

REVIEW

of the works of assoc. prof. D.Sc. Martin Ivanov presented for the competition for the academic position ‘professor’, announced by “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Sociology – Historical sociology)

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1. Characteristics of the candidate’s scientific, applied and pedagogical activities

Assoc. prof. D.Sc. Martin Ivanov is the only candidate for the competition for the academic position ‘professor’, announced by “St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia for the needs of the Faculty of Philosophy in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Sociology – Historical sociology). The competition entirely corresponds to the candidate’s educational path, research profile, expert and teaching activities.

The set of materials submitted by the candidate are in compliance with the national and Sofia University’s Regulations on Academic Staff Development and contains all required documents. They clearly show that the application is legitimate and the National Minimal Requirements for the academic position ‘professor’ are exceeded.

For the competition Assoc. prof. Ivanov has submitted original publications, which have not been submitted for other competitions, nor to meet the national requirements for other scientific degrees and titles. This is evident from comparing the two lists of publications.

For his participation in the present competition assoc. prof. Martin Ivanov has submitted one monograph, another co-authored monograph, thirteen papers, of which six are in English and eight are co-authored and two chapters published in collective monographs.

Assoc. prof. Ivanov transfers his competences in historical research to the field of sociology, which promises a very productive synthesis, demonstrated already in the defended dissertation thesis for acquiring the academic degree of D.Sc.

The relatively short period of teaching at the Department of Sociology notwithstanding, Martin Ivanov is a devoted and highly appreciated faculty member.

2. Comments of the candidate's scientific contributions

From the transfer of experience in historical studies of the complex social, economic, cultural, political processes of economic modernization in different periods of Bulgarian history, the studies of the formation and transformations of elites and the political economy of the society of state socialism to sociological pursuits derive the main and undoubted contributions in the works of assoc. prof. Martin Ivanov. His trade-mark, so to speak, is the voluminous and careful work with heterogeneous and scattered data, which he brings into a comparable and commensurable form with precisely stated procedures, resulting in the justification of original and heuristic hypotheses and the rejection of some deeply rooted assumptions (such as the one about the social background of the first post-liberation industrialists).

The particular manner of bringing together a lot of scattered data into a processable array is also demonstrated now in the publications of the current competition - both in his articles on early modern industrialists and in his works on socialist "prosperity", and also in his central work on this competition - the study of the destinies of *bivshite hora* [ex people].

This is an impressive piece of research that has deservedly received high recognition not only in academia but also from a wider audience.

I will specially focus on the contributions implicit in the data processing and in the delineation of common patterns shared by the fates of the 'ex-people', but in my reading the most important contribution is the very 'giving a voice' to the repressed pre-coup elites, and the well-grounded claim that the repressed are far from being just *déclassé* elites, that in Bulgaria "the social category of 'ex-people'" not only "swelled disproportionately, encompassing both pre-war elites and large sections of the 'middle class' – intellectuals, freelancers, mid-level white collars, and even resistant poor peasants, artisans, and workers" (p. 16), but also the boundaries of the political construction of 'ex-people' are ominously elastic (following an ongoing purge both to prevent any possible contestation of power and to get personal enrichment).

The empirical material that has been compiled and processed contains "three hundred and nine interviews and memoir narratives, sixty-two ex-post biographical reconstructions broadcast on the 'Genes' series on the Bulgarian national TV" and a voluminous archive of the Commission on the dossiers kept by the political police of State Security (p. 8). Thus the interpretation is not limited to the documentary approach; the latter is combined and upgraded with a

biographic one, which is a significant step toward the well-established research- and public programme of the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past: studying and narrating the social life in the Bulgarian society under the regime of state socialism beyond the regime's own propaganda and self-praise. This is crucially needed if the present-day society is to be freed from what Lauren Berlant calls 'impasse': a span of time lived in the absence of narrative genre, where we lack access to a part of our very selves.

This contribution is convincingly formulated by the author himself in the Statement of contributions: "With the wholesale destruction of files and documents of the political police in the first months after November 10, 1989, we are today left with almost no compass to navigate the ordeals of the human destinies of the brutally broken, cunningly tempted and willingly sold 'ex-people'" (Statement, p. 2). In this statement, I will not quote the staggering stories in the interviews, they need to be 'heard'. I want to highlight an unnoticed contributory point: behind these narratives emerges how ruthless society as a whole has become.

The study outlines three circles of 'concentration camp Bulgaria': 1) terror and physical repression; 2) economic expropriation; 3) more subtle mechanisms of discrimination – through permanent obstacles in work, education, travel. This mapping is another contributory point.

