



OPINION

of the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Intercultural Communication), announced by Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in SG, issue 55, June 28, 2024.

Reviewer: Prof. Nikolai Mihailov, PhD

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Diyana Petkova, PhD

General characteristics of the candidates and the requirements for the competition. Only one candidate participated in the announced competition - Assoc. Dr. Diyana Petkova Petkova, teacher at SU "St. Kl. Ohridski", Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. The documentation submitted by her for the competition includes all the necessary materials, which have been completed and systematized in accordance with the Law in Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The candidate meets the minimum national requirements, having shown in some places a serious excess of the required minimum points. Undoubtedly, these data testify to the candidate's active scientific and teaching activity, which is not limited to academic and publication work at home and abroad.

Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions and of the scientific and educational production presented for participation in the competition. Assoc. Prof. Petkova participates in the competition with one monograph (habilitation thesis), twenty articles and studies, some of them published in academic periodicals indexed in global databases, as well as an author's chapter of a collective monograph, a total of 22 separate titles. The candidate is clearly active as an author and the scholarly output presented by her touches on diverse and research interests – from analyzes of political populist strategies through specific optics to oral forms of language to religious trajectories of identity, from stereotypes and postmodern heterotopias to various determinants of intercultural communication and artificial intelligence. The main habilitation work with which Assoc. Prof. Petkova participated in the competition *Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in intercultural communication and comparative folk psychology* (SU, 2024). Both as a theme and as an exhibition and as a vector of research and as a scientific claim, it is relevant to the subject and purpose of the competition in which the respected colleague participates and



systematically exposes key problems of the phenomenon of intercultural communication in the modern world. As well as offering important insights, observations and the author's own research on its dynamics today. In it Assoc. Prof. Petkova combines different approaches to research the stated issues, which she obviously knows extremely well. She often uses the "cultural dimensions" approach of G. Hofstede, who created a system for measuring cultural variability, focusing on the extent of the claim of universality of problems in different cultures. One of the main topics of the monograph of Assoc. Prof. Petkova is the one about identity - cultural and religious, a scientific problem, with which, as she notes, she herself has been engaged in research since the end of the 90s of the last century.

An important research point of the colleague is that there is a close relationship between religious and cultural identities. For her, cultural identity is "the self-determination of a given group - ethnic, national, racial, civilizational." In the monograph for a specific study of these issues, the comparative methodology of H. Hofstede, which the candidate approaches critically by quoting or drawing on specific social facts in order to outline the specifics of the cultures being compared. On the other hand, religious identity according to Assoc. Prof. Petkova can be seen as both cultural and social (because of the connection with the church or rather with what the ancient Athenian culture called the *ekklesia*, i.e. people called to a common high purpose). Without a doubt, these are reasoned reasoning and reasoned generalizations on the part of the respected colleague. The monograph contains a rich bibliographic base, cites classical and innovative paradigms, and is composed in a logically consistent manner. The skillful analysis and typology of the components of religious identity by Assoc. Prof. Petkova in her monograph were carried out mainly from the positions of sociological and socio-psychological knowledge. In my opinion, when it comes to religiosity, a look at the immediate religious experience of the person is also necessary. My idea is that when studying religious phenomena, it is necessary to consider them in all their complexity and diversity, as recommended by Bulgarian researchers. According to the respected colleague, "verification becomes possible through faith" in religion. Perhaps this statement is true in a social sense, but the idea of faith, this "essential human attitude" (Prof. Gradev) is not so much a striving for truth ("verification"), but for perceiving the mystery and immeasurableness of the divine¹. "All religions are based on universal ideas, narratives, images or archetypes," writes Assoc. Prof. Petkova, later noting that the basis of the "essence

¹ Although Associate Professor Petkova mentions that religious identity is "possible to accept the dimensions of a transcendent reality", this statement requires further clarification.



of religion" (or the religious?) is power (p. 23), without specifying what kind of power (in the sense of dominance) it is. However, power exists between men and women, between those who know and those who do not know, and in its most open form – in the institution of the prison, writes Michel Foucault.

