

OPINION

from Prof. DSc Pepka Boyadjieva, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, BAS
concerning the publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Koleva, participant in the
competition for the academic position “Professor”, announced by the Sofia University,
professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences / Theory and history of
culture. Oral history and culturological research of memory, published in the State Gazette,
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1. General characteristics of the scientific, pedagogical and organisational activities of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Koleva is the only candidate in the competition announced by Sofia University for the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, in particular in the field of “Theory and history of culture. Oral history and cultural studies of memory. The competition fully corresponds to the educational and scientific profile of the candidate, to her scientific achievements and teaching activities.

The materials for participation in the competition are presented legally, correctly and very precisely. Assoc. Prof. Koleva presents two lists of publications – one, which contains all publications, and one, which includes the publications with which she participates in this competition. All publications with which Assoc. Prof. Koleva participates in this competition were published after taking the academic position of "Associate Professor".

For participation in the competition Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva presents the monograph "Memory and Justice. Personal Memories and Public Stories of Communism", published in 2020, 8 compilations and 25 studies and articles, a significant part of which are in English. In terms of quantity, these publications significantly exceed the requirements set in the Law on the Development of Academic Staff and the related regulations.

The professional profile and the academic and public performances of Assoc. Prof. Koleva impress with their diversity and high professionalism. Her professional career is based on a reasonable balance between scientific, pedagogical and organizational activities, in which the engagement with a given activity is combined with preserved attention to others and upholding the highest professional criteria.

2. Analysis of the applicant's scientific achievements

In the process of her professional development, Assoc. Prof. Koleva has managed to build and establish her research approach, which, in my opinion, has several main characteristics. First, striving to achieve unity between theoretical analysis and empirical justification, second – interest in discovering and applying the heuristic potential of different theoretical paradigms and research approaches, third – sensitivity to details, ability to follow the path from the more general picture to its micro manifestations, fourth – constant attention to the dynamics of the studied social phenomena. Such a scientific style is an undoubted sign of high professionalism, because it allows the analysed processes and phenomena to be understood from different perspectives and in depth, outlining not only their current picture, but revealing trends in their development and offering explanations for their specifics.

The main problem areas in which the research and scientific contributions of Assoc. Prof. Koleva are concentrated are research in the field of oral history, memory and in particular – the mechanisms and models of interaction between personal and public memory, as well as in the study of communism through the prism of its anthropological "normality." I will note here that the report on the contributions, presented by Assoc. Prof. Koleva, is very precisely and correctly prepared. I appreciate as a sign of achieved professionalism the readiness demonstrated by Assoc. Prof. Koleva to take scientific risks, focusing on challenging for the scientific community problems and approaches. An example in this regard is her ambition to abandon the dominant paradigms in the study of communism – the totalitarian and the revisionist – and to focus on the study of the everyday and private "face" of communism. Recognizing the potential of oral history to have a normalizing function, she manages to make constructive use of its potential to limit political reductionism.

I consider as undoubted and very important contribution of Assoc. Prof. Koleva the substantiation and delineation of the dimensions of a specific, new for the Bulgarian cultural anthropology and very relevant in the international academic humanitarian community, research problem field, marked as oral history. From this point of view, the analyses of Assoc. Prof. Koleva enrich the horizon of cultural studies, as well as of education and professional socialisation in this field.

Among the publications of Assoc. Prof. Koleva, presented for participation in this competition, the monograph *"Memory and justice. Personal memories and public stories about communism"* stood out. This is a thoughtful and in-depth study, which is characterised by clearly formulated and convincingly substantiated theses. The exceptional depth and

precision of this study is evident from the way of formulating the questions that interest Assoc. Prof. Koleva. She aims not only to describe and factually reproduce the public and everyday memory of communism, but also to look for relations between the studied phenomena and to offer possible explanations. Therefore, among the main questions to which she seeks answers are questions such as: "... how is the recent past remembered and on what circumstances is this memory conditioned? How is socialism / communism constituted as a public and cultural memory? Are these processes different in different post-communist countries? Do they influence each other? ... What is the relationship between official and vernacular memory? Between memory and justice?" (p. 13).

Assoc. Prof. Koleva accepts the understanding of memory as a transdisciplinary field in which there is no single paradigm. She builds her theoretical framework on the ideas of various others – e.g. Halbwachs, Nora, Assmann – by clearly stating how she understands and how she will use basic concepts such as collective memory, places of memory and others.

Working within the constructivist perspective, Assoc. Prof. Koleva manages to present how the collective and everyday memory of the past is mediated by the wider political and cultural environment. I consider this a particularly important achievement because it allows us to understand the past not as something "far away", "static and forever given", but as something constructed and under construction, and at the same time makes us sensitive to alternative stories about it.

As an important contribution, I appreciate the formulated and proven hypothesis of the existence of a relationship and constant overflow between memory and recollections: the "big" stories, mediated by public and especially by communicative memory, set the social framework of biographical memory. On the other hand, political change makes it possible for personal memories to gain publicity and become part of a culture of memory" (p. 17).

