

## **ATTITUDE OF REVIEWER**

from

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on

on the competition announced in the State Gazette, issue. 57 of 26.06.2020,

for the academic position of „**Docent**“

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 Sciences“,

specialty “Sociology – Sociology of the Body”

### **1. Information about the procedure**

I hereby submit this opinion as an internal member of the Scientific Jury for the academic position of "Docent" on the basis of: the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Application of ADASRB, Order of the Director of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” P33-4707/25.09.2020 and Decisions from the first meeting of the academic jury.

One candidate participates in the competition for the academic position “Professor” in the professional field 2.3. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences: Nina Vasileva Nikolova. The documents have been submitted on time and comply with the requirements of the ADASRB. At the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held in absentia by exchanging emails in the period 07-08 October 2020 it was decided to prepare an opinion for evaluation of the publications presented by Nina Vasileva Nikolova.

This opinion is based on the materials provided by the author: publications including 2 monographs, 12 published articles – 5 (4 in Bulgarian and 1 in Russian) articles are in co-authorship, as well as 3 additional articles accepted for publication as follow: “Excrements and Perfumes: Deodorizing and Aromatizing of Corps and City Spaces”, “Noli me tangere” and “Homo hapticus”; 2. official notes for articles accepted for publication; table on the minimum requirements points by groups of indicators for docent; declaration of originality; list of scientific works; annotation of the materials for participation in the competition and self-assessment of the contributions; 2 abstracts of monographs; autobiography; doctor's degree certificate; certificate of work experience; reference for classroom and extracurricular employment; reference for

scientific guidance of defended diploma theses; reference for research work with students and doctoral students; reference for study work with students; reference for participation in international and national scientific forums; reference for participation in research projects; reference for application of research developments in the educational practice.

Since the presented List of Scientific Papers does not indicate which of the described scientific papers of Dr. Nikolova is applying for the competition, I have accepted that these are the scientific papers, scanned copies of which were presented to the members of the scientific jury as a general file titled "Publishing Activity". This conclusion is partially confirmed by the "List of articles for participation in the competition" (this list includes only articles, but not monographs and other publications), constituting section I of the presented by Dr. Nikolova "Annotation of materials for participation in the competition and self-assessment of contributions". I would like to make a few more clarifications.

The monograph "Political Anatomy of Modern Man. The Lived Body as a Challenge to Sociology", published in 2001 by the Critique and Humanism Publishing House, is a book published on the basis of a defended dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor". In this sense, it is indicated by Dr. Nikolova in the section on indicator № 5 of Table 1. "Minimum required points by groups of indicators for different scientific degrees and academic positions" under ADASRB. As it has already been evaluated and reviewed in the procedure for acquiring of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", defended on June 26, 2020, as evidenced by the Diploma for "Doctor" 96921 / 01.09.2000, this monographic text will not be separate subject of my opinion hereafter.

In the section "Published monograph, which is not presented as the main habilitation work" of the Table 1. "Minimum required points by groups of indicators for different scientific degrees and academic positions" presented by Dr. Nikolova under ADASRB, is noticed the following book as published in co-authored with Milena Yukimova and Svetlana Sabeva: *Yakimova, M., Nikolova, N., Sabeva, S. 1999. The Bulgarian school and the notion of Europe. Analysis of the Bulgarian high-school textbooks in history. Sofia: Balkan Colleges Foundation. ISBN 954-90302-3-7.* As I did not find a copy of this book or the part of which Dr. Nikolova is the author in the materials provided to me in the competition ("Publication Activity"), it is not the subject of this opinion either.

I would also like to note that most of the submitted articles (9 in number) are incorporated - in a supplemented and revised form, in the content of the monograph "EXCREMENTUM. Senses of proximity (a sociological analytic)", published in 2020 by Critique and Humanism Publishing House. Six of the presented articles are devoted to other topics: 1) "On ordinary

people and invisible existences” (2013), published in co-authorship with Snezhana Dimitrova, 2) “The image of the private entrepreneur in the press – media metamorphoses (1988-1996) (2008); 3) “The Authorized Body. Politaesthetics of Montage in Weekly Newsreels” (2005), co-authored with Svetlana Sabeva; 4) “Ti ve affected” (A sociological look at reflexive history)” (2005), published in co-authorship with Svetlana Sabeva as a foreword S. Dimitrova’s monograph “Women, History, and Nothing More”; 5) “In the snares of mutating networks (some observations on post-socialist school)” (2004) and 6) “The embodied history of the present: the transformation of network capitals” (2003), published in co-authorship with Miroslava Georgieva. From the submitted documents and due to lack of information about Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Nina Nikolova in the Register of Academic Positions and Dissertations of RAPD (<https://ras.nacid.bg/dissertations-search>), I cannot prove whether and which of the articles submitted in the competition were used to acquire educational and scientific degree “doctor”.

