



OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Miroslava Tsenkova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Integrated Marketing Communications) with a dissertation on the topic: "Stigmatization in Political Discourse in the 20th and 21st Centuries: Semantic Analysis",

presented by LAZAR SVETLOZAROV SHISHMANOV, a full-time doctoral student in the Department of "Communication in Higher Education and Advertising" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with scientific supervisor: Prof. Diana Petkova.

I. Presentation of the doctoral student based on the submitted documentation

Education

Lazar Svetlazarov Shishmanov is a full-time doctoral student in the professional field 3.5. OKIN Media and Communications – Integrated Marketing Communications of FJMK since 2022 at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. He has published articles and reports in various scientific publications. He obtained his bachelor's degree in "Public Relations" in 2017 at the same faculty, after which he also completed his master's degree in 2021.

Professional experience

The doctoral student has extensive experience in the field of communications, and since 2017 he has been part of the Digital Marketing Team Lead team, Zeta Hosting Solutions OOD. Previously, he worked as a sales consultant at Hogo EOOD, and also as a digital marketing assistant at Fresh Market. He is fluent in English and Italian.

II. Assessment of the quality of the dissertation text

The scientific work submitted for review "Stigmatization in political discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries: semantic analysis" by doctoral student Lazar Shishmanov stands out with a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the researched issues. The topic is extremely relevant, especially in the



context of contemporary political processes that influence the polarization of society and the creation of stigmas and discriminatory practices towards certain social and political groups. The process of stigmatization is examined comprehensively, with an emphasis on its manifestation in the context of political discourse. The dissertation covers classical and contemporary theories, including various scientific perspectives.

The introduction should be shorter than 22 pages, introduce the issues, but not provide all the answers right from the beginning. The analysis of the examples presented in the introduction should be placed in the second chapter, where a comparison is made with the use of stigmas in different political systems. Historical facts should be positioned predominantly in the first chapter. In the introduction, the use of 1-2 examples is allowed, when emphasizing the longevity of the problem, the connection of the past with the present, with an emphasis on actuality. The detailed description of various details of these events is not recommended to be used in the introduction, because it disrupts the structural balance. It would be good to include historical details in the theoretical chapters, where an analysis can be offered in relation to the context.

For better precision, it is important to follow the sequence and order of structuring the elements of the scientific research: Topic, Goal, Tasks, Thesis, Hypotheses, Object of research, Subject of research, Methodology. The tasks are outlined very well, and it is advisable to reformulate the second part of task 1. Instead of: "Defining the concept of „stigmatization“ when it is considered in the context of political discourse. The concepts of “political stigmatization” and “stigmatization in political discourse” are equated, due to their similarity”, it would be more appropriate to formulate it as: “To analyze and systematize various definitions based on the review of scientific literature and to propose an author's concept regarding the concept: stigmatization”. The thesis should be stated in the introduction, after the Topic, Aim, Tasks, instead of at the end of the first chapter.

It is necessary that the Object and Subject of the study be placed after the Goal and Objectives, and not after the Methodology, as in the text. The Methodology may contain a brief argumentation, but the detailed argumentation should go into the text of the dissertation.

Chapter One examines the social and societal aspects of stigmatization. Important scientific theories are presented, with special attention paid to the psychological and social roots of stigmatization. The main emphasis in the chapter is related to the individual's desire for survival and the search for personal gain. The role of the self-concept is traced, emphasizing that it is largely built



