

## **ATTITUDE OF REVIEWER**

from

**Prof. Stoyan Andreas Stavru,**

**Department of Ethical Studies, IFS-BAS**

according to the competition announced in SG No. 67 of 04.08.2023,

for the **academic position** of "Associate Professor" f

or the needs of the Department of "History and Theory of Culture"

at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

in the professional field

3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies

(Theory and History of Culture, Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices, Studies of Material Culture).

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

I present the current opinion in my capacity as an external member of the scientific jury for the academic position of "Associate Professor" based on: ZRASRB, PPZRASRB, Order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" No. RD-38-554/26.09.2023, and Decisions from the first meeting of the scientific jury held on 16.10.2023.

At the first meeting of the scientific jury, a decision was made to admit Assoc. Prof. Dr. Velislava Petrova for evaluation in the competition, as she meets the minimum national and institutional requirements for the position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture, Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices, Studies of Material Culture). Regarding the candidate Dr. Rozalia Gigova, the scientific jury concluded that she does not meet the minimum national requirements in the indicators of groups "G" (Г) and "D" (Д) and she was not admitted for evaluation in this competition. With this decision of the scientific jury, the current opinion will solely encompass the documents submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Velislava Petrova. The documents were submitted on time and comply with the requirements of ZRASRB.

At the first meeting of the scientific jury held on 16.10.2023, at 17:00, it was decided to prepare an assessment opinion for the publications submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Velislava Petrova.

This opinion is based on the materials provided by the author, namely: publications, including 1 monograph, 21 scientific publications (articles), of which 11 are in Bulgarian, 5 in

English, and 5 in French; autobiography; diploma for higher education; doctoral diploma; 2 certificates of holding an academic position; a list of all publications; a list of scientific works submitted for the competition; a reference generated from the SU Authors system; a reference for meeting the minimum requirements according to Art. 26 ZRASRB; a reference for noticed citations with descriptions of cited and citing publications; a reference for original scientific contributions; 10 course outlines, including 5 mandatory and 5 elective courses, with 4 taught in bachelor's programs and 6 in master's programs; evidence of innovations in teaching methods and teaching implementation in the practical environment (a total of 9 documents, including: extracts from programs, internship invitations, visits, summer schools, certificate for guest lecturer, official note for co-organizing an international film festival, etc.); official notes for participation in projects; certification for participation in a scholarship program at the CIA; evidence of editorial activity (5 documents); evidence of experience in preparing socio-economic assessments, assessments of social impact, and management of infrastructure projects; abstracts of peer-reviewed publications (in Bulgarian and English).

The focus of this opinion will be the monograph "Waste as Resource and Imagination. Anthropological Perspectives", unfolding one of the main thematic scientific fields in which Assoc. Prof. Dr. Velislava Petrova works, as well as the scientific merits and contributions contained in this monograph.

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

Velislava Petrova was born in 1979 in Sofia. She completed her higher education at the University of Paris Descartes, earning a bachelor's degree in 2001 and a master's degree in 2002. Additionally, she graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a bachelor's degree in sociology and cultural studies in 2003. Between 2005 and 2010, she pursued her doctoral studies in Sociology and Cultural Studies at the University of Paris Descartes and Sofia University, successfully defending her doctoral thesis in 2010 on the topic "The Market as Culture: Emergence, Institutionalization, and Power Relations around Marketplaces." The defended dissertation employed a methodology based on field studies, encompassing in-depth and life interviews. The scholarly contributions of the dissertation primarily lie in economic ethnography and urban anthropology.

Dr. Velislava Petrova's interest in these topics is evident in some of the publications submitted for consideration in the current competition. From 2010 to 2011, Dr. Velislava Petrova served as an assistant at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," and from 2011 to the present,

she holds the position of chief assistant in the Department of Cultural Studies at the same university. Her academic experience also includes participating in the Fulbright program as a Guest Researcher in the United States, Berkeley, in 2020, where she contributed to a research project on "Economies of Dirt, Materialities of Waste. Bringing Different Cultural Perspectives Together."

Dr. Petrova has participated in numerous national and international research projects, indicating her continuous and in-depth interest in the fields of urban anthropology and material culture. Noteworthy is Dr. Velislava Petrova's emphasis on various forms of solidarity in her scholarly experience.

Dr. Velislava Petrova's primary research interests are associated with the study of material culture in its broad spectrum, ranging from anthropological dimensions of food to economic ethnography of waste. A priority area in Dr. Petrova's work is the cultural dimensions of waste economies and the related imaginary forms that influence existing social practices. In this area, she has conducted both independent research and contributed as an editor to scientific materials (thematic issues of journals), making a significant contribution to the delineation and structuring of the scientific field of waste anthropology in Bulgaria.

