

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Ana Luleva

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regarding the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of “**Professor**”
at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,”

in: Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences;
Professional Area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies
(Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse – title of the academic specialization)

In the competition for “Professor,” announced in the State Gazette, issue 96 of 11.11.2025,
and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,” for the needs of the
Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History,
the only applicant is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova of Plovdiv University “Paisii
Hilendarski.”

1. General Presentation of the Submitted Materials

By Order No. RD-22-38 of 09.01.2026 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I was appointed a member of the Scientific Jury in the competition for the academic position of “Professor” in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional area 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse), announced for the needs of the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

The only one candidate, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova of PU “Paisii Hilendarski,” submitted documents for participation in the announced competition.

The set of materials submitted in hard copy by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova complies with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” and includes the following documents:

Administrative documents: 1. Application for participation in the competition; 2. Curriculum Vitae; 3. Diploma for higher education; 4. Diploma for the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”; 5. Certificate for holding the academic position of Associate Professor; 6. List of

scientific works; 7. List of publications submitted for participation in the competition; 8. Statement of compliance with the minimum national requirements; 10. Declaration of originality and authenticity; 11a. Abstracts of the submitted materials; 11b. Abstracts in English; 12a. Self-assessment of contributions; 12b. Self-assessment of contributions in English; 13. List of citations; 15. Certificate; 16. Documents regarding teaching activities; 17. Documents regarding research activities; 20a. Official note; 20b. Official note.

The candidate has submitted a total of sixty-six scientific works: ten studies, four monographs, and forty articles. Nineteen scientific works, outside the dissertation, are accepted for review and considered in the final evaluation. Four works related to the dissertation and forty-three works outside the scope of the competition are not reviewed. Sixteen publications are published in Bulgaria and three abroad.

2. Brief Biographical Data

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova holds a Master's degree in Sociology from PU "Paisii Hilendarski" and a PhD in Sociology from the same university. Her doctoral dissertation (2010) is titled "*Practical Logic and the Order of Discourse: Bourdieu and Foucault.*" In 2013 she was awarded the academic position of Associate Professor in Sociology of Inequalities with a habilitation thesis entitled "*Inequalities, Discourse, Inheritance.*"

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penkova has an active research, teaching, and administrative career. She has served as Deputy Director of the Institute for Critical Social Studies at PU (2008–2022), Chair of the Quality Committee and the Attestation Committee at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, member of the University Evaluation and Accreditation Committee, Head of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences (2014–2021), member of the Faculty Council and Academic Council, Deputy Dean, and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History.

3. General Characteristics of the Candidate's Activity

Evaluation of Teaching and Academic Preparation

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penkova teaches core undergraduate and graduate courses, including: Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratification; Historical Sociology of Discursive Practices; Discourse and Ideology; Introduction to Sociology II (Non-classical Problems); Sociology of Educational Institutions; Pedagogical Sociology; Modernity and Postmodernity; Order and Disorder of Discourse; Inequalities and Social Suffering; Modern and Postmodern Theories;

Paradigmatic Problems in Social and Human Sciences; Media Discourse; Identity, Boundaries, Inequalities.

In the PhD program in Sociology, she teaches Non-classical Discourse Analysis and Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratification. For the Erasmus program she teaches in English Sociology of Inequality and Social Stratification. She also leads the Summer Practice “Inequalities and Social Suffering.”

She has prepared three electronic readers (2025): *Social Inequalities and Stratifications: A Critical Perspective on Social Suffering and Vulnerability*; *Analytics of Discourse: Theory, Methodology, Empirics*; *Discourse, Power, Ideology*.

She actively participates in public events, doctoral training, and academic sessions. She has supervised numerous bachelor’s and master’s theses and eight doctoral students, three of whom have successfully defended their dissertations.

Evaluation of Research Activity

For this competition, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penkova submits one monograph and eighteen publications (eight studies and ten articles). Seven are in English and twelve in Bulgarian. Ten are single-authored and eight co-authored. All are published in reputable scientific outlets.

