

## **OPINION**

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Professional field 3.1 Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences

Regarding: competition for Associate professor in Professional field 3.1 Sociology,  
anthropology and cultural sciences, (Theory and History of Culture and Social and Cultural  
Contemporary History of Bulgaria) at the Department of Theory and History of Culture, Sofia  
University

### **1. Information about the competition.**

The competition was announced for the needs of the Department of Theory and History of Culture in SG No 105 of 11.12.2020. I am appointed at the scientific jury of the competition by the Order № RD - 38 - 66 from 04.02.2021 of the Rector of Sofia University Prof. A. Gerdjikov. The only candidate in this competition is Dr. Galina Nikolaevna Praskova - Goncharova, currently Chief Assistant in the Department of Theory and History of Culture of the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University.

### **2. Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position**

Galina Praskova - Goncharova fully meets the requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor".

### **3. Evaluation of the teaching activity**

Dr. Galina Goncharova gives both lectures and leads many seminars related to the topic of the announced competition, in bachelor's and master's degrees. She is the main lecturer (with lectures and seminars) at the mandatory seminar "Introduction to Cultural Studies" – the 3rd and the 4th part; and the compulsory "Youth Cultures" course. Since 2001 he has been leading the seminars of the compulsory course, on the topic of the announced competition "History of Bulgarian culture in modern and contemporary times (XIX-XX centuries)", as well as other very interesting courses. Elective courses "How to become a poet under socialism" (lectures and seminars); "Intimacy and subjectivity in socialism", "Generations, generational discourses and social time" (seminars) are definitely original. As far as I talked to Dr. Goncharova's students, they highly evaluate her as a sweet-spoken and conceptual teacher.

### **4. Brief description of the presented academic publications**

What makes an impression in the scientific biography of Dr. Galina Goncharova is the combination of different objects of scientific interest - generations, youth subcultures, religion, death, love, different groups from different eras - poets during socialism, officials at the end of 19th century and early 20th century, priests, clairvoyants, doctors, etc. - with an enviable consistency in methodology. All her studies combine an interdisciplinary view, the result of great erudition in various fields - cultural anthropology, history, philosophy, sociology, demography, social psychology, with high competence in the application of

various qualitative methods (biographical, in-depth interviews, discursive, artifact, visual analyses), and use of various sources (different documents - from ID cards, through registers to ideological manifestos; literary works; newspapers and magazines; photos; memoirs, diaries; oral stories and interviews; statistics). This combination determines the unique scientific style of Dr. Goncharova - from a concrete (arte)fact, event, biography, to develop a broad picture of the specific period, and in a comparative - historical and international - plan, written in a brilliant "delicious" language and with an intriguing composition. I would define this style as a "trademark" of Goncharova and I consider it in itself a unique scientific achievement.

A brilliant example of Dr. Goncharova's approach and style is her latest book - her habilitation work "Chronicles of Wealth and Modernization in the Kingdom of Bulgaria. The story of Alexander Tenev" (Sofia: IIBM, CIELA, 2021), whose contributions I will comment on in the next paragraph of the opinion. The book begins with a description of the absence of evidence for the biography of Alexander Tenev and in the following chapters shows how this biography can be reconstructed, tracing various data and documents from the time of his life at the local, national and even international level. This reconstruction requires and presupposes a broad interdisciplinary erudition, which, as I commented, Dr. Goncharova possesses, along with sociological imagination and ingenuity, combined with scientific precision, clear methodological guidelines and a well-thought-out conceptual framework. The result is a truly remarkable book, which, by following the stages, events and activities in a person's life, outlines different social types and structures a solid picture of the economic, social, cultural, private life of two generations in bourgeois Bulgaria, who oscillated between patriarchal traditions and the new time, between the village, the city and Europe. This picture and actors could not easily fit into terminological clichés and theoretical oppositions. Those actors set the path for the "quiet", according to the author's definition, modernization in Bulgaria, which was "noisily" interrupted by the radical modernization project, called communist.

## **5. Evaluation of the main scientific contributions**

As it became clear, I will comment on the contributions of the habilitation work of Dr. Goncharova - "Chronicles of wealth and modernization in the Kingdom of Bulgaria. The story of Alexander Tenev" I want to emphasize at the very beginning that the book has remarkable methodological as well specific scientific contributions.