Velislava Petrova is the author of 1 monograph, 25 articles, 2 studies, and 1 translation. Her academic development includes participation in 13 research projects (1 of which she led) and over 30 conferences and seminars, most of which are international. For this body of work, Velislava Petrova has 23 citations attributed to her.

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

In accordance with the information provided by the candidate regarding the minimum requirements, Velislava Petrova meets the minimum national and institutional requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor, based on the grouped indicators points.

### **4. In-depth analysis of the candidate's scientific achievements**

The publications presented by Velislava Petrova for participation in the current competition can be categorized into several groups. The first group of publications is related to the topic of her defended doctoral dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "doctor." It concerns the cultural dimensions of the market and the conduct of critical cultural studies on the so-called "late" capitalism (which can be compared to the so-called "ultra-

capitalism"). Publications such as "Women and the Urban Market," "Take the Market Out of Sight!" and "See the Market Run Away!" can be mentioned in this group.

The publication "Wild Markets as Places of Uncertainty and Filth" serves as a unique link between this first group of articles and the second group, which addresses the problematic field of waste anthropology as part of the anthropology of material culture. This is also the group of publications that is most closely related and to some extent culminates in the monograph "Waste as Resource and Imagination: Anthropological Perspectives." This monograph and its scientific contributions will be the main subject of commentary below.

In this second group of articles, works such as "The Unnecessary as a Research Problem," "Garbage as Battle, Garbage as Resource," "Why Garbage Matters," and "Garbage as Boundary" can be distinguished.

The third group of publications is related to the theme of food and its place in the urban environment and contemporary urban practices. Of particular interest and with important cultural interpretative and reflexive research value are the articles "The Spectacle of Refined Eating Together" and "Food as Circumstance, Food as Situation." The theme of imagination establishes a clear and compelling connection between the studies dedicated to waste and those related to food, "landing" Dr. Petrova's research interest on stable "urban ground." The specific "urban" context of the questions posed in material culture gives recognizable specificity to Velislava Petrova's scholarly works and positions her among the leading authors in these areas.

The monograph "Waste as Resource and Imagination: Anthropological Perspectives" unquestionably represents the first comprehensive anthropological study of waste in Bulgaria. In addition to presenting the cultural history of waste in the context of dynamic transformations in the "local-global" relationship, the monograph addresses one of the most relevant topics of our time: the impact of human activity on the environment and humanity's ability to set limits on the acceptability of this impact when associated with certain negative effects.

The focus of the monograph is the Bulgarian context, which, prior to Velislava Petrova's scientific publications, was practically an unexplored scientific field in the humanities. Despite Bulgaria increasingly being associated with the reputation of being a destination for the treatment of foreign waste generated by other European Union countries (the hypothesis of the so-called "pollution haven"), Dr. Petrova's monograph becomes a text with political implications. It aims to explain and respond to the challenges posed by waste management, not only as an economic and social issue but also as a cultural problem.

The monograph is clearly structured, maintaining the tension between waste as a resource and waste as creation of imagination. It traverses three main axes of exposition: the utilization of raw materials as an economic resource during socialism (the first chapter of the monograph), the imagination surrounding household waste in Sofia (the second chapter of the monograph), and the commercialization of both waste itself and the processes of waste management (the third chapter of the monograph). An interesting and original common thread drawn by Dr. Petrova connects the three themes, namely the theme of waste as competition (p. 3 of the abstract of reviewed publications). When examining these three different axes of cultural dynamics related to our attitude towards waste, specific cases are presented and problematized, cases in which Dr. Petrova, as a scholar, has engaged in various capacities.

An important focus of the study is associated with attempts to shift political attention from collective decision-making to individual efforts to address the problems arising from increasing waste production and consumption. Interesting examples in this regard include those related to packaging management (p. 138 of the monograph) and the use of recycling as a means of creating "busy-ness" (p. 139 of the monograph). The possibility of utilizing Armiero and De Angelis's concept of "wasteland" (p. 50 of the monograph) is explored to legitimize attempts to normalize discarding as a natural part of everyone's responsibility as part of humanity and as a "natural" consumer.

The monograph dedicates attention to the quantity of waste generated by Bulgaria and compares it to that in other European Union countries (pp. 38-43 of the monograph). The influences of individualism and neoliberalism on publicly created and endorsed formats of hope regarding our ability to cope with waste are traced. The conclusion of the monograph also addresses this theme. The union of disgust (seeing waste as dirty and unnecessary), individual guilt (viewing waste as personal responsibility), and private economic interests (seeing waste as a potential resource and expensive commodity) forms the basis of a socially imagined perception of waste not as a shared responsibility but as a problem for some (consumers but not producers) to be solved by others (the "traders" of waste, to whom the state and municipalities have entrusted cleaning activities).

