

## OPINION

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for Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva, the only candidate in the competition for the academic position of ‘Associate Professor’ in the Professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Balkan Cinema), published in State Gazette no. 34 / 23.04.2021 for the needs of the section ‘Culture of the Balkans’

1. *Assessment of compliance with the minimum National requirements for acquisition of academic degrees and occupation of academic positions.*

Assistant Professor Gergana Doncheva, PhD proposes for evaluation in the competition her monograph "Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses" (438 pages), 11 articles and studies published in scientific peer-reviewed publications in Bulgaria and abroad (Serbia, Romania, Slovenia, Great Britain) and reference for citations in academic peer-reviewed editions in Bulgarian and foreign language editions. It is evident that the candidate exceeds the required number of points for holding the academic position of "associate professor". Although Dr. Doncheva has not filled in the table, the section “E”, her other documents show that she is a participant in three major research projects funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund and the National Fund ‘Culture’, as well as she is also a member of the Program Committees of two international scientific conferences, which significantly increases his contributions to the academic position of "Associate Professor".

2. *Research and contributions.*

In the years after the defense of her doctoral dissertation, the Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Doncheva proved herself to the scientific, professional and film community as an in-depth specialist in the field of film art and in particular – as a skilled expert in Balkan cinema. These qualities are a result of many years of research, scientific perseverance and ability for creative analysis not only at the level of thematic and stylistic assessment, but also theoretical, cultural, typological and genre-stylistic thinking, which gives depth and originality to her texts.

The monograph "Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses" is a habilitation work with original contributions. The choice of topic at first glance may be considered regional (or local), but the text definitely refutes such a possible attitude. Dr. Doncheva builds the structure of the monograph in a series of narrowing concentric circles, starting from the global-theoretical views on the festival essence. She theoretically analyzes the cultural, social and political significance of the "festival" phenomenon, making references to the most important European and world events in the film world. According to her analysis, they are far from being exhausted as a social impact with the "red carpets" but form significant social and cultural attitudes in societies. Starting with the Venetian *Mostra* in 1932 – an initiative of the fascist government of Benito Mussolini – Gergana Doncheva traces the cultural policies of the most renowned European festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Locarno, Sarajevo, even Sofia Film Fest to highlight the specifics of Thessaloniki festival.

The analysis of the *functions* of the film festival as a public event contributes not only to film studies, but also to the humanities in general. Dr. Gergana Doncheva formulates 7 functions of the festivals, arguing her concept with detailed historical knowledge of the practice of various film festivals in a wide time and geographical range. In this case, it is important to emphasize that each of the functions inherent in the festivals – the discovery of new original talents, the acquisition of cultural prestige, redefining the world cinema canon, political engagement, forming a cinephile audience, etc. are examined by Dr. Doncheva in a critical plan – with an objective assessment of the positive but also the negative effects of the ability of influential film festivals to exercise discursive control. An interesting focus is the tracing of the relationship between European and American cinema in the focus of the festival promotion by placing conceptual differences between the Hollywood mainstream and independent American cinema. Suddenly emerging and fading interests in exotic cinemas, such as Iranian, Korean, Romanian, etc. are also commented on as part of (relatively) long-term policies.

The Thessaloniki Film Festival, as the central theme of the study, is a fruitful object for scientific analysis because it occupies a middlemost position in many aspects. The forum has a long enough history (without being one of the first in Europe), has a significant influence (without being one of the most glamorous events), is open to the world film process, but at the same time focuses on Balkan and Greek cinema, finding its own balance between the global, regional and national (with different weight in its historical development). Dr. Gergana Doncheva

skillfully manages to analyze the complex amalgam between the global, European, regional, local, national, etc. managing to highlight the contradictions and rivalries between them in different historical periods. The author traces the parallel development of the festival and the development of Greek cinema. Quality and contribution in the second chapter of the monograph is the historiographical, detailed study of Greek cinema, viewed both in the context of the European and world film process and in the context of the political, economic and social development of the Greek state, including the turmoil of the 'Regime of the Colonels' and the birth of the '*New Greek Cinema*'. Over the years, Dr. Doncheva has been able to trace the thread of the author's personalities in Greece, highlighting the differences between such internationally renowned authors as Theo Angelopoulos, Dinos Dimopoulos, Pantelis Voulgaris and many others, and later the Oscar nominee Yorgos Lanthimos or Athina Rachel Tsangari – representatives of the '*Greek Weird Wave*' of the new XXI century. Doncheva manages to outline the connections between the thematic, genre and stylistic development of Greek cinema and the dominant policies at different levels – state and festival – by understanding their complexity and often contradictory results of cultural policies.