Contributions and Citations

The monograph *Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity* (University Publishing House “Paisii Hilendarski,” 2025, 388 pages) represents a fundamental scholarly work contributing to the affective-discursive sociology of inequality. Through the concepts of distinctiveness and affectivity, the author offers a significant contribution to the interpretation of distinctiveness (after Pierre Bourdieu) and to the “affective turn” in the social sciences.

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters divided into two parts (*The Distinctive Village* and *Affective Otherness*), followed by an Afterword, Bibliography, Appendix, and Abstract.

The author’s decision to divide the work into two parts with the respective chapters is conceptually well grounded: the first analyzes figures of distinctiveness, while the second examines figures of affectivity. Although based on different empirical data relating to diverse historical and social contexts, the two parts of the book correspond to one another, demonstrating the interconnection between distinctiveness and affectivity.

The introduction sets out the analytical starting points. The author's understanding of the foundational concept of distinctiveness is articulated in its two modes, following Pierre Bourdieu: positive distinctiveness as "having a world" and as the endowment of distinctive people and places, and negative distinctiveness as deprivation and exclusion of the "affective others." This dichotomy serves as the basis for the analytical examination of social practices and identities. The choice of a praxeological approach is emphasized, treating them as concrete, embodied everyday practices.

A significant contribution, opening perspectives for further interpretation, is the author's thesis that not only social agents but also spaces, times, and objects with which they interact can be distinctive.

Methodologically, the work demonstrates the successful application of a transdisciplinary approach and a "combination of multiple analytics": historical sociology of discursive practices, discourse analysis of emotion, analysis of performativity and indexicality, social praxeology, and ethnomethodology — "all subordinated to the more general goal of developing an affective-discursive sociology of inequality and its problematization in a transdisciplinary key" (p. 11). The aim of the study, as formulated by the author, is a "description of the ways in which distinctiveness is affective and affectivity is distinctive" (p. 24).

In the first part (*The Distinctive Village*), the central figure is that of distinctiveness, conceptualized through Bourdieu's opposition between positive and negative distinction. This opposition structures the study and makes it possible to trace how distinctiveness can be simultaneously a privilege and a vulnerability. The empirical focus is placed on the transformations of the Bulgarian village of Ruzhevo Konare in the early years of socialism, when it was constituted as a "distinctive village" through the overlap between a "model village" and a "demonstrative cooperative farm." The analysis of the "Book of Impressions" (1948–1971) and the extensive archive of the TKZS (Agricultural Cooperative Farm) shows how legitimacy, recognition, and social selectivity were constructed through discursive and affective practices. The book functions as an affective-discursive heterotopia in which the socialist ontology of proximity is preserved and actualized — a world of intense affective solidarity, where "the village-becomes-the-farm" and "the farm-becomes-the-village."

The first part is also contributory through the introduction of the analytical concept of the "life transition." Examined from an ethnomethodological perspective and as practices of

“doing,” life transitions are individually experienced, actively negotiated, and performative. They involve movements between social positions, ages, and institutional roles, with the interaction between bodies, spaces, and objects generating subjectivity and giving meaning to individuals’ experiences. The analysis shows that life transitions are not neutral but participate in the construction and reproduction of social boundaries and hierarchies.

In the second part (*Affective Otherness*), a conceptual framework is proposed for studying affectivity as a key to understanding contemporary forms of social inequality and otherness. In dialogue with debates surrounding the “affective turn,” the analysis problematizes the affect/discourse opposition and defends the concept of “affective-discursive practices.” Emotions are thus understood not as internal psychological states but as social and cultural practices of ‘doing things’: they create boundaries, hierarchies, and communities. A central analytical category is “affective otherness” — the figure of the marginalized, negatively distinctive “other” onto whom hatred, fear, and disgust are projected. These emotions function as “technologies of affect” through which the privileged majority affirms itself, investing “us” with value while turning “them” into bearers of threat, impurity, or contagion. In this way, affective inequality is generated — a subtle, often invisible form of social devaluation embodied in everyday interactions.

