

REVIEW

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member of the Department of "History of philosophical and scientific ideas", IPS - BAS)

of the professorship application in the professional field

2.3. Philosophy (Contemporary philosophical ideas)

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**for the needs of the section "History of philosophical and scientific ideas"
of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (IPS, formerly ISSK) of BAS**

The professorship in the field 2.3. Philosophy (Contemporary philosophical ideas) has been published in the *State Magazine*, issue 89 of 12/11/2019. **The only applicant for the professorship is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tatyana Petrova Batuleva-Kancheva.**

1. Professional information and general characteristic of the scientific activities of the applicant

Associate Professor Tatyana Batuleva holds a Master's degree in French and Literature from Sofia University "Kl. Ohridski". In her master's thesis on Albert Camus, her interest in contemporary French thought became its first manifestation. A logical continuation of her work in this direction is her PhD-dissertation and her habilitation work. In November 1988, Assoc. Prof. Batuleva defended a thesis on *French Philosophy and the Bulgarian Philosophical Culture (late 19th and early 20th Century)* by successfully linking two academic fields – the history of Bulgarian philosophy and the French philosophical currents –, which became central to her further academic career. A continuation of this subject is realized in the foreword of the anthology composed by Assoc. Prof. Batuleva (together with A. Stoynev) *French Philosophy in Bulgarian Philosophical Culture* (2014), which is impressive both in volume and in topics. A decisive step in Ms. Batuleva's scientific research is her monographic work, *The French Philosophy Between Modern and Postmodern Rationality*, which was published in 1994 with the support of the Bulgarian Society of Francophone Philosophy and Culture and presented as a habilitation work in February 2000. With her subsequent book, *Subject and Responsibility* (2010), the historical and philosophical thematic were complemented and expanded with ethical, intercultural and feminist issues that become just as fundamental to her further work as her interests in French philosophy. It is therefore not surprising that the DSc-thesis of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva *Features of Contemporary Feminist Theories of Difference* (2018) is devoted to a central feminist thematics. Her significant teaching experience should not be forgotten either – Batuleva was philosophy professor for four years at the Victor Hugo Lyceum of the French Embassy in Bulgaria (from 1999 to 2002).

Since 2014, Assoc. Prof. Batuleva is Head of the Department of History of Philosophical and Scientific Ideas of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. Her work as a department leader is very stimulating: she assisted the academic activities of the department members by involving them in research projects and current publications. Assoc. Prof. Batuleva is also a scientific supervisor of a doctoral student, who is currently preparing her PhD thesis for the defense. In addition to the research project of the department that she directs, she has participated in a number of national and international scientific projects, some of which I have personally managed. Batuleva has also participated in numerous national and international conferences and colloquia presenting her own research and/or that of the department.

The expert activity of Batuleva is extremely impressive: she is a member of the Standing Committee on Humanities and Arts at the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation from 2015 until now (controlling the field of philosophy), and member of the Board of Directors of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since September 2018. She has been a member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences at BAS in the period from 2007-2010, and is currently member of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS (IFS-BAS) since 2019. In addition to her numerous evaluations reviews of doctoral theses and habilitations, it should be noted that Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Batuleva is member of several editorial boards, as well as editor of diverse volumes.

Expressed in numbers, the applicant's publishing activity includes three monographs, over 100 articles and studies, over edited 30 volumes. Assoc. Prof. Batuleva is cited over 60 times in Bulgaria and abroad. Especially should be mentioned her extensive translation work from French into Bulgarian of such prominent authors like Jacques Derrida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Luce Irigaray, Mikel Dufrenne, Jean-François Lyotard a.o.

