

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yura Konstantinova

in connection with the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor announced by the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Center of Thracology - BAS

In Issue 34 of the State Gazette of April 23, 2021, a competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, scholarly area “Theory and History of Culture” was announced for the needs of the Section "Culture of the Balkans" at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology – BAS. Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva has been admitted to participate in the competition. She has a Master's degree in Cultural Studies and Political Science from Sofia University. In 2010, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation at the Institute of Balkan Studies, BAS.

The main habilitation work in this procedure is the monograph “Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses” published by Sofia: IBSCT, 2021. The book has a total length of 437 pages and consists of a preface, three chapters, a conclusion, an appendix and a bibliography. Already in the preface, the author states the aim of her research, i.e. to present an objective picture of the emergence and evolution of the Thessaloniki Festival. This seemingly unpretentious goal poses a real challenge to the scholar. First of all, the study of the (cinema) festival phenomenon has come into the focus of academic interest only in the last twenty years. This confronts the daredevils who have taken up its study with the necessity of creating their own research methodology. I find Dr. Doncheva's approach extremely successful. She begins her monograph with an analysis of the main characteristics of the film festival phenomenon, then focuses her attention on the Thessaloniki Film Festival and finally focuses on the participation of Bulgarian films at this film forum.

The gradual narrowing of the focus of the research allows the author to place the object of study simultaneously in the context of world film festivals, its Balkan counterparts, and its Greek identity. The same approach is applied to the presentation of the Bulgarian participation in the Thessaloniki Film Festival, which is placed in the context of Bulgarian-Greek relations, Bulgaria's cultural policy, the specificity of the native film production, etc. It is this complexity of the subject, in my opinion, that is the second most serious challenge facing the author of this kind of research. Dr. Doncheva, however, rises to the challenge she sets herself. She very rightly

defends the view that understanding the Thessaloniki Festival – the reasons for its emergence, its meandering course, the ideological struggles surrounding it, the emergence of various rubrics, and so on – is impossible without understanding the administrative, political, ideological, and cultural environment that nurtured it. This approach takes the author out of her obvious comfort zone of Cultural Studies and confronts her with the need to navigate through the Greek reality from the second half of the twentieth century to the present day. Dr. Doncheva successfully analyses the Greek context and skilfully fits the Thessaloniki Festival into it. This is aided by her good analysis of the considerable amount of scholarly literature (historical and film studies) in Bulgarian, English, and Greek that she uses in her monograph.

The third chapter of the monograph, devoted to the participation of Bulgarian films at the Thessaloniki Film Festival, is undoubtedly the most useful. In this chapter, the author's skilful combination of information from archival sources and personal interviews is impressive. I recommend that in the future she should also describe the field material used in the bibliography so that it is clearly visible to the readers. I welcome Dr. Doncheva's decision to place Bulgarian participation in the Thessaloniki Film Festival in the context of Bulgarian-Greek relations and the specific historical period in which it took place. This approach allows her to clearly articulate not only the different stages of Bulgarian cinema participation in Thessaloniki – during the Cold War years, until Bulgaria's accession to the EU and up to the present day, but also to highlight and analyse the specificities of the works presented at this film forum during the different periods.

The appendix to the monograph, which has clearly taken a great deal of work and meticulousness to produce, is extremely useful. It traces in chronological order the Bulgarian films and minority productions that participated in the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in the period 1963-2020. The conclusions drawn in the monograph are logical and well-reasoned, the exposition is filled with many unknown facts and interesting incidents, which, along with the author's readable style, make this in-depth study useful not only for a specialized but also for a wider readership.

For the purpose of the competition, Dr. Doncheva has also submitted her monograph “The Image of the Balkans in Balkan and Western Films.” It is an expanded and revised version of the doctoral thesis defended by the author, which provides an interdisciplinary analysis of the strategies of representation of the Balkans and systematizes the models with which they are portrayed in cinema. Already in this first monograph Dr. Doncheva's affinity for

interdisciplinary research, combining methods from different humanities disciplines – cultural studies, history, literary studies, etc. – is evident. This aspiration, together with the marked Balkan orientation of her publications, are constant in all her research. Dr. Doncheva's scholarly growth over the years is evident in the works presented for evaluation. Her articles, devoted to specific problems of the development of cinema in almost all Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Croatia, Romania and Turkey) and to themes of global relevance, have been published in Bulgarian and English in reputable scientific journals (*Etudes Balkaniques*, *Bulgarian Ethnology*, *Cinema*) and publications (*Art Studies*, *Studia Balcanica*, etc.).

In addition to the mandatory minimum of scholarly publications and citations, Dr. Doncheva clearly has much more than the required scholarly output for the academic position of Associate Professor, as is evident from the list of additional publications provided. Her versatile professional activity is also impressive – participation in projects, teaching, participation in organizing committees of prestigious international conferences and film forums. Dr. Doncheva's scholarly works are original and her contributions are correctly listed in the author's reference.

All of the above gives me reason to believe that Dr. Gergana Doncheva possesses the necessary scholarly qualities and meets the requirements for holding the academic position of Associate Professor. As a member of the scholarly jury, I will vote with conviction that she be proposed for election by the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology - BAS.

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