by the attitude of others towards the individual. The connection between the self-concept, reciprocity and stigmatization as a political tool is appropriately drawn, with the examples presented illustrating how sound psychological mechanisms can be used for manipulation. The example of Hitler emphasizes the role of reciprocity as a politically relevant tool. Regarding the statement that "A person in whose consciousness there is a (healthy) positive self-concept cannot fail to respond reciprocally to the attitude of the Other", it is conditional, since the cultural and situational context must be taken into account, as well as the critical thinking of the specific individual, which allows for the recognition of artificial cause-and-effect relationships. Considering social status as a motivator for stigmatization allows for a better understanding of manipulative mechanisms. The meaning of the concept of "stigma" is defined, outlining the various forms of deviant behavior, but no specific examples of forms of deviance that give grounds for the imposition of stigmas are given. The text would benefit if the doctoral student offered at least 3-4 more key definitions related to stigmatization by both Bulgarian and foreign authors working in the field. The proposed concept of stigma by researcher Sava Dzhonev is not sufficient to achieve the necessary theoretical depth and academic value of the text. The meaning of stigma beyond language is traced and its functions are outlined. The parallel drawn between stigma, insult, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination is apt, as the main similarities and differences between the concepts are highlighted and the connection with the political and public discourse in Bulgaria is highlighted. Special attention is paid to stigmatization as a political and marketing tool.

The claim on page 75 that books such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* are the subject of outright plagiarism must be based on concrete evidence, since the very word "plagiarism" carries a strong legal and moral meaning.

The second chapter is devoted to the processes of stigmatization in political discourse in the 20th century. Important historical events that imposed fateful changes in the history of mankind are examined, outlining the role of the two world wars, the genocide committed on a global scale, as well as the pandemics that took the lives of many people. The development of key tools for political propaganda and various movements for the protection of human rights is reported. The mechanisms of fear and stigmatization in the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union are well traced, as well as the genocide committed against the Jewish population during WORLD WAR II. The doctoral candidate correctly notes that both totalitarian systems (communism in the USSR and Nazism in Germany) use labels and rhetorical devices for stigmatization as a means of control, mobilization and repression.



Terms such as “liberal”, “bourgeois” and “foreigner” show how language can form enemies and legitimize violence against them, how the system creates enemies through linguistic marking. Attention is drawn to the function of language in totalitarian propaganda and the difference between class and racial basis for repression. Repression and stigmatization in the Chinese state are outlined, making an analogy with the Marxist-Leninist vocabulary for legitimizing violence and marginalizing entire social groups. Various ideologies and utopian systems of thought are traced, which offer a solution to human suffering through the use of universal truths. It is correctly stated on page 111 that: “authoritative figures change public opinion.” The examples offered are relevant and apt. Emphasis is also placed on the polarizing terms used by the media to shape public opinion, divide groups, and intensify ideological conflicts.

Chapter Three presents an author's study of political stigmatization in the 21st century. Important political events during this period are tracked and the main problems related to the 2007 Global Financial Crisis, the 2011 Debt Crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian War, as well as the question of the identity of the European Union member states are examined. The mechanisms through which media and political language legitimizes violence through moral stigmatization are covered.

The semantic analysis of the justification of the war on terrorism is punctual and necessary in order to deduce the main prerequisites for achieving agreement, moral legitimation and violence at the same time, as well as to emphasize the main stereotype about the connection between Islam and terrorism.

The articles on the topic should not be cited in the introduction, as the doctoral student indicated on page 125, but there should be a reference to them in the third chapter, where their content is analyzed. An additional value of the text is the attached tables of media titles published on the websites of BTV, Nova TV, BBC, Associated Press, related to the "War on Terror", the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian war. The main keywords, topics and semantic fields are deduced, including countries, cities, regions and districts, political leaders, national or religious affiliation, labels, organizations/groups, violence. Visual graphics of the main topics in the various media are also presented, which helps to provide a clearer structuring and a better understanding of the interrelationships. The conclusions drawn are logical and justified.



Lazar Shishmanov has complied with the above recommendations and has presented the final version of the dissertation within the specified deadlines and according to scientific requirements.

I recommend the publication of the dissertation work, as it represents a thorough and serious study of the issues under consideration, which is evidence of the doctoral student's skills to analyze and systematize important trends in political processes, as well as to express critical thinking and follow the logic of argumentation.

This gives me reason to vote positively for the overall work on the dissertation and to confidently recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" to Lazar Svetlazarov Shishmanov for the dissertation work he developed on the topic: "Stigmatization in political discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries: semantic analysis."

Date: 28.08.2025.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Tsenkova