Due to these circumstances, the main focus of this opinion will be the monograph “Excrementum: Senses of Proximity (Sociological Analytics)” and its scientific merits and contributions.

## **2. Short biography of the candidate**

Nina Nikolova is born in 1964. She graduated has graduated from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, in 1990, obtaining a bachelor's and master's degree in sociology, as the topic of her thesis is “The Body in the Structures of Power”. In the period 1990-1991 he held a postgraduate qualification at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, and in 2000 he defended his doctorate at the Institute of Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences on the topic: “Political Anatomy of Modern Man: Sociology of the Lived Body”. Dr. Nikolova's interests are clearly outlined in her priority field of the sociology of the human body and biopower, including during communism in Bulgaria. Currently, Dr. Nikolova holds the scientific position of “Assistant Professor” as a member of the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy and History of the University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski”. She is a recognizable and established translator, who received in 2016 an award for outstanding achievements in the field of translation of the humanities of the Union of Translators in Bulgaria for the translation from German of the book “Paradigms for a Metaphorology” by Hans Blumenberg.

Nina Nikolova is the author of 3 monographs (1 collective), 2 studies (1 co-authored) and 41 articles (17 co-authored), as well as the compiler of 2 thematic issues of the magazine “Sociological Problems” and 1 book (all three in co-authorship). The many publications in co-

authorships testify to the desire and ability of Dr. Nikolova to work on common projects together with other respected and recognizable scientists in Bulgaria. She was the editor-in-chief of the Archive magazine (Civic Education Bulletin) for the period 1995-1996, and in the years 1995-1998 she was also a member of the editorial board of the Critique and Humanism magazine, as well as the editor-in-chief of the both series “Cases” and “Theoretical Spaces” in Publishing House – Critique and Humanism. Her academic development includes participation in 14 research projects (1 of which she is a project manager) and in 16 scientific forums. For this activity Nina Nikolova has 43 citations mentioned by her, as well as 1 published review of her scientific work.

Nina Nikolova is a holder of 7 courses, she has successfully supervised 3 defended dissertations, and her research work includes 7 projects with the participation of students and doctoral students. An expression of her commitment and dedication to the students in University of Plovdiv “Paisii Hilendarski” is her participation as a member of the evaluation jury within the National Student Essay Competition “Cultures of Knowledge and World of Life” in the last three years (2018-2020), as well as her functions as head of the activities for conducting the candidate-student campaign in the Department of Sociology and Human Sciences. Dr. Nikolova has also participated in the development of curricula for new disciplines based on her research.

### **3. Compliance with the Minimal National Standards for the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences**

According to the documents presented by the candidate regarding the minimum requirements by groups of indicators for associate professor, Nina Nikolova meets the minimum national requirements for the academic position of docent.

### **4. Evaluation of the contents academic achievements of the candidate**

As I pointed out in Section 1 of this opinion, the main focus of the substantive analysis of Dr. Nikolova's scientific achievements will be her habilitation paper “EXCREMENTUM: Senses of Proximity (A Sociological Analytic)” (2020). The book is dedicated to a topic set by Dr. Nikolova in the first appendix to her previous monograph “Political Anatomy of Modern Man. The Lived Body as a Challenge to Sociology” (2001). The issue of turning the closet into a toilet (p. 134), along with the special public-private panopticons of the privy and urinal, are part of the public expansion of a special care for the body, which makes it uncomfortable. It is a matter of taking care of the proper management (i.e. hiding) of the waste released from the lived human body, which has become not only an occasion for individual shame (personal toilet), but

also a reason for observing a certain socially important discipline (hygiene). Therefore, the public toilet is presented by Dr. Nikolova as both a “fast place” with preventive functions (p. 138), but also as a “peripheral place” (p. 140), where a person leaves the Center to correct his “bodily mistakes”.

