

REVIEW

by Prof. Margarita Nikolova Karamikhova, D.Sc.

Department of New and Modern History of Bulgaria, Faculty of History, VTU "St. Cyril and Methodius" based on the materials submitted for the competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the *Alexander Fol* Centre for Thracology (IBSCT) at BAS, field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, for the needs of the section "Culture of the Balkans"

In the competition for 'Associate Professor', announced in the State Gazette, Issue 34 of 23.04.2021 and on the Internet page of the IBSCT (<https://balkanstudies.bg/bg/konkursi/arhiv-konkursi-zashtiti.html>) as the only candidate participated Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva.

1. Brief resume of the candidate

Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva successfully completed her Master's degree in Cultural Studies (2002) and Political Science (2003) at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". In 2010, she defended her PhD with a dissertation on "The Image of the Balkans in Balkan and Western Films. From February 2011 to date, she has been working as an assistant professor and chief assistant at the Institute of Balkan Studies, BAS.

According to the submitted documents, Dr. Doncheva has participated in two research projects funded by the Research Fund and one funded by the Culture Fund. She has won four scholarships for participation in events or specializations with different duration of stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, Republic of Serbia, and Germany.

The candidate has taught a lecture course "Images and Communities" for the students of the Master's program "Ethnology" at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" during the academic years 2012-2013 and 2014-2015.

2. Brief information on the procedure for announcing and conducting the competition.

Recommendation for the announcement of the competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of Thracology "Alexander Fol" (IBSCT) at BAS, field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, for the needs of the Section "Culture of the Balkans" was approved on 12 April 2021, Protocol No. 3, and the Scientific Council of the IBSTC decided to announce the competition at its meeting on 13 April 2021, Protocol No. 6. The competition was announced in the State Gazette, No. 34 of 23.04.2021

and on the Internet page of the IBSCT (<https://balkanstudies.bg/bg/konkursi/arhiv-konkursi-zashtiti.html>).

On 22.06.2021, the applicant submitted an Application for Participation in the Competition and submitted the documents required by the Act and the Regulations (ref. No. 103 NO-05-05/22.06.2021). On 25.06.2021, a committee appointed by an order of the Director of the IBSTC (No 73 RD-16/23.06.2021) examined the applicant's documents and found that the documents submitted met the requirements of Article 19 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. By Order No 72 RD-16/22.06.2021, a Scientific Jury was appointed to conduct the competition. On 28 June 2021, the Scientific Jury held its first meeting at 10.00 a.m. in remote form on the Zoom platform.

No violations have been committed so far in the procedure and all legal requirements have been met. On the basis of the submitted documents, there is every reason to conclude that the procedure for the announcement and conduct of the competition has been carried out in full compliance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation, as well as with the internal Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The further course of the procedure fully complies with the requirements of the aforementioned legal acts.

3. General presentation of the materials received

One monograph (habilitation thesis), one published version of a PhD thesis and nine articles in scientific proceedings were submitted for the competition. The applicant submitted three citations in refereed and indexed international databases of scientific information, four citations in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, and one citation in a non-indexed peer-reviewed journal.

Articles

Leading, in some of the articles presented, are the problems of representation and self-representation through the different film industries in the Balkans and Central Europe in the creation and consolidation of a new national identity. The author demonstrates a skilful command of a wide palette of theoretical tools through which she analyses the objects under study and presents qualitatively new knowledge in the field of the problems posed. It should be emphasized that Dr. Doncheva works in a comparative perspective and places the processes and phenomena under study in a broad historical context, which is undoubtedly a merit of her research approach.

Of particular interest to Ethnology of Socialism researchers is the article 'The figures of the communist power in (post-)Yugoslav and in new Bulgarian cinema' from the collection 'Feeling East. In Search of Identities in Southeast Europe'¹. It examines, in a comparative perspective, the discursive models of representation of the period of socialism, constructed in cinema productions in Bulgaria and in the former Yugoslav republics. The question of the legacy of communism in cinema is analysed through films that were produced in the period 1944-1990 and films representing the socialist past after the changes. The visual construction of the past is an increasingly pressing research problem for scholars developing visual anthropology, and this article is a shining example of serious progress being made.

Of special interest to ethnologists are the articles on the dynamics of cinematic images of witches and vampires. They will certainly be included in the recommended reading for students of ethnology, in the lecture course "European Ethnology in New and Modern Times".

Logically, two of the presented articles are devoted to different aspects of the Thessaloniki Film Festival. By participating in an academic project and by presenting her first results to an academic audience, Dr. Doncheva validates her research intuitions and makes a claim for a serious scholarly work dedicated to a phenomenon little known to the academic public, which is the Thessaloniki Film Festival.

Habilitation Work

For participation in the competition for the academic position of 'Associate Professor', Chief Assistant Dr. Gergana Doncheva presented his habilitation work "Thessaloniki Film Festival: History, Challenges and Metamorphoses", Sofia: IBSCT, 2021. ISBN: 978-619-7179-19-4. The book body contains 383 pages of text, 32 pages of annexes and 19 pages of sources, bibliography.

