

STATEMENT

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Galina Nikolaevna Goncharova, Sofia University "Kl.Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History and Theory of Culture, in her capacity of member of the scientific jury, appointed by the Order No. RD-38-554/26.09.2023 of the Rector of Sofia University and the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Philosophy, Protocol No. 1 of 12.09.2023.

Concerning: The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor for the needs of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University "Sv. Kliment Ohridski" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices. Studies of Material Culture), announced in State Gazette No. 67 of 04.08.2023

Two applicants have submitted documents for participation in the competition for associate professor announced by St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy - senior assistant Dr. Velislava Petrova and Dr. Rozalia Gigova. At the first meeting of the scientific jury, held on 16. 10. 2023, it was established that the documents and materials for the competition, submitted by Dr. Rozalia Gigova, do not comply with the minimum national requirements under the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules for the Application of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (for indicators in group "G" and "D") and she was not admitted to evaluation. Only Dr. Velislava Petrova was admitted for evaluation, as the documentation she submitted fully complies with the legal requirements and the Rules. The latter comprises a curriculum vitae, diplomas for obtained educational degrees, evidence of employment; a list of all publications and a list of publications and summaries for participation in the competition, a reference list of scientific activities and publications from the Authors system of the Sofia University; a table with evidences for fulfilment of the minimum requirements under Article 26 of the Law on Academic Staff Development; a reference list for noticed citations with a description of the cited and citing publications; a reference list for original scientific contributions with the relevant supporting materials.

Dr. Velislava Petrova is a talented and versatile researcher with serious scientific achievements at national and international level. Already her PhD thesis gives a claim to search for and maintain an interdisciplinary focus and orientation towards extremely up-to-date and globally recognizable topics in the field of sociology, urban anthropology, economic ethnography and postsocialism studies. Dedicated to the urban market as culture, it was developed under the international collaboration and joint supervision of the Sofia University and the Paris Descartes University, where Dr. Petrova obtained both her BA and MA thesis in Sociology. Quite predictably, in the years following her thesis, in the course of her work as Assistant Professor and Senior Lecturer at the Department of History and Theory of Culture, Sofia University (2011-2023), she accumulated numerous academic appearances, fellowships, guest lectureships and research initiatives within prestigious university networks and research projects, again in a broad transnational context. Among the many examples in this respect can be mentioned the Center for Academic Research - Sofia Fellowship and her Fulbright research visit to the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Petrova is initiator and organizer of numerous seminars and events to promote the achievements of Bulgarian social

sciences. She is a member of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the Association of Critical Heritage Studies and the International Association for Southeast European Anthropology.

Dr. Velislava Petrova participated in the competition with a total of 22 publications, including one monograph and 21 articles, all of them corresponding to the scientific genre and format, declared by Petrova. The table with the evidences for fulfilment of the minimum national requirements provided by her clearly shows that in all indicators, including Group E indicators, she meets and even exceeds the required number of points for the academic position of Associate Professor.

Dr. Petrova is a university lecturer with extensive and varied experience. The latter undoubtedly deserves to receive wider and fuller recognition and development within the university structure. She has taught one compulsory course in Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices and three electives in BA that give a finished expression to her deep research interests in the field of cultural anthropology and economic ethnography. As the title of one of them, "Waste as a Resource," suggests, they also have direct relevance to the topic and thematic circles of the habilitation monography. Similarly, the two compulsory courses and the two elective courses in the MA both sustain the anthropological perspective and open it up to conceptualisations and methodological experiments regarding the contemporary material and social environment of human development.

Such an ambitious and consistent scholarly endeavors marks the publications submitted to the competition. All of them, with a few exceptions, can be grouped into three main thematic areas: transformative trends in the construction and inhabitation of urban spaces and event spaces; meanings and symbolizations of contemporary culinary consumption; materiality and symbolic potential of garbage and waste.

