

OPINION

by Prof. PhD Svetlana Temelkova Sabeva

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as to the materials submitted for participation in a contest

for the academic position of Associate Professor

on professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and sciences of culture

(Racialization and ethnicization of inequalities and identities in contemporary societies)

in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

In the competition for the position of ‘Associate Professor’ as announced in the State Gazette, No. 58 as of September 9, 2024, for the needs of the Section of Communities and Identities in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, there is one candidate applying: Senior Assistant Professor PhD Georgi Kirilov Medarov of the same Section of the Institute. To the application documents for the competition, he has attached 24 scientific works published in the 2013-2024 period including: the monograph *Races and classes in classical and nonclassical sociology* (in Bulgarian), as a habilitation work; two articles (one in co-authorship) published in periodicals indexed in worldwide databases; 19 articles (three of which in co-authorship) published in other scientific peer-reviewed periodicals; two collective monographs. Publications have four documented quotations in worldwide databases. These works considerably surpass the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor and are also an indicator of active and successful participation in international scientific networks. The annotation of the works formulates clearly and correctly the contributing ideas in the main thematic area as well as the central sociological problematization with which Sen.Ass.Prof. Medarov identifies, that is, the ‘naturalization of social inequalities after the Cold War’.

Georgi Medarov whom I know as a colleague in the Chair of Sociology and Human Sciences of the University of Plovdiv (where he has been a honorary teacher as of 2014) as well as a fellow of the Institute for Critical Theories of Supermodernity, is an eminent researcher in the field of critical social theories, the diagnostics of the present times and the restructurations of social inequalities. He possesses a clearly recognizable research style that heuristically combines the approaches of historicizing social processes and focusing on the

here-and-now, of profound exploration of idea transformations and a strong sensitivity for social interventions, managing to inscribe the 'local' into theoretically conceptualized global transformations of the world after the Cold War. Building upon the achievements of critical sociology in Bulgaria in the last three decades, G. Medarov proposes a characteristic profiling of critical perspectives on contemporary 'culture wars' and 'identity politics'. My opinion is to focus on the monograph *Races and classes in classical and nonclassical sociology* (Sofia, 2024) which is representative of the author's scientific contributions.

The monograph presents an original exploration of contemporary societies that links the diagnostic, critical and analytic perspectives toward two grand categories of sociological objectivation and of public self-description of the social world – that of 'class' and 'race'. The nearly three centuries of these categories' life, full of mental and practical turns, of dramatic conflicts and hopes of emancipation, a life making these categories seemingly mortal but also reborn, is located within the typological framework of the relation between 'classical', 'neoclassical' and 'nonclassical' sociology. G. Medarov studies a fundamental antinomy of the modern era, designated as 'dialectics of liquefaction and solidification' of social identities. Behind the metaphors taken from Zygmunt Bauman, there is in fact a formidable orchestration of an enormous theoretical and empirical archive that involves the reader into the unfolding of the central sociological problematization of the study – the one of 'naturalization and denaturalization of social inequalities / contradictions'. This problematization finds an organizing core in the conception of 'racialization', respectively, of a 'general regime of racialization' and 'particular regimes of racialization', viewed as 'processes of production of racialized groups by ascribing essential (physiological, behavioural, cultural etc.) characteristics' (p. 9). Thus, in the place of the spontaneous substantialist view to which the use of designations 'race' and 'class' may lead, a processual and relational approach comes up, strongly sensitive to the social imagination, an approach allowing to trace the 'production, reproduction and justification of social inequalities and the discriminatory treatment on a communitary and identitary basis' (p. 9). Both in the way it is implemented in the monograph and as a potential for future theoretic and empirical ramifications, this problematization represents a doubtless contribution to the contemporary critical sociology in Bulgaria.

The diagnostic figure of the dialectic between 'racialization and deracialization', between 'liquefaction and solidification', is deployed and defended by a multidimensional sociological analysis. It also carries a strong author's imprint as it demonstrates G. Medarov's

remarkable skill of finding ‘sensibilization’, both theoretical and empirical’, data. The author considers, again in a dialectical manner, the history of sociological ideas and the sociology of social practices recognized in the terms ‘class’ and ‘race’ in emblematic social historical and geographic contexts, including the ‘particular regimes of racialization in Bulgaria’. I would like to especially stress the contributive consideration of the ideas of Weber, Marx, and Arendt, through the prism of contexts of racialization, which crystallizes in an original reading of their symptomatic texts. Max Weber, seen through the dialogues with his American mental partners Du Bois or Benjamin Franklin, is ‘genuinely ambivalent’, as Medarov points out (c. 64), and ‘the color line is the very core of modernity’ (*ibid.*). I see another analytic contribution in the typological construction of ‘classical/nonclassical sociology’, concretized through the ways of historicization of the relations between ‘class’ and ‘race’, which permits the classical sociological thinking to come out not just as evolutionary-progressist and normative regarding social differentiation but also as symptomatically neglecting the themes of racialized difference, colonialism and postcolonialism (p. 91). I find a strong moment in the idea for nonclassical sociological approaches to be linked to the idea of a nonlinear, ‘geological’ notion of history, which is also connected to the very interesting presentation of contemporary decolonial studies. Thus ‘reflexive critical sociology’ (p. 21), as the designation of the research field with which the author is committed, received a genuine architectonic depth in which, along with that, the incessant tension is taken into account between the spontaneous self-descriptions of the social world, with their inertia for naturalizing pathologization, on the one hand, and critical sociological analysis of supermodern capitalism, on the other.

With regard to this analytic model that opens good research possibilities, I would only raise here one optional question: does the author see the contemporary biotechnological and biopolitical regime of racialization (that works not by naturalizing social differences, i.e. not by naturalization as ‘ascribing’ but by capitalizing biologically gained living time, intervening into biological life itself) as inscribed in the ‘general regime of racialization’ of the modern era, or, rather, as a different ‘geological formation’? For more clarity to this question, I will quote the historian Stephen Kotkin who, in his recent lecture in Bulgaria, has set apart a ‘scenario for the future’, seemingly autonomous with regard to the other such ‘scenarios’, saying: ‘You need nothing, everything is in your body and your garden, everything is biology and biology is the solution to every problem. [...] The fifth possible future is biology [...] The solution of all possible problem will be in biology’.

To conclude: after becoming acquainted with the materials and scientific works submitted for the context, analyzing their importance and the scientific contributions they contain, I have all reasons to give, with full conviction, my positive evaluation to the respected Scientific Jury and propose Sen.Ass.Prof. PhD Georgi Medarov be elected to the academic position of ‘*Associate Professor*’ in professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and sciences of culture, in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

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Sofia