

Review

on the competition for the academic position of Professor in *Theory and Theory of Culture. Oral History and Cultural Studies of Memory*, in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies, announced for the needs of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' in *State Gazette*, no. 21 of 13 March 2020

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Liliana Deyanova, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'

Associate Professor Daniela Lyubenova Koleva is the *only candidate* in the competition for Professor in *Theory and History of Culture. Oral History and Cultural Studies of Memory*, at the Department of History and Theory of Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'.

1. Description of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

The duly submitted documentation contains all materials required by the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Sofia University Regulations, including a list of publications published after the applicant's habilitation (in History and Theory of Culture) in 2002 (eight books, including one authored monograph and seven edited collections, and 25 articles and studies). The monograph *Memory and justice: Personal memories and public stories about communism* (in Bulgarian), published recently by the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past/Ciela, summarizes some of the applicant's major studies. Two of the three English-language books edited by Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva are co-edited. About half of the submitted publications are originally in English or have English versions, published by a prestigious publishing house (as are most of the publications and journals in which the applicant has published). The list of the applicant's other publications and their almost innumerable citations is impressive.

Among the documents submitted under items 1 to 18, I will especially note the meticulous and extensive reference material: 1. Information in standard form on compliance with the national minimum requirements for occupying the relevant academic position and with the additional requirements of Sofia University, including the requisite evidence and standard-form declaration (as required under Item 5 of Article 115 (1) of the Regulations on the Terms and Procedure for Acquiring Academic Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions

at Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’); 2. List of citations with full bibliographic information about both the cited and the numerous citing publications.

2. Overview of the applicant’s research and teaching activities, and her place in the academic community

2A.

Considering that the competition in question is for the academic position of Professor, I will begin by reviewing Assoc. Prof. Koleva’s teaching and other pedagogical activities, which are indeed fruitfully connected with her impressive (not only by their number) research projects discussed below. Her academic path is closely and productively linked with the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University, which she currently heads.

D. Koleva has been teaching ‘Key Concepts in Cultural Studies’, a basic course for BA students at the Department, since 2003. She also teaches a course in ‘Cultural Memory and Memory Cultures’ (in English) at the Department. Her course in ‘Politics of Memory: Individual Narratives and Public Discourses’ (taught in English) was an elective course for BA students at Faculty of Philosophy departments. Another course she teaches in English for BA students, but in the BA Programme in EU and European Integration at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, is in ‘History and Theory of Culture’. She also teaches several interesting and popular courses for students in various MA programmes, such as that in ‘Multi-, Inter- and Transculturality in Contemporary Europe’ (in English) in the MA Programme in Cultural Diplomacy and Geopolitics of the EU at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology; and two courses in the MA Programme in Management and Socialization of Cultural Heritage at the Faculty of Philosophy: ‘The Social Construction of Community’ and ‘Intercultural Interactions and Cultural Stereotypes’. Especially interesting and influential is the MA Programme in Cultural Anthropology, co-founded with Prof. Ivaylo Dichev, in which Assoc. Prof. Koleva teaches a basic compulsory course in ‘Oral History and Life-Story Methods’ and an elective in ‘Biography and Normality’. Her course in the Faculty of Philosophy’s MA Programme in Women’s and Gender History (MATILDA) is noteworthy as well. Her lectures at summer schools of the MATILDA European Master in Women’s and Gender History are related to the same subject-matter.

A brief overview of Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva’s impressive international activities will be incomplete without mentioning her positions as guest-lecturer at the University of São Paulo in Brazil, the Palacký University in Olomouc, the Czech Republic, Lund University in Sweden, the American University in Bulgaria, the University of Regensburg in Germany, and the

University of Freiburg (where she taught ‘Anthropology of Life Course’ twice).

Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva has been supervisor of many diploma theses and of six doctoral students (five of whom have defended their doctoral dissertation). She been a member of almost 30 scientific juries awarding academic degrees or academic positions in competitions (listed in detail and with rare precision in the submitted documentation). She has co-directed (with highly committed colleagues from the Department of History and Theory of Culture) a number of memorable summer practices and student internships under various projects.

To summarize: Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva is commendable not only for her remarkable energy, professionalism, organizational skills and sense of community and solidarity, but also for her academic authority, dedication to teaching, provision of intellectual and moral support to students, innovation of curricula, and interconnection of teaching with national and international studies, research networks and centres.

Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva has extensive experience in management of educational, research, project-based and expert activities, including as Vice Dean of Sofia University’s Faculty of Philosophy. She is a member of a number of national and international expert committees, and editorial and advisory boards of prestigious journals and series.

2B.

