

OPINION

by Associate Professor Dr. Ina Dimitrova, Plovdiv University, regarding the Associate Professor habilitation procedure at Plovdiv University in Area of Higher Education 3.1., announced in Darzhaven vestnik, 57, 26.06.2020 r.

1. Assistant Professor Dr. Nina Nikolova is the only participant in the competition with a total of 17 publications, of which two are monographs and 15 articles (14 in national publications and 1 abroad). The publications and citations meet the minimum national requirements for the position of "Associate Professor". Her submitted publications and scholarly and educational academic work meet the legal requirements for the position of Associate Professor at Plovdiv University (PU).

The publications and the scientific autobiography of the candidate show sustainable and high quality academic activity: authorship of research, participation in and management of scientific projects, translation and editing, participation in editorial boards, membership in scientific organizations, as well as intensive teaching activity, combined with various forms of work with students and doctoral students.

2. Evaluation of educational and pedagogical activity and preparation of the candidate / s (teaching aids, lecture courses, work with students, graduates and doctoral students)

Assistant Professor Nina Nikolova has a clearly recognizable presence as a lecturer in the Faculty of philosophy and History at PU. Substantial part of her courses are located in a conceptual space at the intersection of corporeality and public space. Over the years it largely determines the nature and the specifics of the profile of the department itself. This is an unequivocal testimony to the significant place of Nina Nikolova in the teaching and pedagogical work of both the department and of the various interdepartmental initiatives, in some of which I have had the honor and pleasure to participate (for example, those organized by ICSS). Her courses such as "Historical Sociology of Politics (anatomopolitics)", "Sociology of the Body", "Sociology of Corporeal Practices" have always aroused the interest of students and have set new conceptual horizons that have their strong impact on them throughout their studies, which once again testifies to the qualities of Nina Nikolova as a lecturer. Nina Nikolova's close involvement with students and doctoral students through their participation in research activities and projects (seven are mentioned), as well as the guidance of graduates and review work should be emphasized.

3. Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate; contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, applied) and citations

Nina Nikolova's research work brings all the merits of the outlined teaching activity so far, and here we should additionally take into account the continuity of her scientific contributions, the sustainability of the conceptual perspective, the ability to work closely with other researchers. The indicated scientific contributions in the application are clearly and precisely formulated and are fully justified. From the full list of publications, as well as from my long-term impressions and our work together, I can unequivocally say that Nina Nikolova's scientific contributions undoubtedly have an impact on many representatives of our academic community. This is especially true of the monograph "Political anatomy of modern man. The living body as a challenge to sociology", which in 2001 set a new, promising and influential research perspective. The latest monograph from 2020 "Excrementum: Senses of closeness" is promises the same and therefore from now on I will consider some of its main contributions and points.

The focus of the monograph are the "senses of closeness", also called lower senses, namely taste, smell, touch and their various forms of social processing, repression, control and framing. The preferred analytic perspective is the psychoanalytic approach. The entrance to the several thematic circles, which we find in the book, is set at the beginning through references to Freud and Simmel's reflections on the senses of closeness and in particular on the sense of smell and its connection with the experience of disgust. The latter is a central theme for the book, which in itself is a contribution. The connection between the senses of closeness and disgust is a leading line in the study and until the end of the opinion I will focus on several main semantic nodes in it.

The psychoanalytic perspective in which Nina Nikolova works allows disgust to be thought of as a "former desire" and desire as paired with pleasure (74 p.). Why a former desire? Because gradually in the course of individual development the senses of closeness give way to the senses of distance through the "strict taboo of taste, smell and tactile perceptions" (74 p.). This happens with the upbringing imposed by parents. Thus, upbringing actually cultivates in us "aversion to the objects most desired by [the child], those of the body and its excretions... so the desired objects... resist" (ibid.).

I will not comment here on the nature of the basic assumptions on which this scheme is based, because they are part of the psychoanalytic corpus that has been chosen as the leading approach, and I would not like to problematize this choice. I will only point out what I mean. Basic assumption is the identification of, for example, the "most coveted objects" by the young child as the excretions of her/his body. It seems to me that in their place, depending on the conceptual framework, we can put countless other objects and from there build a completely different theory of disgust. For example, Harry Harlow would probably say that he has proven experimentally that the most coveted objects are the warmth and softness to which the little monkey is attracted. How we will call them additionally depends on the level of description - they are on the one hand a "soft towel", but on another descriptive level are "the closeness of the mother and the need for protection". By this I only note that we have to take into account how much theory ladenness we *already* have introduced in our assumptions (I am fully aware that certain degree of it is inevitable).