I had already mentioned, but here I will emphasize again as an indisputable methodological contribution the approach applied by Galina Goncharova. At first glance, from the title of the book we will assume that it is in the field of microhistory, describing the biography of a man, through which an epoch is reconstructed. However, the panorama of social and economic life the book pictures, and the portrait of different social types of actors, can "send" the author in the field of social history, and why not in historical sociology. Galina Goncharova does not care about genre boundaries in the name of the "thick description" (Geertz, so here comes the anthropology) of an epoch - with all its levels, reflected in a biography. The question is not only in the interdisciplinary approach, applied by Goncharova, but in the movement from biography to context, from context to biography, in the overlapping of different circles and

places of life - family, home, birthplace, education, economic ambitions and manifestations, rural-urban milieu. Galina Goncharova herself describes her method as follows: The research makes a "complex conceptual movement from the biographical to the cultural and social dimensions of the family's past, from the individual to the contextual and from the real to the symbolic frames of the experience, from Alexander Tenev as a specific person to Bai Sando as a cultural figure"(p.57)/. This reconstruction of the individual biography, but also of the social world in which it took place, is impressive, as is the ease with which the author moves through the various stages and social spheres. An example of innovative artifact analysis is the discovery of the specifics of the era in the ID card, along with the reconstruction of life through analysis of registers, statistics, memoirs. And at the same time Galina Goncharova succeeds to recreate the emotional world of her characters, to put herself in their place and convincingly to portrait them.

The application of this method leads to conceptual contributions related to the critique of the modernization paradigm and the enrichment of that of "multiple modernities". The book shows that what is happening in the period under consideration cannot fit into the categories of the modernization paradigm - "lagging behind", "catching up", "accelerating", as well as in any dichotomous opposition, regarding the studied social world or the actors inhabiting it. One of the significant methodological challenges is the thesis that modernization takes place through many actors - farmers, mayors, priests, doctors, teachers, who are slowly slipping away from their traditionally assigned roles and by changing them start to change the social milieu. Thus, the theory of "multiple modernities" (quoted by Dr. Goncharova), which suggests many paths to modern society, is enriched by the study of many different modernization agents/actors.

A significant scientific contribution is the understanding of the Bulgarian modernization process during the third Bulgarian state as a specific type of hybrid process, combining traditional roles and practices with new institutional relationships - successful people are those who are between tradition and vision for the future. The very description of a series of such characters - the priest-public figure, the doctor-moralist, the clairvoyant-occultist - is an indisputable contribution of the book. But this hybridity is most clearly expressed in the protagonist, who is "beyond the greedy moneylender and the reckless entrepreneur" / 84 p. /, being a farmer, a "native" lawyer, a merchant, a shareholder in a bank; with a fourth grade but providing higher education to his children; living in an adobe house, but building the tallest Art Nouveau house in Nova Zagora; still traditionally dressed but riding a bicycle and investing in a tractor, etc. Hybridity is not declared, but described in precisely found categories.

Here I focus only on significant conceptual contributions. Beyond that, the book abounds with innovative findings – for example the role of the "native" lawyer in the official trial, the vicissitudes of building transport infrastructure, the description of the specifics of Bulgarian secularization, the emergence of leisure, of the electricity in Nova Zagora, I cannot list all the interesting findings of Dr. Goncharova.

## **6. Critical remarks and recommendations.**

I do not have critical remarks and significant recommendations to Dr. Goncharova. However, precisely because the book is so convincing, I would not agree with the author's last conclusion - that she describes a "hidden and underlying modernization" /p.397/, because this definition is still in the logic of the dominant view that modernization is the result either of a state governing actors - 'modernization from above' or of mighty private entrepreneurs - 'modernization from below'. The book introduces a real, significant modernization actor who is slowly but surely changing the environment, not hidden, he has a visible presence. And as it turned out, he is not the only such actor, there are many different modernization actors waiting to be discovered by talented authors such as Dr. Goncharova. I will be happy if Dr. Goncharova will write more similar books like the commented one, reconstructing other types from pre-communist Bulgaria, not just survivors, but the winners after the "victorious September 9 revolution". I am curious to read their biographies and what had influenced their reckless and cruel revolutionary fervour. Many other types are waiting for their Galina Goncharovas - the worker, the engineers, the officers, the modern housewives, etc.

## **7. Conclusion**

I am convinced that the candidate not only meets all the requirements of ZRASRB, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations of Sofia University for holding the academic position of "associate professor", but also exceeds them. My opinion on the election of Dr. Galina Nikolaevna Praskova-Goncharova for the academic position of "Associate Professor" is highly positive and I strongly recommend her election and appointment as Associate Professor in PF 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Theory and History of Culture) in the *Department of Theory and History of Culture* at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University.

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Prof. Petya Kabakchieva