

## **REVIEW**

**From Prof. Dr. Raina Dimitrova Gavrilova, member of the jury in the competition for the academic position of "associate professor" under PN 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (Theory and history of culture. Anthropology of contemporary cultural practices. Studies of material culture), announced in SG no. 67/04.08.2023 for the needs of the "History and Theory of Culture" department at the "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University (SU)**

**With candidate Velislava Yurieva Petrova**

### **I. General assessment of the received materials**

By order No. RD-38-554 of 26.09.2023 of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (SU) I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury of a competition for the academic position of "associate professor" at SU in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional subfield 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (Theory and history of culture. Anthropology of contemporary cultural practices. Studies of material culture), announced for the needs of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Two individuals submitted applications for the competition but after reviewing the submitted documents, the jury decided to approve the participation of only one of them and: Dr. Velislava Yurieva Petrova, assistant professor in the Department of History and Theory of Culture at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The set of materials presented by Velislava Petrova in electronic and paper format is in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for its Application (PPZRASRB), as well as with the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff of the SU, and includes the following documents: Application, Jury Appointment Order, Europass CV, diplomas for obtained degrees and positions, evidence of employment, general list of publication, list and summary of the publications submitted for participation in the competition, table with evidence for meeting the

minimum requirements, list for noticed citations, summary of scholarly contributions, evidences of educational, research and applied activities, 22 publications.

## **II. Brief biographical data**

Velislava Petrova has Bachelor's degrees in sociology and cultural studies from Paris Descartes University (2001) and SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2003) and a Master's degree in the same field from Paris Descartes University (2002). In 2010, she defended a doctoral dissertation on the topic "The market as a culture. Emergence, Institutionalization, and Power Relations around Market Places" and obtained PhD degree from the same two universities. In 2010, she won a competition and became an assistant professor in the Department of History and Theory of Culture at SU, and she has been the main assistant in the same department ever since 2011. She has been a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. Between 2009 and 2023, she participated in numerous international and national research projects. She speaks English, French, and Spanish.

## **III. Research**

### *1. Monograph*

Velislava Petrova submitted a monographic work for the competition, entitled "Waste as a resource and imagination. Anthropological Perspectives" (Sofia, Publishing House of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2023) with a volume of 173 pages. I must immediately point out that this is the first and only anthropological study in similar format and volume in Bulgaria. Globally, the waste from human activity and the abhorrence it generates have been in the realm of social researchers for a long time and in different perspectives: anthropological (M. Douglas), psychoanalytic (J. Krasteva), urban (K. Lynch) and have become particularly problematic in recent years, as the threat of the irreversible consequences of pollution becomes increasingly visible. In Bulgaria, the topic of waste appears mainly in documents of different governing bodies; in the analyzes of ecologists and engineers, and in the press. V. Petrova not only brings together the diverse perspectives through application of the holistic approach, a central advantage of the anthropological method, but offers observations, data, and interpretations that outline a much more complex picture. At the beginning of the work, the author clarifies that the waste is a complex category in itself and it exhibits a broad register of perception: from

uselessness to usefulness; from emblem of abjection and abhorrence to desirable object as raw material; from the material to the imaginary, being, at the same times dynamic and relational. The discussion on meaning is continued in the chapter "Waste as Materiality and Imagination" q where the author offers interesting comments on the different connotations of the two terms "garbage" and "waste" (p. 77 ff.) The work is organized around several foci: waste as a border, cultural and social, including in visualization of social hierarchies; waste as materiality; waste as a resource. I find the developed analytical scheme not only heuristic, but with possible managerial applications. The methodological choices are clearly articulated; the anthropological nature of the study is demonstrated by field research.

The chapter "Toward a Cultural History of Waste" is noteworthy not only for the aphoristic oxymoron of the title, which is intended as a provocation to dominant cultural attitudes. The concise presentation of the evolution of the understanding of the challenges of the Anthropocene condenses the picture of modern thinking about waste as an imprint of human activity and provides context for the observations on the Bulgarian reality. The next chapter, "The Waste Legacies of Socialism: Material Culture, Networks, Economy," introduces the Eastern European experience in a balanced and nuanced way; in the next chapter, Bulgaria's experience is comprehensively presented with various materials (including photos) and testimonies. I find this portion of the work - the effort to bring together the run away ends of the topic - to be very useful in laying the foundation for any further research. I have a certain problem with the use of the noun neoliberalization in the conclusion of this part of the monograph: neoliberalism is a very loaded term, and I would like to hear the author's arguments for its use in this case.

The field research is presented in two chapters and includes personal observations, in-depth interviews, participation in public discussions and documentary analysis of both normative and journalistic texts, which shape public opinion and attitudes and, ultimately, policies and practices. The title of the section "Waste as Materiality and Imagination" posits the axis, around which the tensions surrounding waste management in Sofia, the city chosen for the field research, are presented and interpreted. Retraced and, it should be noted, well documented, are the stages, actors, and positions in the history of the battles over garbage, summarized in a table comparing the differences and similarities in the positions of the main protagonists. The recorded (and quoted) statements of the interviewees, in turn, bring back the living people to the center as

bearers of the contradictions. The conclusion of the chapter "Waste as part of the social contract" actually presents the author's position in a synthetic form.

