

Foreword

By *Péter Marton*, Editor-in-Chief

In contemporary democratic politics, gender is an issue that two people are perfectly capable of debating without even slightly being disturbed by having a completely different understanding of the term from that of the other. Some go so far as to oppose the use of the word „gender” altogether, arguing that it is something „made up”, even as they are themselves involved in the promotion of gender ideals whose contents do not in fact derive from biological traits.

In scholarly circles, an established way of approaching the subject is emphasizing the difference between (biological) „sex” and (social) „gender”, with a view to how a person’s individual or social identity may be different from what is one’s sex, as the latter is institutionally determined (for society’s purposes) on the basis of various commonly considered traits (i.e., based on indicators such as the presence of a Y chromosome, type of reproductive gland or gonad, sex hormones and external genitalia; indicators that may or may not fully align).

This is the least problematic (and still not unproblematic) definition of the difference between sex and gender. It is certainly much less problematic than the factually incorrect and still popular notion that (natural and unambiguous) sex is all there is that needs to be known about an individual, while (artificial/unnatural) gender is fantasy, or objectively relevant only to a tiny fraction of humanity (essentially: intersex persons with „genital ambiguity”).

In reality, gender roles, i.e. sets of social expectations towards an individual in various stages of life, different settings, and under specific conditions depending on what is one’s real or perceived biological sex, are sources of rights and obligations, privileges and sanctions, exemptions and burdens – and, ultimately, power relations – for individuals. As such, they are key institutions of social life, suggesting a place and a framework of action for an individual that one may or may not be comfortable with. They

may reduce transaction costs in certain important walks of life at the price of major injustices in others (with reference to the resulting breaches of basic human rights that are, admittedly, socially constructed themselves). Be this for good or bad, no individual (male, female or other) can fully escape the impact of gendered role expectations on social life, including being judged in terms of one's perceived role performance in this respect (even as the contents of social expectations may vary greatly from one social setting to another).

The hyperreality of heavily mediated modern societies enhances this effect. We are hardly able to watch a movie or read a book these days, even from times long gone by, without using as an ethical standard a measure of how progressively a given cultural product approaches the subject of equality between the sexes and the need for sensitivity towards varied gender identities. A movie such as *Top Gun* (1986, directed by Tony Scott) may be over the top with its machoism, and it probably already felt so to many at the time when it was made. But then consider the example of Erich Kästner, the author of the pacifist satire for children, *The Animals' Conference* (*Die Konferenz der Tiere*, 1947), a wonderful parody of how „hawkish” human state leaders are pressured by animals into abandoning their favourite pastime of making international trouble. Should Kästner be castigated for having painted female animals in the role of supportive housewives and male animals in the role of the important negotiators of the animal kingdom, thus reinforcing a conservative concept of gender?

One may answer this and other similar questions arguing in the name of „consistency” or „pragmatism.” Whatever one's preference is in this regard, our imperfect world does not necessarily allow for this choice, realistically speaking. In the polarising world of social media comment threads, it is no longer the top-down communication of the comparatively progressive ones to multitudes of passive minds, dominating public space, but interactions between the (partly) faceless masses. This inevitably robs the above ethical dilemmas of progressive politics of some of their practical significance. In what I call „mass²” (i.e. masses-to-masses) communication (as opposed to „mass communication” as the communication of a few to many), even fringe voices opposing the universal application of human rights will find support in each other. Due to their relatively higher propensity to engage views different from theirs, on the virtual fora of the internet they can at times create the semblance of dominance and numerical superiority over other types of voices – not to speak of when these fringe voices

are beamed directly from centrestage by political figures happy to seek the favour of the vocal fringes.

The present issue of the *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* (COJOURN) focuses against this backdrop on gendered aspects of various issues of interest to the study of International Relations (IR). As the articles in this issue may demonstrate, there is nothing made up about the very real effects of socially constructed notions of gender, regardless of whether we talk about Central Asian Muslim women in the Soviet Union and the attempt at their „liberation” from old norms in the name of new norms (as in Kinga Szálkai’s article), female politicians facing distinct tactics of character assassination (as in Nino Rusidze’s article), or the in-built and naively generalising assumption of the male-female perpetrator-victim dichotomy present in documents and policies of DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and re-integration) in the Balkans (as in Eszter Szedlacsek’s article).

At COJOURN, we are fully aware of the diversity of subjects that may be noteworthy with a view to the omnipresent gendered aspects of IR. We believe that the present issue may be just a humble beginning and in the future – in future issues – it may be worth revisiting the subject, drawing responses from a broader group of scholars.