

CHALGA CULTURE MEETS THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION: A GROTESQUE SPECTACLE OF MASCULINITY

Ralitsa Muharska

St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia

Abstract: *The task of this text is to analyze the discursive environment of the “discussion” about the Istanbul Convention in Bulgarian media, which started late in 2017, using the joint theoretical lens of the spectacle (Debord) and simulation (Baudrillard). That spectacle, a nationalist-populist manipulation campaign staged with the aim of political power-grabbing, has since infected the media environment, causing an outburst in cultural creativity: new language units alongside an impressive mass of humorous folklore produced spontaneously. The carnivalesque outburst showed in a grotesque light both the manipulative performance offered to “the people” and their reaction. My hypothesis is that a lot of the brainwashing success of that gender panic project is based on one specific type of hegemonic masculinity. Enhanced by cognitive dissonance, a pivotal part of premodern mindsets, it continues to dominate the public sphere in the country. Mechanisms inherited from our empire-peripheral past have facilitated anti-democratic, anti-European and anti-Western brainwashing. On the other hand, the folklore production could mean that the public may have been more aware of the manipulation than planned: a sign – hopefully – of maturing political culture in the country.*