

Review

by Prof. Dr. Habil. Vladimir Gradev

on the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the

a

c

a

d

e

m One candidate, Dr. Teodora Karamelska, submitted documents for participation in the competition.

c The set of materials submitted by Dr. Karamelska on electronic media is complete and fully meets the minimum national requirements of the RAADB Act, Art. 2b, and the additional NBU requirements.

o Teodora Karamelska has a Master's degree in Cultural Studies and History from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (1998), where in 2005 she also acquired the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" with the dissertation topic "Historicism as a Scientific Paradigm and Worldview in Germany in the 19th and the First Quarter of the 20th Century". From 2007 until 2011 she was a research fellow at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, while teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University. Since 2011 she has been a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy and Sociology, NBU. She is deputy director of the Centre for European Values Studies at the NBU, deputy editor-in-chief of Journal *Sociological Problems*, member of the Bulgarian Sociological Association, member of the German Society for Sociology (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie*), Erasmus coordinator of the Philosophy and Sociology Department, NBU.

o Dr. Karamelska has research fellowships at the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia, the Institute of Methods, and Methodological Principles in the Social Sciences (Georg-August-University Göttingen), the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), the Institute of European History (Mainz), and the Faculty of Protestant Theology (Ludwig-Maximilians-University München).

e Teodora Karamelska has a long and active research career. Suffice it to mention some of the research projects in which she has participated and is

p

r

o

participating: MICROCON (“A Micro Level Analysis of Violent Conflict”), 2007-2010; “Marking Transitions and Meaning across the Life Course: Memories of Religious and Secular Ceremonies in Eastern and Western Europe”, AHRC/ESRC Religion & Society, 2010-2011; “What do the Words Mean? In Search of an Integral Philosophical and Sociological Approach to Language” (New Bulgarian University), funded by Bulgarian National Science Fund, 2010-2013; “The Emotional Content of the Bulgarian National Identity: Historical Roots and Modern Dimensions”, 2009-2011; “Patterns of Anxiety. Life Stories and Narrative Models in Socialist and Post-socialist Societies”, Southeast European Academic League, 2011-2012; participant in the research team of the Fifth Wave of the European Values Study, national director: Prof. Georgi Fotev, 2016-2018; “Generational Patterns of Coping with Life Crisis: Biographical, Social and Institutional Discourses”, 2018-2021; “Bogomilism in History and Contemporary Culture” in 2023-2026, etc.

Teodora Karamelska has participated in dozens of scientific forums, conferences, and seminars in Bulgaria and abroad, among which I would like to highlight her participation in the conference of the Leibniz Institute for the Study of Eastern and Southeastern Europe with the topic of the paper “Public Health in East and Southeast Europe: Growth, Inequality, and the State. Contemporary and Historical Perspectives”; the conference “Wohnen und Gesundheit im Alter” at the of Social Research; the Florian-Znaniiecki-Colloquium “Vielfalt der Modernisierungswege am Beispiel Ost- und Ostmitteleuropas” at the University of Bremen; the forum “Marking Transitions and Meaning across the Life Course: Memories of Religious and Secular Ceremonies in Eastern and Western Europe” in Southampton, etc.

Dr. Karamelska is fluent in German as well as English and Russian. She is an active translator from German with ten books and dozens of articles in the fields of social sciences, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and fiction.

For her research and translation work, Teodora Karamelska has been awarded by the Institute of European History in Mainz, the Bulgarian Sociological Association, the Hristo G. Danov Award, and the award of the Translators' Union in Bulgaria.

My assessment of the candidate's teaching, research, and applied activities is extremely high. In her teaching activity, Dr. Karamelska develops innovative

interactive forms of learning. She has developed and taught numerous academic courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs of the Sociology and Philosophy majors at NBU as “Reading and Understanding Sociological Texts”, “Ideas in Sociology”, “Social Conflicts as Research Cases”, “History of Sociology”, “Institutions of Knowledge”, “Sociological Theories of Modernity”, “Sociology of Religion”, “Basic Sociological Terms”, “Sociology of Communities”, “Sociology of Inequalities“, “Sociology of Ethnic Relations“, “Sociology of Culture“, “Urban Sociology”, “Social entrepreneurship”, “Risk Groups”, “Biographical Research”, “Language and community identities”, etc.

Dr. Karamelska's research is at a high international level, as evidenced by her participation in numerous international projects and scientific forums. Teodora Karamelska's teaching, and research are both directly relevant to and undoubtedly contribute to the field of sociology on which this competition is announced.

The candidate has entered the competition with one monograph and 22 articles. I will briefly focus on them.

In the monograph *Spiritual but Not Religious. Bulgarian Contexts of Holistic Spirituality*, Dr. Karamelska originally and systematically develops the fundamental sociological distinction between “religion” and “spirituality”, and at the same time critically takes up and rethinks the classical typology of church-sect-mysticism, and based on these distinctions clarifies the genesis of modern religious individualism. Karamelska draws important parallels and comparisons, based on in-depth empirical research, between the fragmentation of the religious field in late-modern European societies and the situation in post-communist Bulgaria. Analyzing the conducted research and comparisons, she provides original and well-founded explanations for the growing interest in holistic spirituality among Bulgarians and the related symbolic “remapping” of the contemporary urban environment, expressed in the emergence of (quasi-)religious places of holistic spirituality. Based on data from both representative sociological studies and independently conducted in-depth biographical interviews, she analyzes the impact that the spiritual “awakening” has had on the emergence of new subjective models of interpreting the world, strategies for coping with life crises, organizing everyday life, as well as on the creation of a new type of community ties.