The section devoted to the economic aspects of the problem adds another dimension that comes into the awareness of the citizens only partially. The collected data and testimonies are an important contribution to overcoming the "ignorance" of the citizenry (quoted by the autocrat).

The conclusion is a good synthesis of the varied materials and offers two cautionary and important recommendations for possible optimistic solutions.

The monograph includes selected photos, tables and graphs. The bibliography consists of 18 titles in Bulgarian, 71 in foreign languages, 12 popular editions, 35 normative documents, the minutes of three public discussions, 47 publications in the media - an testimony to the richness of the text, methodological and empirical.

## *2. Other publications submitted for the competition*

Dr. Petrova has presented a list and the full texts of 21 articles, published since her appointment to the academic position "assistant professor" (2011). They can be grouped into several different but related thematic areas: the market as an urban space (5), anthropology of nutrition (5), garbage (6), the city (2), others (3). Ten of them are in foreign languages - English and French. The city and its social and cultural phenomena is a permanent terrain of her research, as she applies different optics to examine social relations; her interest in food and nutrition finds natural continuations in the topic of waste. In general, the tests reveal a marked interest in different and new questions and a clear awareness of the ongoing deconstruction of rigid definitions and models. In this sense, they offer both empirical material and interesting general observations and interpretations.

## *3. Citations*

Velislava Petrova had prepared and presented a table with noticed citations. The jury corrected a few of the scored points for individual posts that, in our opinion, were not correctly marked. But even after the correction, the noticed citations fully meet the minimum national requirements.

## *4. Scientific Contributions*

The most recent topic in Dr. Petrova's research represents an undeniable contribution to the Bulgarian academic field: for the first time, the waste as a social, cultural, and economic category is introduced, methodologically thought through, and researched on the basis of diverse material. I find noteworthy the combination of information and reflections of modern science on global scale with the reconstruction, documentation, and interpretation of local phenomena in the tradition of the new global ethnography. Documenting practices related to nutrition, the market, waste treatment, social and individual attitudes is a contribution to understanding modernity and an important work in preserving the traces of ephemeral social phenomena. Finding and exploring the intersections of classic anthropological research (urban anthropology, nutritional anthropology, political anthropology) is undoubtedly an important step in modernizing the national research tradition.

#### *5. Participation in projects*

Velislava Petrova has presented a list of 5 national and 7 international projects, in which she had participated as a researcher, 9 of them with supporting evidence. Also, we have a list of 10 national and 19 international conferences, congresses, and seminars, in which she has participated.

#### **IV. Learning and teaching activity.**

Velislava Petrova has led or currently leads two compulsory courses in the bachelor's degree ("Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices" and "Introduction to Cultural Anthropology"); one mandatory Methodology seminar in the Masters Program "Cultural Anthropology"; three elective courses in the bachelor's degree program and two in the Master's degree. She supervises the cultural anthropology field work of undergraduate students

#### **V. Compliance with minimum national requirements**

The comparison of the table prepared by the applicant for compliance with the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "associate professor" with the submitted materials shows that her application satisfies them, namely:

- group of indicators A - 50 at min 50

- group of indicators - In 100 at min out of 100
- group of indicators D 4-10 – 250 at min 200
- group of indicators D - 125 at min 50 (calculated by the candidate 160 points, corrected by the jury - 125 points)

## **VI. Community service**

As an assistant to the late Prof. Dichev Velislava Petrova, from the very beginning of her academic career became actively involved in open general audience meetings, in the form of regular seminars and discussions. She regularly participates in various public debates on urban development.

## **VII. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any).**

I have known Velislava Petrova personally since she joined the Department of History and Theory of Culture as an assistant professor. I have personally seen her sharp critical eye regarding academic culture, her activity during the discussions of both teaching needs and in the development of shared projects. I have been with her on field research trips several times and have participated in joint projects. She consistently demonstrates discipline, intellectual curiosity, and a willingness to take on and accomplish tasks. I have the impression that she cares deeply about teaching and strives to bring around and involve students in research projects.

## **VII. Opinions, recommendations and notes**

I have no notes and recommendations.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

The documents and materials presented by Velislava Petrova meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the Regulations for Awarding Scientific Degrees and Positions of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The applicant in the competition has presented a significant and sufficient number of scientific texts, published after the awarding of the academic position of "principal assistant professor". In

the writings of the candidate, there are original scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the field of anthropology and cultural studies. The list of courses offered shows that the candidate's research work finds application, methodological and empirical, in her teaching as well. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Velislava Petrova are indubitable.

The results achieved by Velislava Petrova in the educational and research activities are fully in line with the minimum national and additional requirements adopted by the SU in connection with the implementation of the RASRD.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, and analyzing their significance and the scientific and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and to recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report to the Faculty Council of Faculty of Philosophy for the election of Velislava Petrova to the academic position of "associate professor" at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural studies (Theory and history of culture. Anthropology of contemporary cultural practices. Studies of material culture).

15.12.2023 Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Prof. Dr. Raina Gavrilova