

## STATEMENT

from Assoc. Prof. Ana Luleva, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnography Museum, BAS, member of the academic jury for the competition for the academic position “Professor”, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Theory and history of culture. Oral history and memory studies), announced by Sofia University, and published in the State Gazette, issue N 21 / 13.03.2020

on the research and academic achievements of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr Daniela Koleva

Assoc. Prof. Dr Daniela Koleva is the only candidate in the said competition. She has submitted for it an impressive research production, considerably exceeding the minimal national standards for the academic position of ‘professor’. The list of her publications comprises a monograph, eight edited volumes and 25 articles and book chapters published by Bulgarian and international publishers. In addition, Assoc. Prof. Koleva has authored scholarly reviews and translations; has been active in research projects and networks; has advised several PhD students and has a long teaching experience at the Department for History and Theory of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University.

Koleva’s academic publications are primarily in the field of memory studies, and in their majority are related to the memory of communism in Bulgaria.

The memory of the communist past is also the topic of her monograph *Memory and Justice: Personal Reminiscences and Public Narratives of Communism* (IIBM/Ciela 2020, 365 p.). This work is the result of many years of research, as well as of the author’s specialization in the field of oral history – a specialization and analytic skills that she convincingly demonstrates in the second part of the monograph, titled “Mnemonic narratives and communities of memory”. Before that, the reader is introduced to the theoretic ‘toolkit’ of the study and to the macro context – the European context of the construction of national memory cultures, the policies of memory related to the communist past, and the institutions of memory (archives, museums, memorials).

The monograph is very well structured in congruence with the research aim to examine the memory of the communist past in its various manifestations – the official, institutionalised one, intimately linked to the policies of memory; the public one, present in the public space through works of art and various artefacts in the cultural memoryscape; and – as the author defines it – the everyday, or ‘vernacular’ memory, referring in this way to the personal and collective memory. The main focus of interest is the interaction and mutual influence of these layers of memory.

The research questions are: “How is the recent past remembered and which circumstances condition this remembrance? How is communism/socialism constituted as public and cultural memory? Are these processes different in different postcommunist countries? Do they influence each other? Who remembers and what is the effect of the remembering on the relations between individuals and groups? What is the relation between the official and the vernacular memory? Between memory and justice? Which cultural models and forms are included in the sharing of narratives of the past? How are personal memories

influenced by public vocabularies, images and tropes?” (pp. 13-14). These research questions point towards a constructivist understanding of memory and towards its analysis as a cultural practice, which is implemented in a certain social and cultural context.

Chapter one, “Memory and narrative, or the toolbox” (pp. 25-64), lays out a review of the key theoretical ideas that guide the research. In a very good and useful way, the author introduces concepts and theses, which have their important place and history in the field of memory studies – collective memory, communicative and cultural memory, memory cultures and politics of memory. The relevant approaches towards the analysis of the narratives of the past are discussed, as well as their relations to the kinds of memory.

Next comes Part 1, which is titled “Politics of memory and memory cultures” and includes the following chapters: “The new Grand Narrative: coping with the past”, “Politics of justice: the transitional justice” and “Politics of recognition”. Several important topics are discussed in this part, directly linked to the culture of memory that has emerged during the postsocialist period: the debates around the working out of common politics of memory in the EU, the Bulgarian case of transitional justice, the archives, the institutions of memory, public memoryscapes and the museumisation of communism/socialism as an articulation of the politics of recognition.

Here, the author has very aptly incorporated the transnational perspective, which is necessary for the contextualisation of the national policies of memory in the former socialist countries, which are now EU member-states. The confrontation of politicians and the civil society in the EU institutions (the Council of Europe, the European Parliament) on the arena of the past, the successful and the failed agreements on common European frames of the public memory, reflect national political confrontations and aims, tensions and coalitions of the party families in the European Parliament, and eventually affect the construction of the memory cultures in Eastern Europe. No doubt, the European context and the comparative perspective towards the other East-European countries are necessary and helpful for the understanding of the Bulgarian memory culture and the tendency towards its ‘europeanisation’ (i.e. insertion into European frames), which is to be observed from the pre-accession period on. In this part of the book, drawing on a considerable number of publications on the topic, Koleva convincingly outlines the main points of tension in the European discourse on the continent’s totalitarian past.

Chapter 3 is entitled “Politics of justice: the transitional justice”. Its contents includes: “Legal condemnation and criminalisation of the communist regime”, “Justice for the victims” (structured into: “Rehabilitation” and “Restitution of expropriated property”), “Seeking responsibility from the perpetrators – from the legal to the moral sphere” (including “Punishment” and “Lustration”). Thus it is clear that the author does not only take into account the ‘restorative justice’ („възстановително право“), but the measures, applied partly or entirely in various countries, described in the literature with the concept of ‘transitional justice’. Indeed, the Bulgarian translations of this concept vary („справедливост на прехода“, „право на прехода“, „правосъдие в условията на преход“ – in the official documents), but it cannot be assumed that the translation as „възстановително право“ has been “accepted”. The source cited by the author in *Praven sviat* journal does not offer such justification either. Restorative justice („възстановително правосъдие“) is a concept denoting a paradigm of alternative justice, contrary to the punitive-repressive one. In the

broadest sense, this is a process whereby the parties to a criminal act decide together how to cope with its consequences. It suggests voluntary personal participation and communication between the two parties (victims and perpetrators), restoring the social relations after expressions of regret and forgiveness, social mediation, etc. Measures that have the nature of restorative justice (възстановително правосъдие) are an element of the transitional justice (правосъдието в условията на преход), but this does not make restorative justice synonymous with transitional justice. As is to be seen from Koleva's text, the measures applied after the end of the communist regime go beyond the scope of the restorative justice. The acts of recognition for the suffering of the victims and their compensation, as well as the restitution as a way to restore the status quo ante, can be considered a form of restorative justice, but the punitive measures and the lustration are a form of retributive justice (възмездно, наказателно правосъдие). All these measures aim at the restoration of justice and setting new legal norms, designated with the generalising term „transitional justice“, after the end of the regime that had abused human rights. Perhaps the misunderstanding with the inappropriate translation of „transitional justice“ and the substitution of its meaning with “restorative justice” could have been avoided if the author had cited authoritative authors in the field such as J. Elster, R. Teitel, J. Borneman, as well as the study on Bulgaria by M. Metodiev (Metodiev 2009).