The above academic activities clearly shows that **all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in Republic of Bulgaria, General Terms Art. 26 and Section IV Art. 29 are fully implemented, as well as the national minimum of academic requirements (NACID) for a professor (see the additional documents of the applicant).**

2. General description of the publications

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Batuleva for the Professorship include two monographs – *Subject and Responsibility* (2010) and *Contemporary Interpretations of Femininity* (2019) –, the Anthology *French Philosophy in Bulgarian Philosophical Culture*

(2014), and sixteen articles and studies. I am familiar with many of these works, as I have been a reviewer of her books as well as of some studies included in volumes under my editorship. Her books and her other publications are on key topics that have been largely discussed in the West at the difference of Bulgaria, where it still lacks of research in these fields. In quantity, they exceed the requirements of the the Rules of the IFS-BAS on the Terms and Conditions for the Acquisition of Academic Degrees and Occupation of Academic Positions (Art. 42.1. p. 5).

3. A description of the content and the contributions of the publications

The self-assessment of the contributions of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva is fully adequate, so I will not repeat what she said, but rather complement it. I must state in advance that due to the significant volume of publications and the diversity of their subjects, it is impossible to give a full overview. Thus, I will highlight the more important scientific contributions of the applicant in her monographs and some articles, without claiming completeness.

Tatiana Batuleva's monograph *Subject and responsibility* (Sofia 2010) is devoted to one of the main problems of contemporary philosophy and ethical theory – the relation between the subject and its responsibility for the other – and is characterized by the attempt to give a new reading in the context of the postmodern challenges. As we know, the problem of responsibility, and in particular the responsibility of philosophers, is one of the central themes of Husserl and Post-Husserlian phenomenology, which is highly discussed in Western philosophy. Yet, by considering the otherness, especially in a feminist-ethical context (Luce Irigaray, Sylviane Agacinski) as a kind of "prelude" to the question of the subject of responsibility, as well as the analysis of the latter in the concepts of Emmanuel Levinas, Hans Jonas and Jacques Derrida, Batuleva opens a field, which has hardly been explored.

The monograph is divided into three chapters: "Subject and Desubjectivation", "Subject and Otherness", "Subject and Responsibility." A key role for the understanding of the relationship between the three plays Levinas' conception of the asymmetrical relationship between the self and the other, where the epistemological dimension intersects with the ethical: "Seeing the other's look, I see his face, whose nakedness causes my responsibility... it imposes to me the imperative 'Thou shalt not kill' "(p. 35).

In the first chapter, Batuleva focuses on the classic question of the subject, emphasizing that nowadays, there are no more the old discussions about the subject and its erasure, or on its return, but rather the subject is perceived as an "unnecessary hypothesis" (Dan Sperber). The

reason for that is its linking to a sub-personal level such as the unconscious, as well as the confrontation with the need to solve diverse moral problems (pp. 13-18). Consequently, the second and the third chapters of the book are focused precisely on these issues that are at the core of the contemporary ethical debates, namely the problems of domination and recognition, relation to which are fundamental to feminist theory, as well as if the problem of responsibility for the other in the context of choice and action. In this regard, Batuleva analyzes some of the leading concepts of recognition of feminine otherness conceived in its positive aspects at the difference of the negative ones in Beauvoir's critique of the mythically patriarchal construction of woman as the "absolute other". Of particular interest in this case are the concepts of the ethics of difference of Lucy Irigaray and Sylviane Agacinski that Batuleva examines through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction paradigm. Irigaray's deconstruction of the masculine as a "collective image of the subject" in Freudianism (p. 57) which degenerates femininity into an object and passivity, is very close to the ideologies, criticized by Beauvoir, posing masculinity as transcendence (activity) and femininity as immanence, i.e. passivity. According to Batuleva, while Beauvoir's emancipatory discourse emphasizes the emancipation of women and their exodus from the realm of immanence, Irigaray proposes a type of female mediation such as the "reciprocal word-touch" and the withdrawal from serial identity (pp. 62-63). From the struggle for recognition of otherness, Batuleva passes in the last third chapter to the problem of the refusal of the subject of domination, and the attempt to preserve both his own otherness and that of the alien in the act of accepting responsibility for the other. As I already mentioned, Batuleva places a central emphasis on Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the relationship to the other, which always implies a certain responsibility and she compares it with the concepts of Hans Jonas, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida. Levinas defines responsibility as "being-for-the-other "; it is infinite, unavoidable, and does not stem from a sense of guilt, i.e. from remorse for past mistakes (p. 85). Unlike Levinas, for whom responsibility exists before all knowledge, for Jonas knowledge is a condition for assuming responsibility. If responsibility in Levinas arises in the immediate vicinity, in the interim and in the meeting with the other, Jonas outlines the field of an unpredictable encounter with otherness in the future (p. 100). At the same time, knowledge alone cannot be a guarantor of responsibility, it must be in accordance with certain values and norms of what should be or not. Hence, Batuleva illustrates the importance of Paul Ricoeur's understanding of responsibility, as well as the aporia, and the dual imperative of responsibility in Derrida, demanding the preservation of difference without identity closure by seeking unconventional solutions beyond our comfortable notions of the possible and the impossible (page 119).

