

Review

Regarding the candidacy of Associate Professor Dobrinka Dragieva
Parusheva

in the competition for the position of full professor in the field of 3. Social,
Economic, and Legal Sciences; Professional Direction 3.1. Sociology,
Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Cultural Studies - Historical
Anthropology of Political Culture) announced by "Paisii Hilendarsky"
University in Plovdiv

The documents submitted for the competition meet the requirements. Both a reference for the candidate's academic work and for her teaching and international activities are attached, along with the required biographical and educational data. The abstract adequately presents the content of her work, and her scientific contributions are accurately described. In a word, I have assured myself that the competition can be conducted in accordance with the law and the regulations of "Paisii Hilendarsky" University.

I have known Associate Professor Parusheva for years as a respected and sought-after scholar, primarily distinguished in the field of historical anthropology. The opinion of her teaching activities among colleagues and students is high. Her international contacts and research projects are impressive, thanks to both the broad international focus of her research and her knowledge of various Balkan cultures, as well as her proficiency in several languages.

In the papers submitted for the professorship, two main themes are outlined. One of them is urban anthropology, with a primary focus on the Balkan city and, in particular, Plovdiv. These works demonstrate Parusheva's ability to combine archival work with field observations and to arrive at original insights. These studies conclude a cycle of the author's earlier work and prepare for a new period of her creative endeavors, related to the reconstruction of Bulgarian political culture from the past century.

Let me also mention several articles in Bulgarian and foreign publications, which analyze the broader theme of Balkan political culture characteristic of the region - clientelism, the prominent role of the family,

and populist disdain for elites. They serve as a preparation for the main work presented for the competition, namely the monograph "Down with the Government, Long Live Caricature!" In this work, through the case of Bulgarian political caricature from the early 20th century and its role in the public life of the young democracy, Parusheva sets a greater goal: to reconstruct the political imaginary of the emerging national community.

As the author demonstrates, this concept requires an interdisciplinary research approach. On the one hand, it needs to be analyzed through the tools of historiography - the debates, political struggles, and international relations of the era. On the other hand, it revives everyday practices in the young state, beliefs, relationships, scandals, hopes - and here Parusheva resorts to the methods of social sciences, particularly the mentioned historical anthropology. Thirdly, caricature as a form of political communication is a product of modern media, which for the period in question means the press. Here, Parusheva skillfully conducts a media analysis of the major publications of the time, primarily in "Bulgaran," where the most talented author of the era, Alexander Bozhinov, emerged, but also in "Baraban," "Smyah," various versions of the wall newspaper "Papagal," and other publications that featured caricatures. Last but not least, the author adeptly analyzes the visual aspect of caricature as a specific type of message for rapid and contextual use. It should be noted that the concept of "imaginary," as the author shows, comes from the image, i.e., visualization is a fundamental element of political imagination. The monograph is richly illustrated, which makes it even more convincing and valuable for understanding the era.

The author thoroughly analyzes the concepts she employs - political culture, imagination, visual, media communication, and so on, citing a large number of international scholars. In addition, she is well-versed in all the most important Bulgarian studies on the issues she raises, and not infrequently she bridges to her own older works. The monograph demonstrates erudition, understanding, and even complex topics are presented clearly and comprehensibly.

For Parusheva, Bulgarian political reality from the early 20th century is largely personalized. Parties do not differ significantly in their ideologies because their social base is one and the same. As a result, political struggle mainly consists of a battle over who can gain access to power and be able

to distribute state goods. In Bulgaria, as in other Balkan countries, a primary characteristic of the modern state is that it creates a clientele for those in power, which subsequently supports the respective political parties. This is also evident in the caricatures of the period. The author does not reveal fundamental criticisms or sympathies even toward the socialists, the agrarians, or the radical democrats, who claim a greater degree of ideology - attacks against their leaders are mostly personal, too (153-4).

If "all political parties strive for power and use it in a similar way," (230) it means that the difference lies only in the personal qualities and shortcomings of those who lead them. This has a direct effect on the caricatures: they attack not ideological positions but personal flaws - "the wavering of Ivan E. Geshov, bordering on cowardice, the abuses of General Racho Petrov, the weakness of Nikola Genadiev towards women, the political 'flexibility' of Mikhail Takev, the multitude of personal flaws of Prince/King Ferdinand" (230).