Proceeding with the difficult task of summarizing the data about Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva’s properly academic activities and research projects, one will also find other unquestionable qualities of the applicant in this (obviously belated!) competition for Professor: her consistent research interests, commitment to collective intellectual causes, including contribution to and innovation of curricula and syllabi, and her outstanding presence in the national and international public and institutional academic sphere.

The publications submitted for the competition are in quite a few, interconnected, fields: theory of culture, cultural history and theory of collective memory and of memory politics, oral history, methodology of life-story methods in the social sciences, social history and social anthropology of Bulgarian socialism, of contemporary trends in civil society development and the ‘democratization’ of the public sphere, as well new cultural identities in the city, including ‘new young people’ and ‘new cultures’, etc.

We can continue this enumeration if we look even just at the applicant’s participation in research projects. Her latest research grant is for a project to be completed in 2026, while her first one (chronologically) cited in the list of 28 research grants (featuring only those won after Daniela Koleva’s habilitation in 2002) began in 2005 and was devoted to a research project on ‘Gender and Well-Being’; this was followed by ‘Memory Awaken – Voices from Below’

(one of her key projects, along with ‘Oral History of Communism in Bulgaria’, within the framework of the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, where she is currently a member of the Academic Advisory Council). Among them are other authoritative research projects, such as that on ‘Existential Politics of Socialism’ (a project on a series of seminars at the Centre for Advanced Study – Sofia, whose papers were also published by Assoc. Prof. Koleva); a series of projects on the new feasts and the new cultural heritages, on cultural literacy, urban identity as a resource, and ‘new young people’. A large part of these projects have been implemented with foreign partnerships at various levels.

We can also extend the picture of Assoc. Prof. Koleva’s studies if we look at the list of her participations in scientific forums. The list features only those to which she was personally invited or at which she delivered a paper in English (otherwise the list would be too long), and includes scientific centres in Tübingen, Ljubljana, Dublin, Bilbao, Albania, Romania, London, Finland, Toronto, etc. Here I will mention also some of the scientific and professional organizations of which Daniela Koleva is a member: Memory Studies Association, InASEA, member and co-founder of Cultural Literacy in Europe.

3. Assessment of the content of the applicant’s scientific publications and their contributions

I will group the subjects, ideas and analyses in the submitted publications and their contributions under three main themes:

1. Oral history;
2. Cultural studies of collective memory;
3. Social history, social and cultural anthropology of ‘communism’.

I use quotation marks here because the latter theme explores the memory of and recollections about life in the socialist and postsocialist periods of Bulgarian society which, furthermore, are viewed in a comparative perspective. The author herself has thematized the problem of ‘naming the regime’ and substantiated her choices, including by demonstrating a good understanding of the logics of the endless debates between the so-called totalitarian and revisionist paradigms, and proposing – in most cases, successfully – other terms for the regime in question.

The major work submitted in the competition, the monograph *Memory and justice: Personal memories and public stories about communism* (in Bulgarian), is representative of Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva’s main lines of research, the main problems, concepts, approaches, and theses in her oeuvre to date. The monograph consists of two parts, six chapters, an Introduction and a Conclusion, as well as an extensive (pp. 341–365), very competent and relevant bibliography inviting further exploration.

The extensive first chapter analytically constructs the main conceptual framework. A distinction is made between various modalities of ‘collective memory’ – official, public, and ‘everyday or vernacular’ (p. 13) – of memory as a ‘cultural practice’, ‘the interplay between memory and memories (reminiscences)’, ‘cultures of memory’ and ‘politics of memory’. Of central importance is the distinction between ‘memories of the past’ and ‘narratives of the past’ (including the author’s thesis about the ‘grand’ narratives, which are ‘mediated by public memory and especially by communicative memory’ and ‘set the social frames of biographical memories’ – p. 17).

The first of the two contrasting parts of the monograph, entitled ‘Politics of memory and cultures of memory’, begins with a chapter that offers an erudite and detailed analysis of ‘the new grand narrative’ – the so-called ‘coping [coming to terms]’ with the communist past’. The chapter discusses the institutional framework of memory set by the European politics of memory, as well as the topics of restorative justice and the so-called ‘transitional justice’, i.e. justice under the conditions of a ‘transition from dictatorship to democracy’. The latter involves not only judicial measures setting new frames of memory but also policies of victim indemnification and compensation, demystification of the old repressive apparatus, etc. (A review competently systematizing the debates and laws on the criminalization of the former regime is offered in Chapter Three.) Chapter Four analyses also other aspects of the ‘politics of recognition’, the role of commissions modeled on the classic ‘truth and reconciliation commissions’; it problematizes the logics of the so-called institutions and ‘Institutes of memory’” (pp. 143–53), of the ways of ‘formation of cultures of memory’ – i.e. memorial museums with commemorative and educational functions (examined in comparison with the analogous processes in other East European countries).