The preface sets the topic, outlines the broad framework within which the research is developed, and justifies the deductive approach that necessitates a "reversal" of the classical academic structure of a monographic work. I welcome the author's decision from the perspective of her future readers. Avoiding the scholastic constraints of 'tradition', she leads her readers (specialists or amateurs) into a complex but exciting history of European and Balkan politics, intrigue, struggle for identity and recognition, and - ultimately - high art with clear and sharp messages.

Chapter One is entitled "The Film Festival as an Object of Study". In it, the nature of film forums, the reasons for their emergence and the logic of their development are logically and consistently presented and analysed. A coherent typology is proposed, the dynamic

¹ 'Roumiana Preshlenova (ed.), Sofia: Institute of Balkan Studies, Veliko Tamovo: Faber, 2015, pp.281 -297.

hierarchy of festivals is outlined, and the key figures are identified. The author analyses the processes that determine the existence of festivals through the key of influence and authority, which is a very productive approach. In the course of the exposition, a periodization takes shape that is to some extent synchronous with the political processes that are taking place on the planet, but does not always follow the "big politics". A valuable contribution is the clear articulation of the functions of festivals, especially their power to exert discursive control and create space for political discussion.

The author has chosen to reverse the academic template and introduces the state of film festival research and theoretical models following the presentation of the phenomenon. A worthy place is given to the presentation of Bulgarian film studies and - logically - Greek film studies, and to the texts dedicated to the Thessaloniki Film Festival. This clearly highlights its place and role in the rapidly changing but strictly hierarchical global festival network.

Chapter Two is entitled "Historical Development of the Thessaloniki Film Festival". The author follows the theoretical formulations of Michael Herzfeld and his student Toby Lee to condense the analysis of the phenomenon under study from an anthropological perspective. Dr. Doncheva correctly formulates the concepts she works with and structures the narrative both chronologically and contextually. She builds a dense factual narrative of the emergence, specific stages of transformation and current status of the forum. The dynamics of place - economy (an established international fair) - state policy changes - personalities linkages - are well brought out. Valuable for the understanding of the socio-cultural processes in the Balkans is the tracing of the renewed dialogue between Balkan filmmakers after 1989 with all its attendant difficulties (the Balkan Review section in the festival programme; the fate of the Balkan Fund, etc.). The chapter logically concludes with the decisions that the various film festivals, including Thessaloniki, have to take in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter Three is entitled "Bulgarian Participation at the Thessaloniki Film Festival (1963- 2020)". This chapter traces the participation of Bulgarian films in the festival programme in the context of the dynamics of Bulgarian-Greek relations from the end of the Second World War to the present day. The political history of relations between the two countries is examined within the broader framework of Balkan and global developments. Here I would have expected to find a paragraph related to political immigrants from Greece and their role in different periods, especially taking into account the film "Moments with the Artist Michalis Garoudis" (1979), which is given attention.

The text follows the chronology of the participation of Bulgarian films in the Thessaloniki Film Festival - during the Cold War and after 1989. The structure of the system of state archives created by the communist government determined the absurd lack of information

on the issues under study. Dr. Gergana Doncheva searched for information about Bulgarian participation in the film festival in the records of our Consulate General in Thessaloniki, although scarce and politically coloured. In a restrained but fair manner, the author presents the legal changes and their impact on the film industry in Bulgaria after 1989. Dividing the period before and after Bulgaria's accession to the EC is a good choice. The filmmakers and their works that debuted in Thessaloniki with varying success are presented in detail. The maturity and influence of the Thessaloniki Film Festival is demonstrated by its relationship and impact on the development of Sofia Film Fest, well presented and analysed by the author.

The **conclusion** outlines the logic of the research and the qualitatively new knowledge that has been achieved in the process.

It is important to emphasize that Dr. Gergana Doncheva has an excellent knowledge of contemporary Bulgarian and foreign academic literature related to the phenomena and processes under study. This is, no doubt, due to her proverbial diligence and precision in tracing the achievements of previous researchers, as well as her good command of English and Greek. It is noteworthy that both the articles presented and the two monographs are written in brilliant academic Bulgarian, an art that is increasingly rare among young scholars. All the literature cited is correctly referenced according to academic standards. The author has worked in the holdings of the Central State Archives (CSA) and has brought valuable new sources into scholarly circulation.

4. Evaluation of the personal contribution of the candidate

The presented publications are entirely original, personal contribution of the main asst. Dr. Gergana Doncheva. The candidate has correctly and conscientiously cited the literature and sources used. All conclusions and findings are the fruit of her long-standing, systematic work.

5. Additional information

From the presented documents is evident the remarkable expert activity of Chief Asstant Dr. Gergana Doncheva. Her participation in jurying at various film forums is a pledge for further works in the field of research, for which she has already made a claim as a mature expert.

6. Proposal

After reading the materials and scholarly works submitted in the competition, analyzing their significance and scholarly and applied contributions contained in them, I find it justified to give my positive assessment and to recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report with a proposal to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Balkan Studies with the Centre of

Thracology "Alexander Fol" (IBSCT), BAS, for the election of Dr. Gergana Georgieva Doncheva to the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, for the needs of the Section 'Balkan Culture'.

Prof. Margarita Nikolova Karamikhova, D.Sc.

11. 07. 2021