Some of the articles and studies with which Dr. Karamelska participates in the competition are the result of in-depth biographical and expert interviews and

focus group surveys. In her research on the care of elderly people with dementia, she shows that this care takes place uncoordinated and behind the scenes of public life, most often confined to the family circle and less often in insufficient number and understaffed state homes. Teodora Karamelska proves that the concentration of care in the family (the so-called familism) leads not only to the closure and isolation of the sick, but also to the mental and physical overload of those caring for them, hence the displacement, if not the breaking of their own life trajectory. In her research, Dr. Karamelska pays special attention to the methodology of biographical research, and she not only uses but also critically examines the qualitative methods in the social sciences of the Germanic sciences, and through concrete, carefully researched, and analyzed case studies, she also shows their applicability in a sociological context. Teodora Karamelska does not neglect her initial formation as a cultural historian and historian and reconstructs in detail the cultural-historical context of the emergence and subsequent use of concepts and conceptual interrelations such as “deferred action” (S. Freud), the “Veralltäglicung des Charisma” (M. Weber), “social conflict” and “social interaction” (G. Simmel). She not only analyzes the history and use of these concepts, but also successfully demonstrates their heuristic potential in methodological and diagnostic sociological terms.

Dr. Teodora Karamelska's research is in several areas: sociology of religion; history of sociology; social policies and informal care for dementia patients; biographical method – in historical and methodological perspective; history of ideas and sociological thought; translations of classical and contemporary thinkers and compilers. In view also of my own expertise, I will focus more specifically on those on the sociology of religion.

In the article “Mind, Body, and Spirit: Women and Holistic Spirituality”, Karamelska draws on Woodhead's proposed theoretical model of holistic spirituality to analyze the spread of spiritual notions and holistic practices among highly educated Bulgarian women. She focuses on the biographical motivations for their spiritualist “conversion” and explores the question of whether it led to an overall change in their lifestyle and community interactions.

In “Forget Coffins: Holistic Spirituality and New Funerary Practices”, Karamelska successfully defends the thesis that the rise of holistic spirituality in late modernity led to the emergence of a new staging of death, further stimulated

by changes in the legal regulation of funerary practices over the last twenty years. The trends are basically twofold: on the one hand, a drive to affirm personal uniqueness, including *post-mortem*, and on the other, depersonalization through a return to universal cosmic energy or nature. The article presents examples of a new digital commemorative culture, an important factor in taking funerary and commemorative practices beyond institutionally set – by the state or the churches – frameworks (in the form of personalized headstones and memorial complexes, virtual cemetery parks, cemetery forests, etc.).

In “Sociological touches to religiosity in Bulgaria” Karamelska analyses the results of the fifth wave of the nationally-representative European Values Survey (EVS 2018) regarding the attitudes of Bulgarian citizens towards religion, and in particular the influence of Orthodoxy on those who self-identify as “Orthodox Christians” – both in the organization of their social experience and in making key life decisions.

In “Religiously Motivated Attitudes in Bulgarian Society” the focus is again on the dynamics of religiously motivated attitudes of Bulgarian citizens. Based on the conducted research, Karamelska proves that in recent years the process of culturalization of the two traditional religions in Bulgaria, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam, has been accelerating and deepening to almost the same extent, one of the factors for this being the consolidation against the migrant waves perceived as “alien” to the value model developed by the traditionally professed religions.

In “Securing Boundaries: Orthodox Narratives on Yoga” Dr. Karamelska describes the degrees and directions of distancing and even hostility of Eastern Orthodox theologians, priests, and monastics toward yoga, both in terms of doctrine and yoga instructors and practitioners. The paper analyzes the claims of institutionalized Christianity in Bulgaria for a monopoly over spiritual goods and for narratively delegitimizing so-called “new clerics” as impostors. These efforts to preserve the monopoly are presented against the backdrop of a sociologically registered decline in trust in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a deepening culturalization of Orthodoxy, and an intensification of Bulgarian citizens' interest in individualized frames of their religious experience.

In “Transformations of the Religiosity: Sociological Conceptualizations” Karamelska sets out to delineate the relationship between holistic spirituality and mysticism, one of three sociological types of organization of religious experience

alongside church and sect. As a point of departure, she uses the terminological distinctions of Simmel, Weber, and Troeltsch, which place the scientific study of the topic on a new methodological and conceptual footing.

In her scientific research, Teodora Karamelska develops two new, topical, and promising areas in the field of sociology. In the different fields, she creates new classifications, and applies innovative research methods, some of which also have an important social significance and concrete application, especially in terms of changing in a positive direction the social care for people with dementia and elderly people in Bulgaria. Dr. Karamelska's research is opening new perspectives, and stimulating other researchers. As a researcher, Karamelska has a high reputation both in Bulgaria and abroad. Teodora Karamelska's academic teaching meets high academic criteria, she is a sought-after and beloved lecturer, and her courses enjoy student interest.

In conclusion, Teodora Karamelska's works submitted for the competition have original scientific contributions that have received national and international recognition. Her theoretical developments have practical applicability, as a significant part of them are directly oriented to the educational work and the topic of this competition. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Teodora Karamelska are unquestionable.

The results achieved by Dr. Karamelska in teaching and research activities fully comply with the minimum national and additional requirements of the NBU.

To summarize: the papers submitted to the competition are rich in issues and topics that address important and topical problems in the social sciences. Teodora Karamelska's research, teaching, and translation activities unequivocally reveal erudition and breadth of research horizon, analytical and innovative thinking. The jury has been presented with the candidature of an outstanding sociologist with accumulated research and teaching experience and an international reputation. Therefore, I find it fully justified to give my unequivocal positive assessment and to recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal for the election of Teodora Karamelska to the academic position of

A
s
s
o
c
i
a



2

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Habil. Vladimir Gradev