

OPINION
concerning: competition for the academic post of professor in a
professional field

3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences
(Intercultural Communication),
published in the Official Gazette, issue 55 of 18.06.2024

In the announced competition for the academic position "Professor" in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Intercultural Communication) of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", one candidate has applied for participation - Assoc.Prof.DrDiana Petkova Petkova. The review of the documents shows that all the regulatory requirements of the procedure have been met, the scientific-metric indicators have been presented, and the reference for teaching activity certifies the required number of lecture and seminar courses related to the subject of the competition.

For the purposes of the competition Assoc.Prof.Dr Peykovaparticipates with the monograph "Religiousness, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative Population Psychology" (2024) , with a developed part of a collective monograph "Religious Identities in the Postmodern World: Intercultural and Communication Aspects" (2020), of which she is also a co-editor, and with 21 scientific articles. No borrowings have been identified, all works are original works.

The monograph "Religiosity, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative Population Psychology" develops an essential question - the contemporary forms of existence of

religion (religious consciousness, religious practices) interpreted through the prism of intercultural interactions.

I will point out that the topic of the postmodern existence of religion is the subject of a number of research efforts. The content and practical realizations of the processes of *secularization* and *deseccularization*, the contradictions in the concepts of globalization and multiethnic development, the treatments of religious truth and religion as a social institution, etc., are subject to extensive discussion. Diyana Petkova "Religiousness, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative Population Psychology" fits perfectly into the contemporary scientific discourse by uniting the interpretation of the meaningful characteristics of religion in the context of postmodern realities with the interpretations of the transforming identities resulting from intercultural communications.

The work consists of an Introduction, four chapters (Chapter 1: Religiosity as a socio-psychic and communication phenomenon. Subject of the study; Chapter 2: Cultural and religious identities; Chapter 3: Intercultural communication and identity transformations in postmodernity. Bulgaria, Ecuador and India in a comparative analysis; Chapter 4: Japan - a model of cultural and religious synthesis) and Conclusion. The total volume consists of 290 pages, including references used.

The Introduction states the aims of the study as "to outline the processes of religious identity development as well as its transformations in the contemporary world" and also "to explore the complex relationships between religiosity and culture, and to delineate their expression in the formation of cultural and religious patterns in postmodernity" (p.7). The author concretizes her immediate task: to construct, through an empirical study of different cultures, a cultural model whose elements are consistent with the degrees of contemporary religious consciousness. Assoc.Prof.Dr Peykova assumes, and rightly so, that there is no universal cultural model, as

each culture has its own profile and unique characteristics. Rather, as the monograph insists, cultural situations and circumstances can be described by highlighting religious rudiments, coincidences and ideologies resulting from the intensity of intercommunicative interactions.

In chapter one, "Religiousness as a social-psychic and communicative phenomenon", a respectable body of material is systematized from a scientific-research perspective. Through it, religion is treated in terms of its being a socio-psychic phenomenon and a communication factor. Theoretical views and observations on the nature of religion, its role in the historical-cultural development of peoples are summarized, and ideologemes, mythologemes, and universal archetypes are conceptualized in relation to intercultural communications. Additionally, issues of religion and its perception in the postmodern era are discussed, with a focus on the concepts of secularization/desecularization. Emphasis is also placed on the trend towards archaization and the recovery of pre-modern conceptions.

In depth, the author reveals the nature of religious notions and their contemporary state, focusing on the specific manifestation of religious ideologies, myths, rituals, narrative constructs. However, the question of the functioning of cultural memories and their renewal in the practice of national cultural traditions has yet to be illuminated in more detail. It may be that in certain geographical areas, such as Europe, for example, religious affiliation is often also perceived as a manifestation of national cultural identity. This means that the national (nation, nation-state, national culture) also in contemporary realities does not function as an anachronism, as an understanding of the past; on the contrary, it turns out to be a vital category that, like religion, is also subject to conceptual renewal and regeneration.

In the second part of the monograph "Cultural and Religious Identities" Petkova systematizes a variety of research perspectives on the problem of identity in relation to the treatment of identity, types and

subtypes of identity - individual and collective, cultural and religious. The semantic components of religious identity are illuminated in detail, and the crises of identity are discussed with regard to the explication of postmodern cultural processes. The author also devotes space to the theory of multiculturalism - main theses and representatives. Indeed, in terms of Petkova's research interest, the theory of multiculturalism, summarizing the cultural specificity of countries such as the USA and Canada, can be used as an approach to the interpretation of individual cultural phenomena. But, and this should be borne in mind, in Europe multiculturalism has failed to establish itself as a generally valid theoretical platform and a universal approach to cultural interpretation. Rather, European cultural studies thought has coalesced around an understanding of 'cultural diversity', which has also become established in European normative documents. I would recommend Assoc. Diyana Petkova in her future writings to consider the nature and functional significance of the category "cultural diversity", bearing in mind that the meaning of this concept is used as a basic argument by Constantine-Cyril Philosopher in his theological discussions.