This personalization aligns with the genre's characteristics of caricature, which should be quickly understood and often leads to the stereotyping of its characters. Ferdinand is recognized by his large nose, love for luxury and festivities, as well as being often absent from his kingdom. Takev is always depicted with a top hat, the naive Racho Petrov sports a huge mustache, the fearful Geshov is usually drawn alongside a hare, Radoslavov never parts with his beloved cane, and so on. As for the Bulgarian people, they are invariably portrayed as some form of beast - a mistreated horse, a long-suffering donkey sheared by Ferdinand. The juxtaposition of the entire populace and the elites will later be called populism; for the era, Aleko Konstantinov's definition is more understandable: "all politicians are crooks". The figure of the people will be used repeatedly by political demagogues who will lead its dissatisfaction and attack the elites, taking advantage of the political underdevelopment and passivity of Bulgarian citizenship.

The press at the beginning of the 20th century is another center of study. At the start of the century, newspapers were expensive, and the percentage of illiterate individuals was high, raising the question of how much effect caricature had on constructing the political imagination. With a circulation of 2,100 copies, "Bulgarian" could hardly have had a serious influence on public opinion. Here, the role of coffeehouses and similar places, where satirical publications were passed from hand to hand and where visual messages intertwined with jokes, rumors, and anecdotes, comes into play. The simplicity and quick readability of caricatures made them convenient participants in such quasi-folkloric communication. The mentioned wall newspapers like "Balkanski papagal" (viewed for free by cafe visitors) are elements of

similar usage. Parusheva shows that Bulgaria fits into a global trend from the late 19th and early 20th century, namely the "mediatization of politics." (209). "Bulgaran" brought topics, techniques, and messages from the German "Simplicissimus," while the parrots were inspired by the Italian "Il Pappagallo."

The historical monograph traces two periods in the development of political caricature: before the wars, during them, and after. In the first period, humor is brighter and less malicious, mainly directed at domestic political issues. In the second, satire seems to be mobilized for the purposes of the front. Criticism is aimed at the changing military opponents during the Balkan and World Wars: allies become marauders, protectors become devourers.

In this section, Parusheva investigates how caricaturists construct the image of the "other" - the distant other as Grandma Europe, John Bull, or the French Marianne, and the near other as a Greek, Romanian, or Serb. The technique of stereotyping is the same, just turned outward. Greeks are perceived as cowards and fraudsters, while the Serb is identified with the image of a pig, as pig farming was one of the main occupations in Serbia. We encounter the Romanian with a long embroidered shirt and a violin or the Greek Yanis in traditional fustanella and characteristic shoes with pom-poms. "Serbian King Peter is usually dressed in tattered military uniform, while Montenegrin Nikola always wears a wide traditional belt in which weapons, a fork and spoon tucked in." (128) In other words, the image of the "Other" in caricatures reflects the prevailing sentiments in Bulgarian society toward the neighboring people at a given moment (147)

This moment in the research is particularly interesting. On the one hand, it is understandable that the nation is being tested to unite not only around its positive goals, its dreams of territorial conquests, but also around its mocking attitude toward its enemies. On the other hand, this unity seems rather similar to the populist unity of the previous period, when caricature sympathizes with the people as prey and declares everyone up there as corrupt crooks? These crooks are sometimes the enemies we are at war with, sometimes the new enemies who are "feasting on Macedonia", and sometimes our own politicians who catastrophically lost the wars. Caricature seems to play a certain role in this totalizing attitude.

In conclusion.

"Down with the government. Long live caricature!" by Dobrinka Parusheva is an original contribution to understanding Bulgarian political culture. Through caricature, it presents the public debate at the beginning of the 20th century, the parties, the sentiments, and the tumultuous development of democracy in Bulgaria. The author has an excellent grasp of her material, as well as the vast literature on the multiple perspectives contained in her research.

Having familiarized myself with the materials and scholarly works presented in the competition and having analyzed their significance and the contributions they

contain, I express my **positive** evaluation and recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History to select Assoc. Prof. Dobrinka Parusheva for the academic position of Professor at the Paisii Hilendarski University in Plovdiv in: higher education field 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (Cultural studies - Historical anthropology of political culture).

Sofia, September 8, 2023

Prof. DSc Ivaylo Dichev