But in the basic connection between the senses of closeness and disgust, which Nina Nikolova offers us and convincingly develops, I am more interested in something else - namely, why does she choose to analyse disgust only in this relation? Obviously, the purpose of the text is not a theory of what unites all the things we find and call disgusting, or of what in them makes them fall into the same class of objects. I would not like to impose a goal that the author did not set for himself, but I am still curious why the connection between disgust and the gaze - this sense of distance - is completely ignored. Both Kolnai and Colin McGinn (an equally important author on disgust) define disgust as the aesthetic emotion among the aversive emotions. The others are hatred (moral emotion) and fear (prudential emotion). In these analyzes, disgust is an affect, mainly focused on the way the object *looks*.

It seems to me that this connection - the ability to be *disgusting and disgusted* only through the visual sense - actually gives even more strength to the thesis that disgust is a social construct and power dispositional, through which sociality is self-preserving (36 p.). If power relied solely on the sense of smell to control us through disgust, its effectiveness would be far more insignificant. Disgust is and must be possible - and power is generously exploiting this potential - to happen only through sight, only through *seeing X as disgusting*. This is paired with different strategies for moralizing, relying on the other "aversive emotions" and so we feel simultaneously disgust, fear and hatred for those groups that are problem or danger for the social and economic order.

We find this emphasis in a number of key studies on governing through management of our emotions. Such is Martha Nussbaum's study "From disgust to humanity", in which she analyzes the functioning of the legal system in the United States in relation to various minorities (mainly the LGBTIQ movement) through "politics of disgust"; the study "The public identity of the welfare queen" (Hancock 2004), which examines how anti-poverty measures are legitimized and gain symbolic capital through politics of disgust targeted at the single, unemployed black mother in the United States; the mobilization of disgust as a tool for managing attitudes towards people with disabilities or refugees; disgust as a tool for regulation in the field of biotechnology: in bioethics it is defined, for example, as an expression of deep wisdom, which is the most authentic way to feel where the border goes beyond which the biotechnologization of life is no longer acceptable.

Another main semantic node in the text, related to the previous one, but independently analyzed, is the place of smells in the civilization process. Dominique Laporte is quoted on page 53 as saying that "smells have no place in the constitutive triad of civilization - hygiene, order and beauty, in it the smell is always an object of suspicion and even when it is sophisticated it always hints at hidden impurity. Beauty does not smell". The counterpoint is the example of the period XIV-XVIII in Europe when "beauty must smell" (54 p.). But in the end, Nina Nikolova seems to agree with the thesis that "every smell, even the most refined, is a hidden message of stench", insofar as it ultimately hides the temptation and the danger of eroticizing the social order (66- 67 p.). In this context, it is indisputable that the book offers us an astonishingly ingenious and interesting analyzes of smell, smell, perfume, as well as the historical - civilizational - game between

distance and closeness, smell and touch, the bourgeoisie and the "common people." But I would also like to make a comment. It seems to me that there is a certain neglect of the social functions of the fragrance and an exacerbation of its understanding as a repressed stench. Reading the relevant parts, including those about the deodorized spaces, the images that immediately appeared in my mind were - the airport in its commercial zone (we all know how fragrant it is) or the area in the supermarkets where pastry is located - for the first we would say that it smells of luxury, for the second – that it smells of "bread" or of "home". Both directly activate an affective bundle of experiences, memories, desires (nicely analyzed towards the end of the book). And this bundle, as Nina Nikolova says, has a strong seductive effect, because it is composed of "promises to touch or taste" (189 p.). But I think the promises are for much more and that is why we can be governed by fragrance - they are promises of prosperity, order, protection, freedom, wealth. In other words, they are promises of desired identities and lifestyles that we (are taught, interpellated to) long for, and which the economic order is constantly and ruthlessly mobilizing for its profit. Fragrances in this sense have clearly settled in the constitutive structure of civilization and are not at all absent, as Laporte argues - or if we want to be more modest - not of civilization, but at least of the modern neoliberal order. In this sense, it is indisputably insightful to observe the intermediateness of the sense of smell and its substitute position in relation to the repressed by society contact senses, which "can and are clearly regulated" (188-189 p.), but let us not forget that the smell not only undermines the order through its physiological uncontrollability (188 p.) and its pervasiveness, but also powerfully helps to strengthen it when it comes to fragrances.

Last but not least, two very short comments. A critique of enhancement through the thesis of suffering as a condition of compassion, but thought through touch: "we cannot touch without being touched, and that means experiencing compassion without suffering," seems to me a particularly important and theoretically promising move. Perhaps it would be interesting to consider it in relation to disgust. The third part, dedicated mainly to socialism as a modernization project with specific biopolitical discourse and the emphasis on dirt as freedom and on specific social spaces as the *komunalka* and the queue, are undoubtedly contributions demonstrating academic professionalism and cultivated sociological sense.

In conclusion, I will say that the overall academic presence of Nina Nikolova is characterized by obvious professional competence in each of the discussed above activities and fields. Thus I express my positive opinion and will vote in her favor in the Habilitation jury.

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