The main contribution of the book consists both in the offered comparative analyzes and in the author's own reflection that invites us to rethink the problem of our relations with the other and the problem of responsibility in the light of contemporary Bulgarian society, science and culture. As Batuleva shows, in the Bulgarian context, the concept of responsibility is mostly used as a synonym of guilt: Bulgarians think of responsibility after something shocking has already happened and it is only then that they ask for the causes by searching the culprits. She convincingly displays that demanding responsibility, instead of consciously assuming it after preliminary debates and normative determination of the responsibilities as this is done in the advanced European countries, the loud talks of "morality" in a society that is corrupt at all levels confront us only with distorted images of the other.

The recently published monograph by Tatyana Batuleva *Contemporary Interpretations of Femininity* (Vienna 2019) is a comprehensive study of more than 300 pages, which focuses on a still actual and widely discussed problem – the problem of femininity, its specificity and role in contemporary society and culture. Before pointing out some of the contributions of the monograph, I would like to mention a few things. First, in a strictly philosophical sense (without going as far as to Cartesian feminism), this issue has been debated already by Edith Stein and Simone de Beauvoir before being pursued by the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and the subsequent feminist philosophical debates. Edith Stein emphasized not only the ontological difference of women, but also their specific spirituality, developing the concepts of the "feminine soul" and "woman's predestination". Simone de Beauvoir criticized the men's myths about women, in particular the idea of the "eternal feminine", and emphasized that women should start tailoring their own clothes by inventing themselves as women and that the denial of femininity by women and/or lesbians is a form of inauthenticity, of escape, of self-delusion. In other words, the critical disclosure (deconstruction) of the patriarchal representations, myths and projections of femininity should go hand in hand with the need for authentic self-determination and self-invention of women (positive reconstruction of femininity by women themselves). However, *The Second Sex* was not always properly grasped. By paraphrasing the notorious statement of Beauvoir that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Sandra Bartky develops the thesis that "To be a feminist, one has first to become one," which means to overcome femininity as a male construct. This is one of the reasons for the rejection of womanhood and femininity¹ by a number of feminists. Other reasons include the critique of the universalization of women and womanhood by speaking of "femininity as such,"

¹ The French term *féminité* and English *femininity* means both womanhood and femininity.

of the "female/male" division as a basis of biologism or of essentialism, and of the consolidation of the hierarchy of the binary gender matrix with the corresponding role stereotypes and hence of the male domination that feminists are trying to overcome.

Why do I recall all this? Because, in my opinion, Batuleva's choice to focus mainly on the interpretations of femininity in the difference feminism is not accidental. The skip of the interpretations of the so-called "first wave feminism" (a term that, in my opinion, can be accepted only to a limited extent) is fully justified, insofar as differential feminists resist certain interpretative tendencies of both the "first" and the "third" waves of feminism, respectively of "postfeminism", by offering alternative visions to overcome the "negative images of femininity" and the erasure of the feminine in the extreme deconstructive gender and queer theories. The main merit of Tatyana Batuleva's book is that her analyzes reveal the multiple paths of the theories of difference feminism that try to upvalue the feminine, without falling into biologism, or essentialism, or gynocentrism. This is evident from the reconstruction of her analysis of the theories of Luce Irigaray, of the proponents of the care ethics, of Sylviane Agacinski, of Rosi Braidotti, and of some Bulgarian authors. In order to illustrate the contribution of the monograph in this regard, I will give two examples.