The habilitation monograph submitted for evaluation belongs to the third area and also relies on an interdisciplinary approach and shows sensitivity to hybrid zones and discourses of environmental governance and shared living spaces. Referring to specific economic, political and cultural contexts of the use of garbage and waste, Dr. Petrova attempts to specify the complex and continuously boundaries between nature and culture, between social and biological, between material and imaginary, (re)negotiated and dynamised in capitalist modernity. It is the focus on liminality that predetermines the original choice of methodological tools, as well as their continuous self-reflexive reaffirmation in different, structurally and content-wise, parts of the text. It is no coincidence that two parts are devoted to the clarification of working concepts and approaches, in which the categorial metamorphoses of waste and the need for continuous (re)contextualization of political, economic and cultural uses are problematized. Consistently assuming that materiality and imagination are the main conceptual axes along which the object and the subject of the research should be thought, Dr. Petrova tests various propositions and hypotheses attesting to the social significance/meanings of Sofia's grey containers, rubbish or unnecessary objects. First and foremost, it is the understanding of the impossibility of arriving at a complete definition of garbage and waste (suggested by the title of the first chapter), which explains the repeated return in the exposition to the problem of their continuously contested attempts at differentiation or synonymization.

Second come the observations about defining waste through negative moral values, about transient materiality that evokes shame and disgust, about waste as part of the international exchange of commodities and setting social hierarchies of the "polluting paradise". This "sifting" of research perspectives demonstrates an impressive scholarly erudition in terms of leading authors and works on the subject, from "classics" such as Clifford Geertz, Mary Doulgas and Julia Kristeva, to established researchers of material culture such as Daniel Miller, to young Bulgarian sociologists such as Nikola Venkov. It allows for a clear argumentation and refinement of the starting analytical framework - Michael Burawoy's principle of global ethnography together with the conceptual model of the socialist bloc's waste regimes of Jouja Guillet and (her) notion of the sociocene. Equally large and reflective is the fan of research approaches. This is where the "constructions of the "unnecessary" as a social/cultural/historical category" find their place in combination with intertwined perspectives: historical narrative and inclusive observation and fieldwork, economic analysis with a future-oriented, diagnosis of the organization of the Bulgarian welfare state.

The historical narrative does not unfold in its classic, old-fashioned format of strictly chronological narrative, but as a genealogy and cartography of social and economic relations within different versions of the welfare state and the environment, defined by and in turn redefined out of ideological discourses of transforming waste into a valuable resource and environmental protection. The latter are examined in the multiple and closely intertwined contexts of the Second World War, the Cold War, and postsocialism; of the development of technology and consumer society, of environmental movements, of the complex rivalry between planned and market economies, of making sense of climate change; of Bulgaria's socialist modernization and the individualized policies of transition. Particularly noteworthy here is the reconstruction of the system of secondary raw materials with all its ideological basis and legacies, practical attainments, and everyday uses. Dr. Petrova raises the question of the ecocide of the socialist regime in Bulgaria by referring to the research of Radosveta Krustanova. It seems to me that it deserves further clarification and discussion, insofar as attempts to maintain a propagandistic "green" facade of socialism can be registered both at the beginning and at the end of the regime - at least with the construction of the park spaces of industrial cities, among which the most obvious example is Dimitrovgrad or the discourse of protection of nature, especially intensified in 1970s.

The reconstruction under review also predetermines the development of the thematic circles of the last subchapters, which, besides elaborating and heuristically enriching the leading concepts, make different analytical cuts on the contemporary situation of waste management in the country, in particular on the current public debates and political demands for separate garbage collection and the construction of a garbage plant (with or without incinerator). Dr. Petrova carefully describes the "collision of two regulatory imaginaries" and convincingly shows that both end up in the loop of incoherent and unscalable activism, narrow expertise and lack of trust in institutions, individual and non-socially significant efforts vs. private and group business interests.

As a colleague of Dr. Velislava Petrova, I have the pleasure of observing both her teaching and research work from close distance. I can boldly say that, one cannot help but appreciate her diligence to be a scholar with conceptual and methodological contributions to the field of contemporary material culture studies, to participate reflexively and fruitfully in current public debates on sensitive topics, and to engage generations of students in research on

globally and locally significant cultural discourses and practices. A diligence for which I find strong evidence in the publications and habilitation monograph submitted for the competition. Regarding the latter, I have not detected any plagiarism, nor have I been notified of such plagiarism. Here I have to specify that I am not in a conflict of interest with Dr. Petrova and I have no publications in common.

From all that has been said so far, it is inevitable to conclude that Dr. Velislava Petrova fulfils all the legal and university requirements, as well as the necessary qualities for holding the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Anthropology of contemporary cultural practices. Material Culture Studies), for the needs of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski. Without hesitation I vote "for" the scientific jury to recommend to the Faculty Council of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" that Dr. Velislava Petrova be elected to this academic position.

Sofia,

16 December 2023

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