In the monograph “EXCREMENTUM: Senses of Proximity (A Sociological Analytic)” the emphasis is on a privileged by Dr. Nikolova in his Latin spelling human waste: EXCREMENT. However, the pledge of the text is not so narrowly defined, but seeks and problematizes the genealogy of the division of human senses into “higher” (sight and hearing) and “lower” (smell, taste and touch). Visual and audio stimuli are recognized as dominant in modern society, which allow disciplinary practices to create and maintain the necessary distances between human bodies for ensuring the public order. Significantly more complex and ambiguous is the social topography of the so-called by Dr. Nikolova “senses of intimacy”, which are “much more related to disgust and pleasure” (p. 7) and are the subject of many taboo interventions in the process of education.

The book consists of Introductory Words and three parts, two of which (the second and third) include appendices. In structural terms, the book can be read “through” all three senses, with which Dr. Nikolova connects intimacy. In adopting such an approach, the “world of smells” is the subject of study in the first part, taste – is the focus of the first chapter of the second part, and the second chapter of the second part is carefully touched. The third part is dedicated to the sanitary culture and the private space especially during the years of communism in the People's Republic of Bulgaria. It appears as a field in which the philosophical conclusions and socioanalytic interpretations made by Dr. Nikolova in the previous two parts of the monograph are actually experimented.

The book is written clearly and understandably, but also in the typical bright and memorable style of Dr. Nikolova. Particularly pleasant are the skilfully integrated analyses of Joanne Harris's novel “Chocolate” and Patrick Süskind's novel “Perfume” (pp. 26-28; 75-79), the presentation of Victor Hugo's “Les Misérables” (p. 37-38) a description of the “bottom” of Paris, which “doubles the city” (p. 61), as well as the fictional conversation constructed by Dr. Nikolova at the beginning of the first part (p. 19-21) between Simmel and Freud on “the problem for olfactory perception” (p. 17). The reference and even the creation of literary texts into the monograph not only diversify the rhythm of the book, but also successfully demonstrate Dr. Nikolova's thesis on pushing the philosophical problems of the “senses of closeness” beyond the dominant humanities and closing them in the much freer in their daily lives spaces of literature.

Although there is no general bibliography at the end of the book, Dr. Nikolova has built and substantiated her theses with the help of many indisputable authorities in the field of philosophy and sociology, as well as a number of authors established in the special field of habilitation work. She cites authors such as Freud, Simmel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Marcuse, Bakhtin, Canetti, Benjamin, to whom are added Alain Corbin (“The Foul And The Fragrant. Odor and the French Social Imagination”), Constance Classen, David Howes, Anthony Synnott (“Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell”), Jürgen Raab (“Sociology of Smell”), Olga Weinstein (“Scents and Smells in Culture”) Dominique Laporte (“History of Shit”), Ernest Schachtel (“On Memory and Infantile Amnesia”), Michel Onfray, Richard Sennett (“Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization”), Mark Neocleous (“The Smell of Power”), Vilém Flusser, Thomas Fuchs, Monika Kritzmöller and others. In the analysis of the “skin experience” references are made to Jean-Luc Nancy, Paul Valerie, Husserl, Aristotle, and the consideration of the extremely curious dimensions of the so-called “economics of pain” in the modern professional sport (and in particular the so-called “boxing habitus” – p. 119) are supported by quoting Loïc Wacquant, Johan Huizinga, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, and a convincing analysis of the history of one of the most scandalous world-famous footballers - the Uruguayan Luis Soares (pp. 116, 124). Other authors, including Vasile Ernu and Dusan Bjelic, are embedded in the theoretical basis of the third part of the monograph, which is more distinct and specialized than the first two parts.

I could conclude that the scientific contributions mentioned by Dr. Nikolova correspond to the merits of the habilitation work presented by her, as I believe that the connection between the psychoanalysis and sociocultural practices of disciplining the “close” senses by turning them into “lower” (e.g. pp. 49-51). The emphasis on the enormous power of smell, taste and touch as mechanisms for the immediate existence (thickening) of a living human body in the world, as well as tracking the process of their transformation under the pressure of power into symptoms of disease associated with various forms of disgust, are undoubtedly one of the most distinctive achievements of Dr. Nikolova's book. The many resistances formulated by Dr. Nikolova against the increasing in its diversity ways of dealing with the remnants of human incarnation by arranging them in a well-managed and regularly cleaned “bottom” of society and culture in modernity should also be mentioned as a valuable contribution.

### **5. Impact of the publications of the candidate**

Nina Nikolova are cited in 43 books and articles.