Part Two, entitled ‘Mnemonic narratives and communities of memory’, discusses – from various angles and based on multiple studies – traumatic memory and nostalgic memory (as well as the stakes of postsocialist nostalgia, the generation’s and gender’s experience and narrative resources). The author assumes that the ‘communist repressions are a cultural trauma’ and argues for an original, ‘non-naturalistic understanding of trauma’. Chapter Five (based on a years-long field study, a series of oral histories, and valuable documentary evidence) contains one of the best of the many good parts of the monograph – about Belene as a site of memory, as a ‘topos in the traumatic narrative’; what’s more, about ‘Belene’ not just as ‘The ‘Lager’, The [forced labour] camp’, ‘The Island of death’ suppressed or not by collective and individual memory (pp. 205–56). The chapter on nostalgic narratives (with the wonderful title ‘Sorrow, almost hope’, a quote from the vast, meticulously collected over the years, empirical archive that is so characteristic of Daniela Koleva’s research style) builds on the previous analyses. It investigates ‘everyday socialism’, elaborating significant original theses about the ‘normality’/abnormality of socialism and

about the critical functions of postcommunist nostalgia ('stigma-free *Homo nostalgicus*').

To summarize, I will highlight some of Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva's contributions:

1.

Exceptional contribution to the scientific and institutional establishment, development and institutionalization of oral history as a research field of importance in the Bulgarian social sciences and humanities, and in university education – with a number of original theses about the intersubjectivity, suppressions and displacements, 'everyday rationalizations' and renegotiations of identities in the processes of interviewing and of other 'onsite' interactions in the process of 'rewritings the soul' (to quote Ian Hacking), as well as with the solid, 'truthful', and meticulously collected oral archives over the years, including publication of invaluable collections of life-history interviews

– quest for and demonstration of the potential of oral history and the researcher's mission in the postcommunist Bulgarian context which, however, is interpreted in a comparative perspective with other 'former countries of the socialist bloc';

– creation of international 'epistemic communities' and networks of scholars in this research field.

2.

– a productive 'constructivist approach' and conceptual framework which the reflexive researcher Daniela Koleva 'applies' to empirical matter, turning the latter into scientific evidence and data; an approach that allows enquiring into the actual 'narratability and its conditions of possibility' as well as into the 'mnemotechniques and mnemotechnologies' by which the representations of the past are disseminated and negotiated' ('List of publications', II 3, p. 63);

– important methodological and theoretical theses about communicative memory and about what Koleva calls the 'awakening of memory', while realizing that, in the processes of interviewing, researchers also 'narrate themselves'; they narrate – as a colleague from the Plovdiv school of 'socioanalysis' puts it – suppressed doubles ('my double in me');

– systematic and critical presentation of the European policies and attempts to juridicize memory (this whole chapter in the monograph is the first of its kind in Bulgarian memory studies); significant interpretations of the 'positive processes of transnationalization of memory';

– critique of the 'Holocaustization of communism' and the transformation of the thus 'Holocaustized' communism into a 'central topos of the European mnemonic canon' (*Memory and justice: Personal memories and public stories about communism* pp., 69–70);

– analysis of the narrative resources and strategies of narrating postsocialist life stories in their ‘anxiety’ (within the framework of the more general theses and studies on ‘anxiety’ within the research project on *Patterns of anxiety. Life stories and models in socialist and post-socialists society* directed by Prof. Alexander Kiossev, in which anxiety is understood by Daniela Koleva as an enduring structural characteristic of the narratives of socialism (ibid. p. 61).

3.

– Years-long studies on the everyday life of metanarratives, of the ‘discrepancies’ between communist metanarratives – the ‘grand narratives’ – and everyday experience

– analysis of the generation’s and generation’s and gender’s experience and narrative resources

– a series of applied studies and theoretical seminars and publications, directed and edited by Assoc. Prof. Daniela Koleva, on the topic of the ‘existential politics of socialism’.

4. Questions and Comments

Of course, Daniela Koleva’s seminal monograph and her other publications submitted in the competition for Professor cannot but give rise to discussions and questions, but these last are beyond the genre of ‘procedure for...’

Conclusion:

The applicant’s research results, scientific, teaching and other properly scientific and scientific-organizational activities fully comply with the requirements for occupying the academic position of Professor. Hence, considering the applicant’s above-noted significant contributions, academic and moral qualities, I firmly propose to the members of the Scientific Jury that we vote for appointing Daniela Koleva to the academic position of Professor in History and Theory of Culture. Oral History and Cultural Studies of Memory, in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies.

Sofia

18 September 2020

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