

## SHORT REVIEW

for the purpose of the contest for the academic position of associate professor, in professional field 3.4. Social activities/social work, announced by New Bulgarian University, department of “Healthcare and Social Work”, at SG № 97/13.11.2020

for the candidate assistant professor, Rumen Goranov Petrov, MD, PhD

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‘The secret of trauma does not unite, but divides’ - these words of Nobel laureate Svetlana Aleksievich permeate the research and the author reads the political, the social and the existential precisely through the traumatic divisions. The extent to which he has managed to convincingly substantiate his conceptual reading is the subject of this opinion. It also includes a more general assessment of the work of Dr. Rumen Petrov in view of the requirements for the academic position of associate professor in PA 3.4.

I will structure the opinion in two parts – an evaluation of the habilitation work and an evaluation of the overall teaching and research activity of Dr. Rumen Petrov.

I would synthesize the merits of the habilitation work *‘Confused in Pain. Social trauma and social responsibility’* in several parts:

- The theoretical and normative pathos of the book, aimed at studying in order to overcome the desocializing spiral injury - trauma - alienation and restoration of compromised sociality. It is precisely in this perspective that the author place his understanding of social work not as ‘a primitive discipline’ (p. 25), but as establishing and maintaining social connectedness, seen as an antidote to the many ways in which human sociality is being hurt (p. 27-28). This pathos also takes on an existential-academic tone: ‘This book is about my personal rehabilitation of the concept of ‘social work’ and a critique of the ‘social assistance’ [concept of social work](p. 26). The critique of the ‘culture of dehumanization and power’ (p. 220) in social work, as well as of the moral indifference in it is strong. The analysis of the ‘quintessential poverty’ (p. 177) as an archetype of the social trauma and of the ‘a-social policies’ to certain groups such as the disabled is convincing.
- Another contribution is to the critical studies of the nationalism through the author's key conceptual prism of social trauma. The author identifies three of its forms - militarism, anti-Semitism, anti-Osmanism, examining them with different types of argumentation in a specific mix for each of the forms - from historical to literary, the first leading to more solid conclusions.
- The critical reflection on the ‘violence organized in policies and collective identities’ (p.80).
- The deconstruction of the patriotic-nationalist mythologized image of the national. The work ‘fights’ with the myth of Bulgarian tolerance with an abundance of historical evidence of violence, with an assessment of the ‘uncritical militarization of society’ (p. 72) and the marginalization of pacifism.

- The normative-theoretical rehabilitation of victims by deconstructing the social mechanisms of stigmatization: 'Being a victim is so humiliating ... downright shameful .... I want to be like everyone else, but it turns out - I'm alone' (p.51-52 ),

The style is essayistic, readable, strives to combine conceptuality with affectivity, facts with irony, scientific assessments with journalistic pathos. The extent to which the measure between these diverse goals is observed depends in no small part on the polemical taste of the readers: 'The new Bulgarian state [after the Liberation] relates with a Dinkovian brutality to its new citizens [the Bulgarian Turks]' [p.56]. This style contrasts with long citations, some of which are too extended for an even more rigorous academic text.

There is no study that does not contain deficits and does not raise *critical considerations*. I will summarize them in three groups:

- The most important is the disempowerment of whole groups by a predominant thinking about them through the point of view of the trauma. A typical example is the community of Bulgarian Turks: 'the unenviable role [of a such large group, brought to social alienation and loneliness] by an unfortunate tradition falls to the Bulgarian Turks' (p. 43).
- There is a certain underestimation of the some of the results of the social sciences, which leads to, not always completely convincing, pioneering self-confidence: 'Bulgarian academics make the first steps in understanding nationalism' (p. 82); 'I offer a possible explanation for the weak critique of nationalism and its incarnations in our country' (p. 81). It is due in part to the selectivity of the cited literature, which has been chosen to inform and support the author's theses rather than to argue with them.
- There are also some small conceptual extensions and discrepancies, e.g. the paragraph 'Refugees' (p.47) - this category can be rightfully included in the traumatic groups, but in this case the analysis continues the study of anti-Semitism, based on the same study by R. Avramov and N. Danova, and the concept of refugee does not introduce a significant new, additional conceptual perspective. It is structurally unconvincing to define and unfold the basic concept of 'social trauma' in more detail in Chapter Five (p. 235). It is questionable whether the concept of 'social trauma' can coherently organize Vaptsarov and Chavdarova, nationalism, totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, the disabled, the poor, the Turks ...

These considerations are formulated in the context of an academic debate, which the habilitation thesis undoubtedly deserves. For the purpose of the opinion on the procedure for associate professor, I would like to emphasize that the merits of the book undoubtedly and categorically prevail over some inevitable issues for discussion.

## Publications

The main results of the author's research are in scientific circulation, published at home and abroad. The number of publications and the 'geography' of the publishers testify to a solid academic

experience, sufficient and exceeding the requirements for habilitation. This conclusion is also supported by the number and quality of research projects.

#### Teaching experience

Dr. Rumen Petrov is a dedicated lecturer, as evidenced by the high marks of the students. He actively participates in the development of new courses and programs at the Department of Health and Social Work as the Master Program "Psycho-social interventions with children and families" and others.

#### Citations

The citations are an important indicator for recognition and for interweaving the author's research results in the network in the searches of other scientists from Bulgaria and abroad. They are specifically mentioned and testify that the author's results have been feeding the searches of other researchers for years.

#### Personal impressions

I have known Dr. Rumen Petrov for years from our work in the interdepartmental seminar 'Human Rights' and from the human rights website 'Marginalia', as well as from our discussions on innovative and promising academic areas and practices. All these activities outline Dr. Rumen Petrov as a dynamic and committed to the development of NBU lecturer and researcher, as well as a cordial and responsive colleague.

#### Conclusion

The theoretical merits of habilitation work 'Confused in pain. Social Trauma and Social Responsibility', the active research, teaching and publishing activities, as well as the commitment to the development of the Department of Health and Social Work, to the interdepartmental seminar and to the NBU's development give me a reason to conclude categorically and convincingly that senior assistant professor Dr. Rumen Goranov Petrov meets all the requirements for the position of associate professor in the professional field 3.4. Social Activities/social work, Master's Faculty, Department of Health and Social Work.

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