The first one concerns the interpretation of femininity of Luce Irigaray – one of the most prominent figures in contemporary feminism. Batuleva describes Irigaray's approach as a "deconstructivist-constructivist one, aiming not to create a theory or concept of femininity, but to preserve women's place in the gender difference, which has always functioned in the self-representational systems of the male subject" (p. 19). In other words, the "self-representational systems of the male subject" must be deconstructed in order to reconstruct anew the gender difference by reinterpreting the woman as a specific subjectivity. Irigaray does this, according to Batuleva, via several strategies: the incorporation of the irreducible feminine experience in the symbolic order by the creation of a feminine language, the restoration of the feminine genealogies erased within the "neutral" subject, the creation of a common female-female space, the opening of the perspective of a two-subject culture on the basis of the conception of relational identity, and the outline of a "feminine path" to spirituality and the divine.

The second example is related to the feminist theory of Rosi Braidotti and it is particularly interesting because she puts into debate the paradox of the concept of "woman", which on the one hand is the basis of feminism and, on the other, is criticized by many feminists. Thus, Braidotti reiterates the question(s) that Beauvoir poses at the beginning of *The Second Sex*, but offers an original conception that goes beyond the existentialist notion of the

masculine/feminine subject as ex-sistence and transcendence, as well as beyond the performative-discursive production of Judith Butler's subject. According to Batuleva, Braidotti's feminist project defends the perspective of differentialism because she wants to preserve the feminine experience, but at the same time, she offers the prospect of an alternative form of performatism based on the differences as a natural reality. Her understanding of difference is not abstract, as it is understood in the plural, i.e. as differences found on several interpretative levels. The first level refers to the difference between men and women, the second – to the differences between women through which the various forms of the feminine subject are revealed, and the third level – to the individual diversity of feminine subjectivity in every woman where the conscious always implicates something unconscious. While maintaining the feminine and at the same time the mobility, i.e. the "nomadic nature" of the subject, Braidotti offers an interpretation that is located between two poles – that of Irigaray and that of Butler. That is why Batuleva's definition of Braidotti's feminist project as "moderate differentialism or restrained performativity" is quite convincing.

A significant original contribution is the final chapter of the book, which presents some Bulgarian theoretical developments on the women's question (Krasimira Daskalova, Cornelia Slavova, Milena Kirova, etc.) and, most of all, some major works and examples of "women's writing" in Bulgarian literature after 1990 (Albena Stambolova, Teodora Dimova, Silvia Choleva and many others). In my opinion, such a broad reconstruction of the feminine in Bulgarian context has not been done to date.

It is not possible for me to go into detail in the eleven articles and studies provided by the applicant, so I will summarize the more important points of contribution by stating in advance that these texts outlines five scientific fields of Batuleva's professional specialisation, namely French philosophy, Bulgarian philosophical culture, feminist theories, postmodernism, and intercultural studies.

The articles on feminism, which do not duplicate the text of her last monograph, are devoted to hot topics such as "Bulgarian women and the parallel state", "women's political languages of transition", "women and aging" etc. The contribution of these papers consists, in my opinion, in Batuleva's clearly expressed critical analysis of the situation of Bulgarian women in the actual socio-political conditions. For example, she severely criticizes the market mechanisms that turn women's bodies and organs into a product, and states that "the figure of the mother is being instrumentalized and motherhood is being commercialized." She also unmasks pseudo-feminism and a number of non-governmental institutions, which are merely a

facade of structures belonging to the parallel state and aims to replace the Bulgarian laws. She notes: "Attempts were made to discredit emancipation as imposed by the totalitarian regime. On the other hand, a good deal of foundations and NGOs have given themselves the role of pioneers in the fight for women's rights, often importing foreign issues that are far away from the specific national context. Often it is difficult to distinguish the authentic women's rights organizations from those who functions actually as structures of the parallel state and its native or imported 'affiliates'. (...) In such cases, the used feminist rhetoric is not an opposition to the pervasive market economy mechanisms and the constantly repeated mantra of its benefits; it merely serves those mechanisms." ("The Bulgarian Woman and the Parallel State", pp. 174-175)