The monograph convincingly demonstrates the complexity of waste-related issues and the need to mobilize multiple perspectives for evaluating proposed regimes for waste management. Waste management is not just an economic problem; it exploits our imagination of waste as an object of aesthetic engagement (unsightly waste in the urban environment that we prefer not to see) and as an object of ethical assignment (bad waste in ordered spaces that we

have placed there and must remove). The negative attitude towards waste as not only something unnecessary (unwanted residue) but also something owed (imagined debt) creates a negative mode for everything that is discarded. Discarded items are interpreted as individual problems that public authorities should deal with, outsourcing their resolution (paid management) to private economic entities (traders of cleanliness). This specific emphasis can be maintained in the monograph precisely because of its focus on a specific type of waste: household waste, and more specifically, household waste in the city of Sofia. The marginalization of other types of waste in the Bulgarian political and media space suggests a management of the very imagination of waste, followed by the management of already imagined waste in the desired format.

This conclusion is also connected to one of Dr. Petrova's main theses, according to which the problems of human impact on the environment can only have a global solution aimed at reducing waste: "Waste constantly reminds us that we live in a world built of interconnected phenomena, where the local and the global are in constant communication, and the apparent complete locality of waste is actually a global phenomenon" (p. 22 of the monograph). At the same time, Dr. Petrova points out that "at the local level, trust in public policies regarding waste, which should be sustainable and in the public interest, should be restored first and foremost. Such policies can create community ties if they are based on proximity and commitment" (p. 4 of the summary of reviewed publications, as well as specific proposals on pp. 115 and 123 of the monograph). In this sense, waste is considered not only as a "total social fact" (p. 54 of the monograph) in Marcel Mauss's terminology but also as an "interscalar transport medium" (p. 45 of the monograph) in Gabriel Hertz's formulation.

Dr. Petrova's original and valuable proposals for future waste policies in Bulgaria include suggestions for introducing new financial mechanisms that encourage waste processing in smaller communities. This implies achieving a new social agreement and a change in the existing stigmatization of waste. Creating sensitivity among individuals towards waste (p. 124 of the monograph) is necessary and can be achieved by taking concrete steps, such as redistributing ownership of waste bins: instead of being placed in public spaces, which anonymizes them and makes them susceptible to the influence of serious economic interests, waste bins can be individual property of those who dispose of their waste and pay proportionally for the service of waste management (pp. 123-126 of the monograph).

One of Dr. Petrova's hopes, which I sincerely share myself, is that "understanding the Bulgarian case will provide insight into the complex way in which local imaginations of waste influence waste as a global force" (p. 46 of the monograph).

The monograph pays special attention to the conceptualization of waste regimes in the socialist bloc and the associated comparison of the place of waste in economies of deficit (the concept of "capitalocene," Jason Moore) and in economies of excess (the concept of "socialocene," Zsuzsa Gille). By conducting this comparison, different types of conditions leading to the formation of specific and competing material cultures (including the organization of associated economic structures and political ideologies) are differentiated. These cultures are also defined by their relationship to different ways of imagining waste. The detailed examination of the "division" of the Anthropocene into the capitalocene (pp. 48-50 of the monograph) and the socialocene (pp. 51-52, 56-59 of the monograph), carried out along the lines of cultural imagination regarding the significance of waste, is an important contribution of the monograph that deserves special recognition.

I am convinced that the comparison of different forms of imagining waste within the ideological and cultural frameworks of the capitalocene (waste management as caring for nature: secondary raw materials) and the socialocene (waste management as caring for the economy: pollutants of nature) could be particularly productive in seeking hybrid and mutually balancing waste management regimes on a more normative level, oriented towards proposing concrete regulations: management through waste utilization (capitalocene) and management through waste neutralization (socialocene).

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

Velislava Petrova has presented 23 documented citations, covering the minimum requirements for the position of "Associate Professor." The most cited (6 citations) is the article "Take the Market Out of Sight," published in SeminarBG, issue 11 for the year 2011. Four citations are attributed to the candidate's article "Experiencing the Spectacle of Fine Dining. New Forms of Festivity in Sofia, Bulgaria and Diversion of Public Space in: Valentina Marinescu," published in 2020 in the journal "Food, Nutrition and the Media." The citation of various publications by Dr. Velislava Petrova attests to the significance of her works and the impact they have on the research fields they encompass.

Most notably, her influence extends to the academic literature related to the subject of her defended doctoral thesis for the attainment of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" on the topic "The Market as Culture. Emergence, Institutionalization, and Power Relations around Marketplaces."

