

REVIEW

by Prof. Maria Antonova Schnitter, DSc, Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University, in connection with the competition for the occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor” under Higher Education field 3 “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”; Professional field 3.1 “Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Sociology – Sociology of the Body)”, announced in State Gazette, Issue 57/26.06.2020

By Order No P33-4707 от 25.09.2020 г. I was appointed a member of the scientific jury in the competition described above. In the competition for “Associate Professor”, announced in State Gazette, Issue 57 of 26.06.2020 and on the website of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University for the needs of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and History, as the only candidate involved is Chief Assistant Dr. Nina Vasileva Nikolova from the same department

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

I have known Dr. Nikolova from the very beginning of her collaboration with Plovdiv Sociology (1996) and I had the opportunity to follow the vicissitudes of her professional development. I will state now that during these years she has become a respected lecturer and a mature researcher with a high standard of her own, so that the current competition could be described as “late” in the best sense.

In order to participate in the competition Nina Nikolova presented a monograph (*Excrementum. Senses of Closeness. Criticism and Humanism, 2020*), a study, 9 articles in specialized periodicals (3 of them – in press), 3 articles in scientific journals (one of them – abroad, co-authored), and two prefaces, i.e. a total of 16 texts, and it should be noted that 10 of the articles are in fact summarized in the monograph.

The scientific output of the candidate meets the national and specific faculty requirements for the occupation of the academic position “Associate Professor” and in some respects exceeds them.

2. General characteristics of the activity of the candidate

Two clearly distinguishable problem areas can be identified in Dr. Nikolova’s research activities after the defense of her doctoral dissertation (2000). These are, on the one hand, the studies of the social transformations accompanying the Bulgarian “transition” (presented in publications No 8, 9 and 11-15 of the attached list), and on the other – those dealing with the

various aspects of the social functioning of the olfactory sense (No 1-7 and 10 of the list, as well as the monograph).

The first group of publications demonstrates the perfectly mastered research technique of microanalysis. Whether it is an analysis of visual (No 13) or textual (No 11) data, retrieval of the affect of the so-called “pain archives” (No 8), or the ways in which individual experience transforms and re-evaluates the past (No 10), in this group of texts N. Nikolova shows her ability to understand the detail and to bind the “high theory” with its “practical application”. This is an ability that is not self-evident for the current generation of social researchers and speaks of a deep “personification” of the chosen analytical position. In this earlier section of scientific papers, the study on the media metamorphoses of the image of the private entrepreneur in the first decade of the transition deserves special mention. In it, the author draws important conclusions about the role of the media in the definition and the clash of basic concepts in the economic field – conclusions that are predictive in nature, judging by the later results of the processes we are witnessing today.

The second thematic group of research is a testament to a new degree of research maturity and confidence and clearly outlines a “preserved research area” in which Dr. Nikolova makes new scientific contributions. Most of these texts are subject to preliminary “public approbation” on the pages of authoritative periodicals in the country and abroad (No 1-3, 5-7, 10) or as part of significant publishing projects (No 4), but their unification in a complete text in the monograph gives them additional meaning. We will add that although it is not claimed as an independent scientific contribution, the magnificent translation of Freud’s famous text “Das Unbehagen In Der Kultur¹” undoubtedly plays a role in the maturation of ideas in Nina Nikolova’s monograph.

The monographic work of Dr. Nikolova “*Excrementum. Senses of Closeness*“. Criticism and Humanism, 2020 (210 pages) is a significant contribution in a poorly studied field of sociology – that of the social life of the senses, in this case – the so-called “senses of closeness”. Approaching them from the position of psychoanalysis, here Nina Nikolova makes the important assumption that these so-called “lower senses” are largely related to disgust and pleasure, in which disgust is a former (repressed) desire (for pleasure). Skillfully combining Freud’s and Elias’ approaches to the civilization process in combination with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological analysis, she worked out an effective “key” to understanding the

¹ Freud, H. *Texts on Culture*. IK K&H, S., 2019

transformations in the understanding of the body in the transition from modernity to postmodernity. The considered cases are mainly from the realities of the (Soviet) world of socialism and are another convincing proof of the mastered research technique and the correctness of the initial hypotheses. The book is read with ease and pleasure, and the reader remains as if not-completely-satisfied: at least for me it would be interesting to see how the developed analytical model would be applied to Bulgarian material (in-depth analytical view of our recent past is one of the strengths of the researcher N. Nikolova). Of course, in the sphere of wishes there remains the opportunity to study the large-scale change in the attitude towards purity and the body through these optics, which we are witnessing and living/suffering in the situation of the global COVID-19 pandemic. I hope that this will definitely be priority in the future scientific activities of Dr. Nikolova.

Before concluding, I do not want to forget to mention the serious teaching experience of N. Nikolova – she is the author of several original lecture courses, successfully presented to students from four universities, and her role in creating and establishing the so-called “Plovdiv model” of sociology is indisputable.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

Against the background of what has been said about Dr. Nikolova’s serious and proven scientific potential in the field of sociological research, and given her exceptional linguistic competence, it seems strange that she seems to refrain from making her research available to a wider range of readers. As much as we highly value and respect the *Sociological Problems* Journal as a highly authoritative scientific forum, it seems to me that the achievements of Nina Nikolova in her work deserve and could easily have international visibility. My recommendations for her future scientific achievements are in this direction.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the above, it can be summarized that the candidate for the academic position “Associate Professor” Dr. Nina Vasileva Nikolova has submitted for participation in the competition documents and materials that meet all the requirements of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the implementation of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the respective Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University.

The candidate in the competition has presented a significant number of scientific papers published after the materials used in the defense of “Doctor” education and scientific degree, which contain original scientific contributions and have received recognition, as a representative part of them are cited in authoritative and scientific journals. Nina Nikolova’s scientific and teaching qualifications are unquestionable.

After getting acquainted with the materials and the scientific papers presented in the competition, the analysis of their significance and the scientific contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my unequivocally positive assessment and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to prepare a report to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy and History for the election of Nina Vasileva Nikolova to the academic position of “Associate Professor” at Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University under Professional field 3.1 “*Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences*”, in the scientific specialty “*Sociology – Sociology of the Body*”.

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Review prepared by:

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