Particularly noteworthy are the publications of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva on French philosophy and its reception in Bulgaria. An emblematic example in this regard is the study "French Philosophy in Bulgaria", published as foreword of the anthology *French Philosophy in Bulgarian Philosophical Culture* (2014). It is a large-scale study, a much expanded (over 50 pages) and updated version of her article "French Philosophy and Bulgarian Philosophical Culture" that was published in the prestigious journal *Studies in East European Thought* (53/2001). In this text, Batuleva outlines several stages in the reception of French philosophy in Bulgaria: 1) French philosophy during the Bulgarian Revival; 2) French positivism and Bulgarian philosophical thought in the late 19th and early 20th century; 3) Bergsonism and Bulgarian philosophical culture; 4) the French classics in the years of totalitarianism; 5) the contemporary context of French philosophy in Bulgaria. Her study offers the reader not just an overview of the main currents and key works of the reception and (re)interpretation of French philosophy in Bulgaria, but it also provides original analyses and conclusions about the achievements of the Bulgarian philosophers during the different periods. For example, she points out that the reception of French philosophy in Bulgaria until 1990 testifies to the attempts of the Bulgarian philosophical culture to overcome its own isolation. During this period, the research on French philosophy in Bulgaria is only on the third place staying in the shadow of the presence of the Russian and German philosophies – a situation that subsequently changed. After 1990, the interests of Bulgarian philosophers moved from modern to contemporary French philosophy, including French existentialism, postmodernism, and hermeneutical phenomenology. Moreover, according to Batuleva, a characteristic feature of the Bulgarian reception of French thinkers is that it occurred in concordance with the Bulgarian 'otherness': "In their interpretations, the Bulgarian philosophers use some ideas [of French philosophy] to

better understand the specifics of their own identity and its complex development in the conditions of transition." (p. 207).

I want to conclude with the significant contribution of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva to the understanding of Bulgarian philosophy and identity in the context of intercultural studies. In her article "Philosophical Reception and Intercultural Dialogue," Batuleva offers an original elaboration of the notion of "philosophical culture" by associating it with the concept of "philosophy plus" of Gérard Bensoussan. Hence, she raises the thesis that philosophical culture could be understood as the intersection of philosophical reception and intercultural dialogue, and thus as a way to overcome the opposition between national philosophy and world philosophy. This thesis is justified insofar as Batuleva conceives the notion of "philosophical culture" in a broader way than that of "philosophy" perceived as a strictly academic discourse. Therefore, "philosophical culture" may refer not only to original thinkers but also to the propagators of philosophical ideas, which sometimes prove particularly valuable for the formation of one or another aspect of national identity. Moreover, through this notion one can trace the influence of philosophy in the extra-philosophical fields, as well as the formation of discourses different or even in opposition to some dominant philosophical ideas.

4. Critical comments

I have no critical comments on the mentioned scientific publications of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva, not because our assessments are in perfect agreement, but because it is quite normal that they differ on different matters. For example, from the point of view of feminist philosophy, my preferences are on Beauvoir's side rather than on Irigaray's, while my attitude towards Agacinski's positions is much more critical and on certain respects completely negative. However, these are points of discussion that have nothing to do with the proven contributions and the importance of the publications presented by the applicant for the professorship.

5. Conflict of interest

I have no joint publications with Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Batuleva. There is also no conflict of interest.

6. Conclusion

The enumerated activities and contributions are the reasons for me to give a **very high rating** of the scientific activity of Assoc. Prof. Tatyana Batuleva. I believe that she fully deserves the position she is applying for. As a member of the scientific jury, I will vote decisively **"FOR" her promotion** and I will suggest that the distinguished members of the scientific jury vote also **for the appointment of Assoc. Prof. Batuleva to the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field 2.3. Philosophy (Contemporary Philosophical Ideas) for the needs of the Department of "History of the Philosophical and the Scientific Ideas" of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS.**

Prof. DSc. Yvanka B. Raynova

Sofia, 21 of February 2020