I would try to say this - at the basis of all religions is the idea of God, something irrational and inexplicable by concepts, but a matter of experience, of personal spirituality for something "truly given" according to Rudolf Otto. However universal the "ideas" of religions may be, the different idea of God is primary to them, and it does not derive from these ideas, but they derive from it². That is why religious identities are so diverse, sometimes paradoxical, and often conflicting.

Regarding the proposed model, which the colleague formulated - "An integrative model, it is necessary to distinguish between individual and collective cultural identity. This means considering social and cultural affiliations in two main dimensions – at the level of the community and at the level of the individual". Yes, I think this is one of the main problems of identity as thought through intercultural communication - the important question of what is more important in this aspect - the group or the individual. In the concept of identity, there are also social and personal (private, private) aspects, and this is a proven scientific thesis. But here it seems that the analysis of the conceptual pair "in group" - "out group" and all the consequences of this paradigm for the theory of identity in social and communication terms are also necessary. In order to be identical, you must distinguish yourself from (have defined) external, foreign groups to which you do not belong. For me, a certain moment of dissatisfaction with the relevance of the title to the content of the work is also created by the absence of an analysis of some basic concepts for intercultural communication and those such as acculturation (affected, but in my opinion in an insufficient volume for the stated object of research) and its typologies, the interpretive approaches of Clifford Geertz, especially in the aspect of communication, and a serious analysis of the concept of "cultural difference", which, in my opinion, is a starting concept for any topic dedicated to intercultural communication. "The difference between social and cultural identity is expressed in whether social or cultural characteristics are prominent and dominant in a given community" (p. 72).

² "In the age of modernity, religious and cultural patterns completely or almost completely coincide," writes Assoc. Prof. Petkova, "Models of religious identities in postmodernity", p. 14. However, secularity is an important feature of modernity and even if "Western European and American civilization of the modern era builds on the traditions of Christianity" (p. 14), according to the European Court of Human Rights the crucifixion on the wall in Italian public schools is "a cultural a symbol' of 'Italian civilization and its values...of human dignity'".



However, this terminological claim raises the question of whether cultural characteristics are not part of or conditioned by the social, and requires, at least in my opinion, a more comprehensive justification to sound with such categoricalness. To a large extent, the socio-psychological approach to identity applied by Assoc. Prof. Petkova, formed as a paradigm after the Second World War, was influenced by the works of Kurt Lewin, which seem to be insufficiently visible in the field of research of the respected colleague. Levin is the author of ideas about the "atmosphere in the group", "field theory", dedicated to the relationship between the individual and the group, for example, in his book on minorities, in which Levin himself, an emigre in the USA, directs his scientific attention to the problems of cultural differences. This theoretical foundation would help and enrich the colleague's research regarding the definition of group affiliation and acceptance (or not) of a relevant ideology as an important aspect of understanding and insight into one or another culture, which is also one of the ideas of the American scholar. And it would be completely relevant to the approach she used in her habilitation work³. A specific emphasis and conceptual basis in the field of intercultural communication, which I could not find in the monograph, is the article by M. Kuhn and Thomas McPartland⁴, in which the result of the famous test of 20 questions (Twenty statements test), dedicated to self-determination and attitude to the group, mostly with the use of religious communities as reference groups, is presented. Intercultural communication is a possible object of research also between (religious) groups in a society that accept different (self)identifications through statuses and roles something that has been done in our country and I think that this would be an important focus in perhaps future research on dear colleague. And it will give additional methodological density to her research. Our social identities emerge when we interact with strangers (out group) because we have defined the strangers as different from us (outs) in terms of some group membership. The chosen social identity depends on how we define ourselves and the strangers (foreigners) with whom we interact. If we define them on the basis of ethnicity, our active social identity will be ethnic, if we define them on the basis of religious - then it is a matter of religious identity, and so on. This seems to me relevant as a method of comparative or comparative research, which complements the honorable colleague's choice of nations and cultures with different social practices and beliefs, between which the intercultural boundaries are clearly delineated

³ I cannot fail to mention Derek Parfitt's well-known thesis in philosophy and ethics, expressed in part in his article translated into Bulgarian (1996) "Why is identity not so important?", which offers a different, perhaps ultimate attempt to rethink the importance of psychological criteria and normative rationality (for example, secular moral norms) in determining personal identity. Or maybe identities.