In my opinion, the depth of the analysis in the book of Assoc. Prof. Koleva significantly is mainly due to the adopted approach to analyse the studied phenomena in dynamics and to look for the relationship between them. For example, the focus of her research is on questions such as: "How does autobiographical memory transform into objectified and relatively stable forms? On the other hand, what is the dynamics within the cultural memory itself? How do some of its elements pass from the periphery to the center, from a latent to a manifest state?" (p. 17). A convincing example of the importance and heuristics of the study of relationships is the analysis of the interdependence between the law of restoration and the memory of Belene. Considered not in itself, but from the point of view of the formation of the collective memory, the right of restoration turns out to be important

due to its modeling, "educational" impact on the public and cultural memory. For their part, "struggles in the field of memory" "affect the nature, scope and application of the relevant laws" (p. 130).

Particularly important for the success of the creative idea of Assoc. Prof. Koleva's book is the realised "cycle" between theory and empirical data – the research starts from a certain theoretical framework, accurately analyses empirical data, and then returns to theory to see how empirically based insights correct, confirm or outline guidelines for the development of the theory. This is clearly seen in the analysis of the Belene case, which highlights the possibility of correcting the theory of collective memory, showing first the "disputed nature of the "memory of communism", where different perspectives compete instead of supporting each other" ... and second giving "the opportunity to observe how the collective memory flows into a cultural one, appropriated by individuals, groups, communities and generations" (p. 265).

I would like to specifically note that Assoc. Prof. Koleva has successfully coped with a difficult methodological challenge arising from the very specifics of her topic, namely – the need to be academically impartial to events, for some of which she has personal experience, while not completely silencing her voice as a citizen.

3. Notes of the reviewer on the submitted works of the candidate

For me, discussing scientific problems with Assoc. Prof. Koleva has always been a very stimulating intellectual pleasure. I believe that she will maintain her constructive critical attitude in the future as well.

Reasonably emphasising the complexity of the phenomenon of "memory", the fact that memory "is both personal and social, individual and collective", that "it cannot be divided into areas" and "crosses the fields of a number of social sciences and humanities", Assoc. Prof. Koleva makes a conclusion about "the heterogeneous, decentralised, antiparadigmatic nature of the research field" (p. 14). I think that it is more correct to talk not about the antiparadigm, but about the polyparadigm nature of the research field. It is no coincidence that elsewhere in her book she refers to specific paradigms – for example, on page 15 to the constructivist perspective, and on page 41 to the "paradigm of cultural memory". Designating the research field as polyparadigmatic emphasises the lack of a dominant paradigm and hence – the status of "normal science" (Thomas Kuhn) in this research field and makes it mandatory

for each researcher to clearly indicate the paradigm in which she/he works, while encouraging efforts to seek dialogue between the different paradigms.

I have already highly appreciated the contribution of Assoc. Prof. Koleva to the establishment of oral history as a separate research field. From the point of view of the development of this field and its "opening" as a database for a wide range of researchers, it is very important to adopt clear rules for citing empirical data, which allow both ensuring the anonymity of respondents and their use and identification in the database of researchers who want to work with them. From this point of view, the absence of any indication of the quoted biographical interviews (such as on pp. 300-301, 316-317, 320-321), or the use of different indications in the different citations (such as "a saleswoman from a large city (born 1945)" (i.e. indication of profession, place of residence and year of birth) on p. 297, or "80-year-old interviewee from a mountain town" (i.e. indication of age and place of residence) on p. 296, or the designations P5, P18 in the Belene case, do not provide a reliable basis either for anonymising the interviewees or for a possible future work of other researchers with these interviews.

I will allow myself to make a suggestion about the future research of Assoc. Prof. Koleva – how does the memory of communist repressions as a cultural trauma change in the next generations? It seems to me that such a study may be interesting not only empirically but also theoretically in terms of a possible critique or confirmation of the theory of cultural trauma.

4. Personal impressions from the applicant

Based on my personal impressions of the work and public appearances of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Koleva, I can say with confidence that she has established herself as one of the most prominent Bulgarian scholars in the field of cultural studies and social scientists. Her creative productivity, organisational initiative, constructive attitude and collegiality and international prestige are very important for the development of the humanities and social sciences in our country.

5. Reasoned and clearly worded conclusion

Based on all the above about the high scientific achievements, rich research and organisational experience and active teaching of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Koleva, I strongly

recommend to the members of the esteemed jury and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to vote unanimously in support of the election of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Koleva to the academic position of "Professor", professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences. The election of Assoc. Prof. Koleva to the academic position of "Professor" will be not only a well-deserved recognition for her scientific achievements, but also essential for the future development of the specialty "Cultural studies" and the Faculty of Philosophy as a leading national center in the field of social sciences and humanities and a respected partner of leading European universities.

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