The largest number of citations (26) is published on the basis of a defended dissertation for doctor degree book “Political Anatomy of Modern Man. The lived body as a challenge to sociology”. This is the book that was the subject of a review published in the magazine “Balkan Forum” in 2001. The book has aroused the interest of many authors in various scientific fields, as it presents an original approach to the sociology of the human body. It is an extremely careful approach, sensitive to the various power encroachments on the living human body, which “disenchant” the human embodiment itself. Topics such as the medicalization of death, the visibility of the lived body, the disciplining techniques in the process of civilization, the rationalization of modern corporeality, the role of correctional institutions and clothing as a bodily mirror have not gone unnoticed by the community of Bulgarian sociologists who actively worked with the book of Dr. Nikolova. Particularly curious and provocative are the details that Dr. Nikolova manages to emphasize in presenting the sociological perspectives of clothing, such as the “fastening pocket” (p. 61) and the uniform (pp. 62-70).

Dr. Nikolova's other scientific works are also repeatedly cited, and the articles “The Symbolism of the Human Body” (1998) and “The Authorized Body. Politaesthetics of Montage in Weekly Newsreels” (2005, co-authored with Svetlana Sabeva), should be noticed. In these articles human corporeality in its philosophical and sociological dimensions comes to the fore again.

## **6. Critical commentary on the submitted thesis**

To my extremely positive assessment of the qualities of the habilitation work presented by Nina Nikolova, I would like to add a few comments, which in a more general sense could be considered as suggestions for the future scientific activities of Dr. Nikolova.

First, I would like to point out that the metaphors used by Dr. Nikolova, such as the metaphor of the “sewer underworld” (p. 62) and the metaphor of the “night soil” (p. 60), contain a high emotional pathos that tries to defend suffering as a factor constituting humanity. This thesis of Dr. Nikolova is formulated on p. 114, which contains the only story in the monograph from the personal experience of Dr. Nikolova (the incident with her daughter). It seems to me that an apology of suffering as a condition of compassion has as clear boundaries as its constitutive significance. Although suffering as a personal experience is a necessary precondition for experiencing compassion from humans as an inevitably embodied beings, this does not mean, in my opinion, that suffering above a certain threshold cannot have the exact opposite effect. Indicating the extent to which suffering is a human-forming factor is an

important clarification that should be made clear in order to control the captivating effect of the metaphors used.

Secondly, I would like to ask a question to Dr. Nikolova, which is related to the consideration of hygiene as “olfactory neutrality” (p. 61), and in Corbin's term – as “olfactory chastity” (footnote on p. 27). In her habilitation work, Dr. Nikolova points out the following: “From now on, bodies and spaces, generally speaking, if they smell anything at all, they must smell “clean” (p. 61), because in every smell is “hidden a message of stench” (p. 67), even in the perfume. The same danger is contained in touch, which must be tamed within certain rituals, described as “infinitely repetitive actions, emotionally amputated and thus secured” (p. 103). My question is, does every ritual lead to “anaesthesia of touchiness” (p. 103)? Doesn't the ritual also have the power to capture and intensify the act of a touch, turning it into a collective experience? Doesn't the neutrality imposed by hygienic practices in fact offer a new and equally rich (such as that produced by the “lower” senses) content of various forms of human existence in which the ability of homo erectus (pp. 67, 90) to descends (“humiliates”/“humble”) to his corporeality, to the so-called “the inconvenient earthly remnant” (p. 46) is successfully combined with his ability to stand up in new ways, allowing him to compact some specific and complex (let me call them “heavenly”, “high”) spaces in which he finds different parts of himself? I ask the question in order to prevent the negative impression that the reader of Dr. Nikolova could remain about the significance of the “topness” of human body and it’s significance for the rich and authentic human existence.

## **7. Personal opinion about the candidate**

I know Nina Vasileva Nikolova from various academic and scientific forums in which we have participated as lecturers and authors. She has always been an active participant with clear scientific theses, who knows how to argue and defend her positions.

We have no common publications with Nina Nikolova and we have not worked on common projects.

I believe that Nina Nikolova is a responsible and conscientious scientist, with a very strong sense of detail and always expressed willingness to work in good faith and systematically on issues falling within the interdisciplinary spaces of various scientific fields.

## **8. Conclusion**

From the submitted documents it can be concluded that Nina Nikolova exceeds the minimum national and institutional requirements for the respective academic position. Her



research, publishing and teaching activities have all the necessary qualities to be awarded the academic position of “Docent” in a professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences. I firmly vote in favor of Nina Vasileva Nikolova to be awarded the academic position of “Docent”.

10.11.2020

Sofia

**Signature:**

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Stavru