⁴ An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes (1954), Manford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland



and even, in my view, hardly comparable in some respects as homogeneous. I think that this is how the boundary between studies of the national character and those in the field of intercultural communication, which in some places is not so clear⁵, will be specified in the monograph. And finally, regarding the content of the monograph, at least I was not able to find research or reflections in it about intercultural education, although I know the rich and successful experience of Assoc. Prof. Petkova as a teacher of foreign students here and abroad. Surely the colleague noticed regularities in this area that would enrich her research content and give it even more persuasiveness, even more so in a competition for a position related to teaching. The last lines do not diminish the impression of the monograph for the systematicity of the exposition, for the presentation of these in a convincing and own way for the researcher, for the undeniably large amount of research and analytical work on it, carried out by Assoc. Prof. Petkova, as well as for her indisputable depth of knowledge and very serious erudition in the field of religiosity, postmodernity and in the field of intercultural communication. The monograph builds on the sustained scientific interest in dialogue in an intercultural context and the research results reflected in a previous work by Assoc. Prof. Petkova, entitled *Cultural Identities in Intercultural Dialogue* (2013, Faber), showing the large volume of research work that has been carried out since it.

The texts of the articles and studies proposed for the competition are in Bulgarian, English and Russian. They are relevant to the applicant's scientific interests and reinforce my impression of a serious and consistent researcher in his academic interests. Only some of them thematically and conceptually present similar ideas and research. For example, the publication "Слухи и теории заговора в българских социальных медиа в период пандемии COVID-19" (Научный диалог = Nauchnyy dialog, 13(1), 2024) largely repeats the earlier "Rumors and pandemic: rethinking old and new theories of rumors and disinformation" (Медийна грамотност: класически и нови измерения, 2022, pp. 93-101), as well as Petkova, D. (2024). *Populism and Conspiracy Theories during the Pandemic of Covid-19: Rethinking Rumor Theories in the Eastern European Context*. In K. Carrilho, L. Horsmanheimo, & K. Linnamäki (Eds.), *Reflections on emotions, populism and polarisation: HEPP3 conference proceedings* (pp. 116-128). University of Helsinki. The HEPPsinki working papers on emotions, populism and polarisation, 3(1). I do not consider this a weakness or an omission of the respected colleague and her undoubted scientific work ability, but I wonder why it is

⁵ In this regard, we may regret that Marisa Zavalloni's works on the method of "representational contextualization" have not been translated in our country.



necessary, with such a high publication activity on her part, with so many international contacts and own new research ideas, to refer to publications and at all of scientific research activity, which are too close in terms of scientific design, research subject, sources and cognitive focus.

Personal impressions. I know Assoc. Prof. Petkova as a thorough and very well prepared lecturer, able to hold the attention of his students not only with his knowledge, but also with a skillful and predisposing attitude towards the audience. It is no surprise in this regard that she is a preferred supervisor, mentor and even mentor of young people attracted and intrigued by the topics and disciplines she teaches. According to the proposed references, Assoc. Prof. Petkova is the scientific supervisor of more and more graduates in master's and bachelor's programs of our faculty, a frequent guest lecturer at foreign universities, a successful supervisor of doctoral students. He always approaches his research seriously and precisely, with the depth of his analysis and knowledge. All important and necessary qualities for the position for which the respected colleague is applying.

Conclusion. I would describe the candidate on the basis of the submitted materials in the competition as an active researcher, an experienced and erudite lecturer and teacher, with significant publication activity on important topics, which, taken as a whole, have their real scientific value in the field of the announced competition. The presented habilitation thesis, the scientific, teaching and research performances of the candidate, the publications and other attached evidence are of a high level **and give me reason to support the election of Assoc. Prof. Diyana Petkova Petkova, PhD for the academic position "professor" under 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Intercultural Communication), announced by SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the State Gazette, no. 55 of 28.06.2024**

Prof. Nikolai Mihailov, PhD

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