A very important emphasis in the monograph is the tracing of the influence and significance of the personalities who headed the Thessaloniki Film Festival. The principles of selection, the support of one or another group of filmmakers, the conduct of a cultural line, the award policy, etc. are viewed as a tool for selection and screening of artifacts to remain in national memory as a cultural value.

Dr. Doncheva also devotes an entire chapter to the presentation of Bulgarian cinema at Thessaloniki Film Festival. The analysis is in the context of Bulgarian-Greek relations in historical terms from the time of World War II until today. The models of the institutionally (but not at all costs ideologically) conditioned selection by the Bulgarian side during the communist period and the competitive principle of application from behalf of private producers in our days are revealed. In the study of earlier historical periods Dr. Doncheva widely uses archival sources of the Consulate General in Thessaloniki, sent as information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which for the first time are published in a tabular form in the Annex and are of particular interest for future researchers.

The habilitation work of Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Doncheva "Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses" is an original

and in-depth theoretical and historical study with a significant contribution both in Bulgarian film studies and in the field of social sciences and Balkan studies.

The studies and articles presented for the competition by Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Doncheva show that she is a leading specialist in the field of Balkan cinema – Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Greek, Romanian, Turkish and last but not least – Bulgarian. Most of the articles are related to the development of Balkan cinematographies after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the same time, the author is very involved in the comparison of how the individual Balkan artists reflect on the recent totalitarian past of their countries (*The figures of the communist power in (post-) Yugoslav and in new Bulgarian cinema*). National identity (*The cinematic Macedonia between exoticism and propaganda*) is also a central problem in Doncheva's field of vision as a researcher. The problem of self-exoticism or the (un)conscious search for models that correspond to the festival's Western clichés and ideas (*How Balkan are the images of self-presentation in Balkan cinema?*) is fundamental for post-communist countries. Dr. Doncheva analytically describes the painful and dramatic process in which producers and creators "adjust" the plots of their films in the hope that they will be awarded at international film festivals by the inertia of the 'Romanian New Wave', representing the new realities of their countries only in the darkest segment of the palette in a minimalist style. The quality of all texts is a skillful drawing of parallels and the highlighting of similar phenomena in different cinematographies. Bulgarian cinema in most of the articles is compared with the processes in other Balkan cinemas (*Bulgaria: Reframing Contemporary Arthouse and Mainstream Cinema*). Dr. Doncheva's publications show not only wide knowledge of the artifacts and processes in the cinematography of various Balkan countries, but also her ability to typologize and relate the individual films to more general problematics. The analysis of the work of individual bright directors – Ceylan, Manchevski, Kusturica, Gardev, Lazarov and many others gives density and credibility to the overall picture.

At the same time, Dr. Doncheva demonstrates knowledge and analytical approach to world genre cinema (*Season of the Witch: Cinematology of the Magic; The Phenomenon "Twilight": On the Evolution of the Image of the Vampire in World Cinema*) and she confidently enters the models of Hollywood neomythology.

### 3. *Projects, teaching, expert activity*

Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Doncheva is a participant in two projects of the Bulgarian National Science Fund – "Thessaloniki and the Bulgarians: history,

memory, modernity" (2017-2020) and "Southeast Europe between West and East: economy, politics and culture in period 19-21 century"(2012-2014), as well as in a project funded by NF "Culture" – "One Hundred Years of Bulgarian Cinema: Significant Topics in Feature Film and Their Reflection in Film Periodicals "(2015). She has been a lecturer in the master's program "Ethnology" at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", she also was a member of the Program committees of two international scientific conferences – in Serbia and Romania. Doncheva is an author of many scientific reviews, was an anchor at professional press conferences at national film festivals, etc., she was a member of international juries at film festivals. Dr. Doncheva is a member of the board of the Guild of Film Critics at the Union of Bulgarian Filmmakers, a member of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists and the Bulgarian Film Academy. She has won international grants for participations and specializations in Norway, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany and Serbia.

#### *4. Personal impressions*

I know Gergana Doncheva as a profound and erudite researcher with a serious and precise attitude to work. She is an extremely correct and well-meaning colleague, always contributing to the good atmosphere in communication – qualities that deserve respect in the scientific and professional community.

#### **Conclusion:**

The contributions and the volume of the habilitation work, as well as the depth and originality of the ideas in the publications of Assistant Professor Dr. Gergana Doncheva give me reason to believe that she has the qualities to occupy the academic position of 'Associate Professor'. I will vote in favor.



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