## 6. Critical commentary on the submitted thesis

In connection with the processes of transformation in the culture of definitions and attitudes, as indicated by Velislava Petrova, and our relationship towards waste (p. 10), which are generative with regards to the imaginations we create about our own (as humans) material presence, I would like to point out the notable ambiguity that persists concerning the distinction between the definitions of waste and trash. Both terms are used rather interchangeably, although attempts at differentiation are made in some parts of the monograph (the words "waste" and "trash" are dedicated to the first footnote below the line). For example, trash is problematized "as a concept close to experience" (p. 13), while waste is considered "primarily an economic category" (p. 16).

However, it seems to me that the mentioned differentiation is not made clear enough and is not thoroughly pursued. Its existence is seemingly not sustained throughout the entire monograph, leaving room for various interpretations and perhaps different imaginations. The necessity to take a clear stance on whether there is a difference between these two concepts or not is also related to the title of one of the sections of the monograph, which practically repeats the same structure but with the consecutive use of both terms: "Anthropology of Trash, Anthropology of Waste." The linguistic construction used rather imposes an interpretation for a distinction between the two concepts, as otherwise, we would face an unwarranted tautology.

At the same time, on p. 23 of the monograph, the definition of "waste and trash" is treated as unified, although conditioned by a specific historical context. On p. 66 of the monograph, the use of "trash (as an intimate category)," associated with a specific threat through its materiality, is followed by a sentence that begins with "waste (mainly kitchen waste)," which is more connected to the specific production of shame. However, this distinction seems to remain "closed" within the framework of the socialist regime of waste.

Only on p. 77 of the monograph is the need for a distinction between the concepts of "trash" and "waste" indicated. It is stated that "usually when we talk about trash in the literal sense of the word, its main characteristics pass through the idea of something dirty and repulsive. Waste, on the other hand, refers to a more utilitarian definition through the unnecessary nature of objects and their spatial separation. We usually think of waste as final, negative categories, but they can be not only materials whose impact we must combat but also potential resources." From a legislative standpoint, a legal definition exists solely for waste, not for trash, making a significantly more detailed justification of the mentioned distinction necessary. The distinction made on p. 77 of the monograph between "trash" and "waste" remains unused and



uncontextualized in the subsequent analyses of the case with the "trash plant" (p. 84), the "debate about alternative waste management forms and the social dimensions of recycling" (p. 84), the "cancer factory" (pp. 94-95), and the "clean" RDF or Refuse Derived Fuel (p. 109).

Based on the above comments, I would like to pose the following clarifying questions to Velislava Petrova:

- Do you believe that the distinction between waste and trash can be productive in exploring the cultural dimensions of discards (human residue)?

- In what direction do you see the use of the distinction between waste and trash, respectively: between the anthropology of waste and the anthropology of trash, if you accept that this distinction can be culturally significant and essential?

I would also like to note the perhaps purely technical discrepancy between the statement on p. 28 of the monograph, which includes four chapters in the exposition, while in the abstract of the monograph (p. 2 of the abstract of reviewed publications), it is noted that the research results are organized into three chapters.

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

I am acquainted with Associate Professor Dr. Velislava Petrova from various academic and scientific forums in which we have participated as presenters, interlocutors, and discussants. She is a recognized Bulgarian scholar with an active stance and numerous organizational initiatives in the field of urban environment and urban imagination. I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations and debates with her on various topics of mutual scientific interest, both in formal and informal settings. I can affirm that she possesses all the necessary qualities to articulate her arguments as a scholar and researcher.

While Velislava Petrova and I do not have shared publications and have not collaborated on common scientific projects, I consider her to be a responsible, consistent, and conscientious scholar. She develops and structures a relatively marginalized scientific field within the social and humanitarian sciences, specifically focusing on cultural imaginaries surrounding waste and the culture of instant consumption and carefree disposal. The themes on which Velislava Petrova works as a scholar and researcher are crucial for shaping critical state policies related to addressing some of the most pressing issues in our society and the world at large.

Examining these themes within the realms of sociology and cultural studies transforms Velislava Petrova's scientific publications into a unique resource not only for understanding and precisely defining certain cultural practices but also for establishing models, including normative

ones, for addressing the social and legal issues associated with these practices. In this sense, the results of her research can be utilized by scholars in other professional fields, including philosophy and law, to enrich their perspectives with additional aspects and dimensions.

### **8. Conclusion**

From the presented documents, it can be inferred that Velislava Petrova meets the minimum national and institutional requirements for appointment to the academic position of "Associate Professor." Her research, publication, and teaching activities possess all the necessary qualities to be selected for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field relevant to the needs of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the professional direction 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies (Theory and History of Culture, Anthropology of Contemporary Cultural Practices, Studies of Material Culture).

I confidently vote "for" the scientific jury to propose to the Faculty Council of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" that Velislava Petrova be elected to the academic position of "Associate Professor."

12.12.2023

**Signature:**

Prof. Stoyan Stavru