemporary societies.

Second, why does this monograph a significant research? Because it emphatically demonstrates a comprehensive, coherent and detailed knowledge of both the critical reflection through which the analytical movement of the exposition unfolds, and the current state of research building the thematic constellation of accumulated knowledge in the problem field. The qualitative diversity of the precisely used philosophical writings, sociological and psychological texts, media publications, journalistic statements and empirical data construct the theoretical premises for an interpretive understanding of the regime of governmentality of human behaviours embodied and applied by contemporary propaganda: “governmentality of and through fragmentation of the social tissue” (p. 114); they serve as a secure basis in refining the scope of objectives, establishing the degree of reliability of hypotheses, and sustaining the level of validity of results.

Third, why does this monograph an original research? Because in a highly successful way it applies a polyparadigm approach: a consistent methodology, built and adapted to the qualitative specificities of the object of study through a step-by-step examination, supplementation and correction of critical theory, political sociology, cognitive psychology, discourse analysis and media studies. The conjunctural re-working and consistent homogenization of the notions “white and black propaganda, levels of public irritability, and hate speech” of H. Lasswell, “organizing myth, homogeneous discourse, and types of propaganda” of J. Ellul, “perception management” of S. Ewen, “chain of equivalence” of E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe, “conspiracy theory and paranoid thinking style” of R. Hofstadter, “nodal point and reification of signifiers” of D. Howarth, A. Norval and Y. Stavrakakis, “symbolization of unconscious desires, representations of reality, and affective reversal” of E. Bernays, “propaganda efficacy, truth, and falsehood” of H. Becker, “defective ideology and propaganda effect” of J. Stanley, “myth of inevitability and ambivalence of risk” of R. Rorty, “demagogue, enemy and victim” of L. Loeventhal and N. Guterman, “principal, author and animator” of E. Goffman, “media and journalistic field” of P. Bourdieu, “climate of opinion and spiral of silence” of E. Noel-

Neumann, “fear and anxiety” of Z. Freud, “forms of fear and schizoid personality” of Fr. Riemann, “affect, resonance and interference” of Br. Massumi, “emotion, cognitive processing and unconscious cognition” of W. Reddy, “anxiety, danger and fear” of J. Deleumot, “domestication of chance, representations of probability and signified dangers” of I. Hacking, “inevitability of failure, loss of self-esteem, and self-destruction of the self” of T. Burns, “crisis of authority, paresis, and risk” of M. Foucault, “framing signal and metacommunication” of Gr. Bateson, “nationalism, national feeling, and wounded consciousness” of I. Berlin, etc. not only build cognitive tools for their relevant application to the language, vocabulary, and effects of antiliberal propaganda, but are also conditions of possibility for extraordinary scholarly achievement: how propaganda works effectively in practice – through complex and comprehensive influence in order to “direct impressions” (p. 28), “diffuse emotion into the mass” (p. 47) and “change attitudes for action” (p. 29) - in order to organize existing heterogeneous anxieties, frustrations and grievances, i.e. experiences of injustice that form diverse layers of social vulnerability, into a coherent and plausible picture of the world.

Fourth, why does this monograph a justified research? Because in terms of the degree of argumentation and the level of evidence, its generalized conclusions are credible, valid and reliable; that is, they are theoretically generated and empirically verified true knowledge. They have arrived at through a single synthetic process in several analytical runs. First, a deconstruction of the discursive mechanisms, figures and techniques organizing and coordinating the media's antiliberal (in fact anti-democratic) messages-representations of the symbolic dimension of reality, and consequently, a demystification of the propaganda picture of the world as a manipulative substitute and demoralizing expression of populist grievances in contemporary Bulgarian society. Second, a reconstruction of the logic, architectonics and mode of operation, the collapse of the journalistic field as a distinct and specific space of critical communication, a correlation of forces, accumulated capital and legitimate positions – “journalism as the empowerment of the public to make informed decisions on the issues of the day, as a professional work partially autonomous from the powerful of the day” (p. 120). Thirdly, a diagnosis of the discontents, anxieties and frustrations that propaganda subtly shapes for the mass individual into a consistent picture of the world and into certain expectations of an inevitable fatalistic future, and effectively manipulates by relabelling categories of thought, applying a demoralizing strategy, creating public cynicism, absolutizing public inaction and delegitimizing civil society.

Fifth, why does this monograph a contributory research? Because the reflexive choice of a super-significant analytical subject, the application of a polyparadigm methodological approach and the selection of adequate empirical material are the conditions for the possibility of building, adapting and testing the conceptual chain – social anxiety – fear management – propaganda effect – social governmentality – as a relevant cognitive tool for the critical study of the propaganda picture of the world, its degree of intensity and level of effectiveness. Propaganda is not a lie or truth, nor is it disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theory, populist critique or discursive practice; it is an all-encompassing and complex political technology of governmentality of the human behaviours in fragmented societies, whose fragmentation reproduces and multiplies – a “plausibility production machine” and “attitude change techniques for action” – articulating heterogeneous experiences of injustice in a homogeneous vocabulary: “dissatisfaction with insufficient meritocracy and dissatisfaction with constant competition” (p. 19). How, in what exemplary and canonical way, it functions efficiently: the propaganda effect is to organise, channel and codify existing social anxiety through endlessly repeated elementary operations, signs and figures that transform it into fear. The transformation of diffuse anxiety into mythic fear, hence, the attachment of real, potential, and virtual dangers to it, is a rational behavioural control strategy. It is a social governmentality that subordinates, directs, and guides the whole of society, stepping on power-constructed expectations and creating basic attitudes for manipulated action. “The basic mechanism that transforms fear into governmentality, i.e. channels it and drives it to a readiness of action, is its transformation into grievance, or to put it another way, into resentment“ (p. 168).

One contribution of utmost importance, you give completeness to the others – as with inner conviction and academic honesty I acknowledge the original authorship of all the contributions formulated and justified by associate professor Yakimova – of the monograph and other publications is: the problematization, thematization and verification of the concept of (de)(re)localization. Its explanatory force is extremely important as it helps us understand what particular diffuse anxiety transformed into an objective mythic fear; a propaganda effect constructing an environment of negativity made up of circulated dangers, a power and cognitive object of social governmentality. The fear of delocalization is a sociological indicator of the historical disintegration of the relationship between social space, social recognition and normative principles; conversely, the drive to relocalize is a civic attempt to reinterrelate social positions, recognition and normativity, but it is recoded

in propaganda terms: the lost sense of self-respect and pride is replaced by the victim's sense of moral superiority. A victimized Bulgarian society where social resentment prevails and social action is meaningless.

In my opinion, from today onwards, anyone defining himself as a humanitarian scientist who will conduct his research in critical theory, sociology of power and political sociology, discourse analysis and media studies, and who will be guided by the principles of academic ethos and scientific honesty should recognize the extremely significant achievements of associate professor Milena Yakimova, to know in details and refer correctly to her monograph *Fear and Propaganda*.

Conclusion: Based on the theses, arguments, and evidence I have substantiated above, I am internally convinced – and intellectually pleased to declare – that Associate Professor, Doctor of Sociological Sciences Milena Yakimova Yakimova is a scientist with exceptional professional achievements and an outstanding university lecturer. The overall teaching, research, publishing and public activities of associate professor Yakimova is an unequivocal defence of her candidacy for the academic position of Professor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology - Sociology of Power). As a member of the Scientific Jury I will unconditional vote “YES” for the choosing of her candidature for this position.

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Sofia

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