The empirical basis of the analysis consists of two manifestations of affective attitudes toward the Others: hate speech directed at refugees and the “invisible everyday racism” toward Roma, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through an analysis of media and institutional discourses, the study demonstrates how Roma otherness is epidermalized and hygienized — recognized “at a glance” as a “carrier of contagion” or a “threat.”

The text emphasizes that the deprivation of affective others is often perceived as a pre-given essence, which renders its overcoming conceivable as impossible. Nevertheless, the question is raised of the possibility of “self-inheritance” — a transition from deprivation to endowment through reflexive action that transforms the boundaries of the social order.

In the Afterword, the author broadens the discussion toward a more general ontological perspective: she contrasts the “ontology of proximity” (affective solidarity) with the late-modern “ontology of distance,” characterized by risk and vulnerability. By problematizing boundaries and liminality in contemporary life, living in crises, and the pervasive sense of uncertainty and vulnerability, she raises the question: “Will we be able to cross this last

boundary — a gateway to a divided, yet gathered in its affective solidarity and togetherness world, unfolding in the cradle of care?” (p. 339).

Situated within a transdisciplinary framework, the monograph of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova convincingly demonstrates the interconnection between distinctiveness and affectivity and their foundational place in the affective-discursive sociology of inequality she has developed.

The published articles and studies in which the author elaborates her ideas within the field of affective-discursive sociology of inequality have been cited by a number of other scholars, which attests to their positive reception and undeniable scientific contribution.

Beyond the field of affective-discursive sociology of inequality, two publications relate to the sociology of ecology. In them, the author introduces the concept of the anthropobiotic community, proposing “a new way of relating to the world and a new ontology of living together, namely that of being affected within the cradle of care.”

Three other texts analyze the pro-ecological dispositions of young people. A notable contribution is the application of an unconventional qualitative methodology that provides access to young people’s pre-reflexive attitudes toward water; in addition, for the first time the issue of food as waste and young people’s pro-ecological attitudes toward it is examined.

Finally, though not least in importance, I should emphasize the contributory significance of the text devoted to otherness, bordering, and mobility on both sides of the Bulgarian–Turkish border.

The scholarly works submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova are distinguished by conceptual innovation, high theoretical value, and strong scientific and social relevance. The author possesses the abilities, knowledge, and academic courage to develop new research fields in sociology.

The quantitative indicators of the criteria for holding the academic position of Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” are exceeded.

4. Assessment of the Candidate’s Personal Contribution

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Penkova participates in the present competition with original scholarly works in which no evidence of plagiarism is found. Eight publications (articles and

studies) are co-authored. In her monograph, the research of other authors with whom she collaborated within the research projects under which the empirical material was collected is properly cited.

5. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no critical remarks. I would recommend that the monograph *Figures of Distinctiveness. Figures of Affectivity* be published in English.

6. Personal Impressions

I became acquainted with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penkova during the conference *Life Transitions in the Transforming Village: Memory, Identity, Inheritance*, organized by the team of the project of the same name in the spring of 2024. I was impressed by the excellent organization of the conference and, above all, by the creative spirit and the pleasure of communication and exchange of ideas among the participants, as well as by the academic and friendly atmosphere, which was undoubtedly also due to the project leader, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penkova.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its implementation, and the respective Regulations of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

The candidate in the competition has presented a substantial number of scholarly works published after the materials used for the defense of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” and the procedure for acquiring the academic position of Associate Professor. The candidate’s works contain original scientific contributions that have received international recognition, with a representative part of them published in journals and scholarly collections issued by international academic publishers. Her theoretical developments are directly oriented toward teaching activities. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova are beyond doubt.

The results achieved by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova in teaching and research fully comply with the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty

of Philosophy and History, adopted in connection with the University Regulations for the implementation of the LDASRB.

After reviewing the materials and scholarly works submitted in the competition and considering the analysis of their significance and the scientific contributions they contain, I find it well-founded to give my positive evaluation and to recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the appointment of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stoyka Petrova Penkova to the academic position of **Professor** at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences; professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Historical Sociology of Inequality and Discourse).

February 24, 2026

Reviewer:

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(signature)

Prof. Dr. Ana Luleva