

Opinion

from Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.

regarding the selection procedure for the title of professor of 2.1 Philology (Bulgarian Anthropology. Bulgarian Folklore), advertised in the State Gazette, Issue 54 of 29.06.2021.

There is only one candidate in the current selection procedure – Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Papuchiev, Dr. Habil., who not only meets but by far exceeds the minimum requirements for the academic position of professor.

Nikolay Papuchiev is one of the most recognisable names in the field of Bulgarian anthropology – he has authored a great many major texts and delivers foundational series of lectures on the subject to BA students of language and literature, as well as a number of specialised courses in the Anthropology MA programme. It can most certainly be said that, without a doubt, his work is greatly appreciated by students, while his output is highly interdisciplinary, demonstrating a good knowledge of culture theory, as well as a sensitivity to its applications.

Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev has presented two monographs for this selection procedure: “The museum – possible and impossible. Challenges of mass culture, market strategies and nostalgia for the past”, as well as “Festivals. Networks. Identities. Masked processions in Pernik and their regional reflections”, in addition to several articles.

Both books are in the spirit of the best of cultural studies, in that the author examines culture in its interdependence with politics, exploring the links between the symbolic and the social. Harking back to Stuart Hall, these books insist that the object of cultural studies should be articulating (albeit in different contexts) the links between culture and power. Culture is used in a broad sense here – as guiding a given lifestyle and a set of concrete social experiences; it encompasses language and art, as well as rules, rites and rituals of human life as part of a community. Especially valuable in this respect are the

analyses of cultural heritage protection policy, as well as exploring festivals as the outcome of power politics and practices.

It is no coincidence that the candidate's research is informed by the links of culture to authority and ideology, incorporating it in the mechanisms of memory, cultural heritage, the shift to mass tastes, or personal and collective identities. It is worth singling out the candidate's research into considering rituals as tools for legitimising ideological messages, as well as their uses in the various grand national narratives. All of this comes with a solid culture-theoretic background coupled with analysis of concrete case studies, lending theoretical ideas a specific life of their own.

In sum, it would be fair to say that culture is predominantly seen neither in an aesthetic nor in a humanistic light, but rather from a purely political perspective. Culture is not just seen as a collection of aesthetic ideals and ideas about shapes and beauty embodied in great art; neither is it seen simply as a voice of the 'human spirit', which transcends the boundaries of time and the nation's desire to talk about a hypothetical universal human being; culture is not equated with aesthetic products, the work of the human spirit to counteract "crude materialism" and vulgarity. Culture is rather seen as a way of living within society itself, which gives meaning to all social experiences. Hence the belief that meaning and its creation (which as a whole constitute culture) is linked to social structures and can be explained only in terms of those structures and their history.

In summary, the traditional concept of identity is connected to the essentialist, teleological discourse, whereas Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev's research views identity as positional and without a fixed origin. In the light of this, it could be suggested, again going back to Stuart Hall, that the concept of identity can only be compared to the concept of translation, since translation is a never-ending process of rearticulating and recontextualising with no way of establishing some form of primary origin. Neither does the candidate's research overlook the idea that the key determining factor of identity in modernity is creation, whereas in postmodernity it is recycling.

The candidate offers valuable analyses of festivals, experiencing shared togetherness, projecting the idea of a community against the backdrop of cultural divisions, the shift to mass tourism, the development of regional policy and its links to problems of identity, the transitions from the day-to-day to the festive (and vice versa), the museification of the recent past, in addition to his perceptive analyses of socialism in the context of nostalgia, nationalisms, as well as daily practice. There is also the impetus to see the field of culture through the prism of its practical dimensions.

In short, Assoc. Prof. Papuchiev is a modern anthropologist who is well versed in the relevant European practices and aims to implement them within Bulgarian anthropology; at the same time he does not just replicate and refer back, but undertakes genuine research into the Bulgarian within the context of the latest principles and theories.

In view of the discussion above, as well as the indisputable merits of the books, demonstrating the author's remarkable analytical skills, as well as his impressive erudition and ability to create stimulating narratives, combining his anthropological background with his own point of view, I wholeheartedly vote in favour of awarding Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Papuchiev, Dr. Habil., the title of professor in 2.1 Philology (Bulgarian Anthropology. Bulgarian Folklore).

Prof. Amelia Licheva, Dr. Habil.