If the first two circles (liquidated-imprisoned-interned and expropriated) are somewhat explored, Martin Ivanov expands the "cartogram of concentration camp Bulgaria" with the third circle and with the extraction of common motifs from polyphonic narratives. It is in the fate of the repressed in this third circle that the clear argument that the so-called class-party approach is utterly arbitrary emerges most clearly as a contribution, although perhaps imposing irrational fear is used rationally.

I want to highlight also the lucid, well-grounded and useable by other researchers and studies typology of the behaviours of the 'ex-people' in reaction to the fate that has befallen them: "we could distinguish four main behavioural archetypes among the 'ex-people'. The first group includes those who decide to escape – abroad or from life in general. The majority of those remaining in concentration camp Bulgaria face three other options: resistance (overt or tacit); acquiescence (and condescension) or breaking (and 'repainting')" (p. 217). And it can't be said that only one of these behavioral strategies feeds societal conformity – it feeds even on exes' efforts to protect their children from trauma.

The differences in the strategies of "choosing life over death" are carefully articulated, including in the careful reading of the archives of the repressive apparatus, so that collaborationism with the repressive regime is clearly distinguished from the self-preservation strategy of those ex-people who are

forced by violence and blackmail to sign declarations of cooperation with the services. It is a contribution that goes beyond the academic field to bring a reflexivity and moderation to the reading of the archives of the services, a reading that allows for distinctions to be made regarding guilt and responsibility for complicity with the repressive structures of the regime.

3. Comments and questions

It is not the first time when Martin Ivanov creates tools that can be transferred to other research questions and used by other researchers. His last study submitted as the main piece of work for this competition allows also to be upgraded. I will make suggestions for directions, since I am confident that Martin Ivanov will introduce his followers to the field. First of all, the conceptual arsenal can be enriched and this will lead to new generalizations and perspectives on fear, ruthless conformity and what Elena Mihailovska called ‘survival culture’ in the societies of state socialism. This notion of hers could be very useful in further developing a theme that appears repeatedly in the narratives under study: how the need to be saved and to seek help and protection from communist party members [*partiytsi*] fuels social conformity, which in turn makes society - not one or another part of it, but society itself – ruthless, a ‘big camp.’ And through the question of how conformity and reconversion relate, the concept of ‘reconversion’ could be further enriched and compacted.

I am convinced that Assoc. prof. Ivanov will work with PhD students who will have the opportunity to step on the contributions of his work and view it through a theoretical apparatus organized around notions of power, violence, class and conflict, and networks. Through such an apparatus, it seems to me, it will emerge even more clearly how connections and intercessions modify the class approach. But also how this system of intercession, through which class terror is avoided, builds the system of conformity as a social system that sustains the sinister arbitrariness of repression.

Another line of work pointed by the study of the fates of the ‘ex-people’ is through a notion of discourse and through history of concepts (enemies of the people, hostile elements, ex people, unkillable bourgeoisie – which one appears, when and where, how are they intertwined, who speaks them...)

I will also allow myself two remarks that can affect neither the fate of the book on the research, it is already with its audience, nor my conclusion on the competition. The first concerns the notion of symbolic capital: in a further work, Pierre Bourdieu’s notion can be unpacked to show that symbolic capital is a matter of reputation, it is the prestige of one kind of capital or another, that is, to impose high recognition of the capitals one has, to impose it without it being seen as an imposition in such a way, that others want to accumulate such capitals too. The

ex-people's capitals are devalued, but not as if not quite, and some "new" people want to appropriate them.

The second note is about the work that Assoc. Prof. Ivanov has done with a real goldmine – the raw data from the second wave of the empirical sociological survey "The Town and the Village" (1986). First, I want to congratulate him on his precision. However, I do have some misgivings about drawing conclusions about the ex-people from these processing. Not all the educated non-party members in this last decade of the regime, say, are ex-people. Quantitative analysis of 15 units, as Martin Ivanov himself notes, is uncertain territory. It is interesting to note, however, that in the 1980s the data do not suggest that social homogeneity was achieved.

4. Personal impressions of the candidate

With Assoc. Ivanov I have an academic friendship. His academic, public and expert appearances are truly impressive in their breadth and certainly speak of a person with initiative, energy and organizational talent: we are talking about his positions in the diplomatic corps, the State Archives Agency and the Presidency, as well as his work as an organizer and moderator of two regular academic seminars that are established public institutions: the CAS – Sofia Seminar on Economic and Social History and the CLS Seminar on Economic History.

Conclusion

In the light of all that has been said above in this review and in the light of the teaching, research, public and expert activities of Associate Professor Martin Ivanov, D.Sc, I strongly urge the members of the scientific jury and the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy of "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia to vote in favor of the election of D.Sc. Martin Ivanov for the academic position 'professor' in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Sociology – Historical sociology).

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