Mostly exploratory in nature is Chapter Three: "Intercultural Communication and Identity Transformations in Postmodernity. Bulgaria, Ecuador and India in Comparative Analysis". Here Assoc. Prof. Dr Peykova presents the results of empirical studies - questionnaires to verify the degrees of religiosity, the nature of religious notions and attitudes. On the basis of the comparative approach the author achieves an understanding of both the differences and similarities in the structure of religious consciousness in the postmodern period in the cultural situations of Bulgaria, Ecuador and India. The focus on the festive calendar, on deistic ideologies, on religious doctrines and superstitions provides the basis for further observations on the dynamics of contemporary processes in the three countries.

As for the treatment of Bulgarian religiosity, it seems to me that a number of observations need more argumentation here. For example, assoc. prof. Petkova proposes three chronological periods in the historical explanation of Bulgarian religiosity, with which I fully agree. However, it is not clear why the author has focused only on these three periods and not discussed, for example, the Church struggle or the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate? Nor is the cultural situation after the fall of Bulgaria under Ottoman rule clarified in depth - the transformations in the cultural model, the changes in the religious nature of the Bulgarian, the specificity and role of folklorized Christianity. The generalisation is also subject to refinement: 'Bulgarian cultural and national identity is always situated in a certain context, which is determined by the specific time and space, but Bulgarians feel proud mostly because of the historical traditions and rich cultural heritage of the country' (p.161). It should be stressed here that every culture, not only Bulgarian, develops in a certain historical context, it is dependent on specific socio-cultural factors. Not only Bulgarians, but also other European nations - and to a much greater extent - feel proud of their past and their cultural traditions. The difference lies rather in contemporary economic comparisons, which are not relevant to the cultural excellence not only of the past but also of today.

The presentation of the cultural situation in Ecuador is a contribution in this part. Based on a survey, Assoc. Prof. Dr Peykova achieves a generalization about the religious perceptions and beliefs of the different ethnic groups in the Latin American country, as well as about specifics in cultural motivations and communications. The realized empirical study in India is the basis to delineate both the palette of diverse beliefs and traditions and to outline the contact zones, the intercommunicative mechanisms through which processes of synthesis and differentiation are achieved. Observations on the processes of religious identity in Bulgaria, Ecuador and

India are taken by the author as a basis for distinguishing four models of religiosity: traditional, withdrawal, resistance and open culture models.

The fourth model, that of open culture, is the subject of Chapter Four: "Japan - A Model of Cultural and Religious Fusion." Here Assoc. Petkova, again through empirical research, summarizes Japanese understandings of religion - a synthesis between a sense of unity (Japanese religion) and an understanding of the uniqueness of individual religious identity (different religious preferences). The author reasons that the specificity of Japanese religiosity relates "not only to particular Japanese beliefs and understandings, but also to the way in which they are expressed. Thus, silence and stillness play a huge role in Japanese culture not only as an expression of religious feelings but also as a special tool for achieving supernatural experiences" (p. 241) Related to this is the observation of the close interaction between degrees of religiosity, religious self-consciousness, and cultural specificity.

The conclusion is constructed as a summary of the findings of the individual parts of the paper. Essential is the conclusion that Assoc. Petkova draws as a result of her research: "the global world is not homogenized, unified or universalized. It is undergoing heterogeneous processes that imply not only the multiplication of religious and cultural consciousnesses, but also the transformation of the very structures of religiosity" (p. 270).

The monograph of Assoc. Prof. Dr Diana Petkova "Religiousness, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative Population Psychology" is a serious scientific study, which impresses with the author's ability to systematize, compare and interpret cultural phenomena in their dynamics and crystallization process. Issues of religious consciousness are examined from a variety of perspectives and are woven into the general theme of intercultural communications. The work impresses with the author's erudition and expert knowledge of the voluminous scientific literature in both sociology and cultural studies. The

work is an accomplished and original habilitation thesis whose usefulness to students and researchers is undeniable.

The 22 scientific publications presented as part of the documentation are indicative of the characteristic research approach of Assoc. Prof. Dr Petkova: to interpret the phenomenon under study in a contemporary environment taking into account specific socio-cultural circumstances and intercommunication interactions. I will highlight articles such as "Rumours and Conspiracy Theories in Bulgarian Social Media in the Pandemic Period (COVID-19)", "Freedom of Speech and Democratic Values in the Digital Age: A Critical Perspective on Post-totalitarian Media Culture", "Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots in Copywriting - From a Revolution in Communication to the Folklorization of Digital Postmodernity", "Cultural Memory, Cultural Trauma and Intercultural Communication". I accept the above contributions of the candidate.

In conclusion: my detailed reading of the monograph *Religiousness, Identity and Postmodernity. Studies in Intercultural Communication and Comparative Population Psychology*, as well as with the scientific works of Assoc. Prof. Dr Diana Petkova strongly convince me of her qualities as an accomplished researcher in the field of intercultural communication. This is the reason for me to propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to elect Assoc.Prof. Dr Diyana Petkova as Professor in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences, for the needs of the Faculty of Journalism at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridsky".

Jury member:

(Prof. Vanya Dobрева,DSc)