

TRANSLATING GENDER, TRANSGRESSING REASON, AND THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF JUDITH BUTLER IN BULGARIAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *With a few notable exceptions, gender studies have not yet become mainstream in Bulgarian universities, and the term gender itself has not firmly established itself in the Bulgarian language. In the winter of 2018, there suddenly emerged mass hysteria around 'gender' in Bulgarian public discourse, related to the pending ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Some absurd examples from public debates, events, and protests ensued, and orthodox priests were seen on television, (mis)quoting renowned gender scholar Judith Butler. Apart from the entertaining moments in this farcical charade, the undercurrents of this sudden social outburst carry more sombre implications. They point to a cultural shift in Bulgarian society towards parochial, conservative, anti-liberal, and anti-modern attitudes. This is apparently part of a now global trend and a global campaign against what anti-liberals have called a "gender ideology". The ultimate goal, however, are the liberal values of western democracy. The paper looks critically at some examples from Bulgarian public discourse and argues for a more engaged, liberally-oriented approach to gender in higher education.*