In “The politics of recognition” Koleva refers to “The archival revolution”, “Politics of truth and institutions of memory”, where she outlines the work of the history commissions established in some East-European countries, which had the task to craft a new historical narrative, as well as the institutes of memory and the challenges they face in their work. Finally, she discusses the memorialisation and museumisation – the establishment of monuments to the victims, commemorative rituals and museum narratives. In this section (“Museum narratives of communism”) the ‘politics of recognition’ are illustrated with cases from other countries (Albania, the Baltic countries, Germany), whereby the absence of a museum of communism and its victims in Bulgaria comes into sharp relief.

The second part of the monograph is dedicated to two types of narratives formed in biographical memory: the traumatic one and the nostalgic one. As I noted at the beginning, this is the part in which Daniela Koleva demonstrates her skills at the analysis of the oral interviews that she has recorded, herself or with her colleagues, for many years. Both topics – cultural trauma and nostalgia – are introduced with comprehensive comments on the relevant literature. The “Belene case”, i.e. the local memory of the camp, is discussed as an example of traumatic memory and its dynamics. Koleva analyses the latter in the context of cultural trauma and its sublimation through a “politics of pity”.

The last chapter, “Sorrow, almost hope: nostalgic narratives”, is rich in associations. The author claims that “the nostalgic narrative is mostly a product of popular culture and everyday memory, i.e. it is exclusively vernacular” (p. 267). In the sample of biographical interviews with individuals born in the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, the author has found certain commonalities described as “tropes, topoi and plots” to be found in the sketches of the “Everyday socialism”, “Solidarity in the micro-community”, “Tranquility and certainty”, “The lost values”. Every one of these common sites of the memories can be the focus of a special analysis in the context of the historical-sociological and the historical-anthropological research on the socialist everyday. In this case, of course, this is not needed.

Based on the outlined common sites in the memories, the author comes to the conclusion that “the first socialist generation can be regarded as a mnemonic community” (p. 313), which could be defined as nostalgic (“A nostalgic generation?”). In her understanding of generation she draws on Karl Mannheim’s classical theory, according to which the defining characteristics of a generation are the shared experiences and the shared (collective) memories of certain events that the members of the generation have lived through at the same stage of their lives. A number of Mannheim’s followers have developed further this idea and the concept of “generation” has been successfully applied to the analysis of biographical sources together with those of “class”, “race”, “gender”. In her particular case, discussing the narratives of individuals born in the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, Daniela Koleva argues: “Even a cursory review of the biographical trajectories of the first socialist generation shows the common tendency toward upward social mobility: as a rule, the interviewees’ education is higher than that of their parents, and many of them have professions and qualifications that were inaccessible or even unthinkable for their parents, most of whom used to be agriculturalists. The rural-urban migration in most cases has meant not only spatial but also social mobility “ (p. 318). I would completely agree with this conclusion if, instead of “generation”, the author had used “generational unit” (Generationseinheit) – another very important concept introduced by Mannheim and also mentioned by Daniela Koleva in the summary of his theory. I think that it is better suited for the description of the cohort born in the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, that experienced upward social mobility after the establishment of the new regime in 1944. For others of their coevals, the 9-September coup d’etat and the repressions after it put an end to their life projects for study, professional realisation, keeping the family traditions in the liberal professions, etc. This was the fate of the youth of the “first socialist generation” who went through the camps and the prisons of the communist regime and they do not nearly identify themselves as “builders of socialism”, but rather as its victims. This is my impression from interviews with men and women who experienced the 9-September coup and the ensuing purges in their youth (Лулева 2008). When they talk about their youth, the interviewees born during the period in question, do not appear as “we” in the sense of a group with shared values, worldviews and collective memory. In my opinion, “the first socialist generation” is split into generational units – those with upward social mobility who feel as successful “builders of socialism”, and others who, alternatively, in the end of their lives tell about their experience in the camps, about their displacements and their broken dreams. Their youth and their life courses were strongly affected by the political and the social changes and it is only the awareness that their youth fell on a turning point in history that makes the difference from the preceding and the following generations.

Concluding my comments on D. Koleva’s main work and the other publications submitted for the competition, I would like to emphasize that the monograph *Memory and Justice: Personal Reminiscences and Public Narratives of Communism* is an undeniable scholarly contribution to the memory studies and memory cultures in Bulgaria, one of the rare examples where the ‘Bulgarian case’ is fruitfully discussed in a comparative perspective.

With her latest book, as well as her previous publications, Daniela Koleva proves her recognised presence in Bulgarian social science and the international research space as an original and highly competent author. Her contribution to the establishment of oral history as

an approach to the study of the past and its relation to the present, is indisputable. Her organisational skills and engaging erudition have led to the book series resulting from the seminar “Existential politics under socialism” held at the Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia.

All of the above gives me strong reasons to fully support the election of Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva for the academic position of “professor” at the Department of History and Theory of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University.

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Ana Luleva