



TM 5 Performing Gender: Gender as a Political Category  
International Workshop at University of Würzburg on 8 and 9 June 2017

### Concept Note

#### Gender Relations Revisited – Cross-Cultural Approaches to Violence and Agency in India and Germany

As part of the M.S. Merian – R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies (ICAS New Delhi), the Module TM 5 (Performing Gender) considers **Gender** as an imperative dimension of the overarching ICAS theme of **The Metamorphosis of the Political**, which is studied and approached from a multiplicity of disciplines in the Würzburg research group of TM 5.

This workshop will focus on the numerous manifestations of gender-related violence, which include both direct and indirect forms of violence on the basis of unequal gender relations. According to article 3a and 3d of the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, signed on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul, “violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life; “gender-based violence against women” shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately (Council of Europe Treaty Series; CETS 210).

The European Institute of Gender Equality distinguishes between direct and indirect violence against women: “Direct violence must be understood through the lens of unequal power relations between women and men. Violence against women is often normalised and perpetuated due to these structural inequalities. Hence, the historical and contemporary subordination of women in economic, social and political life must be acknowledged when attempting to explain the prevalence of direct violence against women in society. This means shifting the focus from an actor-oriented perspective which examines individual motivations for acts of violence, to a structure-oriented perspective which looks at the structural gender inequalities that support and justify gender-based violence against women. Indirect violence can be understood as a type of structural violence, characterised by norms, attitudes and stereotypes around gender in general and violence against women in particular. Indirect violence operates within a larger societal context; institutions, and the individuals within and outside these institutions, are all engaged in the production and reproduction of attitudes which normalise violence against women. Looking at these attitudes can provide insight into the way in which these indirect forms of violence are created and sustained, and even more importantly, how they contribute to and support direct forms of violence against women” (<http://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence/forms-gender-based-violence>).

Different forms of gender-related violence include rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, dowry-related violence, violence against female children, honor killings, acid throwing, sex trafficking, domestic violence, humiliation, economic deprivation or limited access to education and employment.

The term gender-related violence reflects the fact that violence against women is an expression of power inequalities between women and men and serves to maintain structural gender inequalities. Inequalities - and the forms of violence connected to them - are intersectional. They are the result of an interplay between multiple power structures that produce and reproduce hierarchical distinctions, for example regarding race, (dis)ability, age, social class, religion, and gender. This means that while all women face discrimination based on gender, some women experience multiple forms of discrimination, of which gender is only one component.

To adequately address the different manifestations of gender-related violence, we will have to address cultural, political and economic issues that encourage violence. A cross-cultural approach will consider gender norms against the backdrop of different cultures, lifestyles and social conditions and it will critically examine structures, mechanisms and causes of, but also discourses, on gender-related violence. Against this backdrop, norms as “freedom”, “emancipation” or “liberty” should be questioned within the dynamic interplay of power, as the providers of “justice” and “rights” (i.e. the global north) mobilizes these norms against “receiving” groups and collectives of the global south, although predominantly in politically convenient cases. In Europe, the Western woman presents herself as emancipated against migrant (Muslim) women; they are presented as victims of their own culture, who have to be protected and saved from their own men.

Considering the Indian, the German, as well as a broadened international context will enable us to understand both the specificities and the commonalities of gender-related violence. One focus will be on sexual violence and the re-examination of discourses on rape which always include discourses on concepts of gender.

Another focus will be on citizenship and democracy, and on structural forms of violence, such as access to economy and education and existing norms related to this form of violence. The wide range of concepts regarding citizenship becomes visible especially when the term is interrogated by the category of gender: It has increasingly been used to refer simultaneously to a formal association with the legal authority of the state, the larger moral community of the nation and the rights that they bestow, as it does to the more substantive local relationships that constitute the fabric of social life (usually, though not only, in cities).

A third focus will be on performance traditions and representation of violence on stage and in literature, involving the constant redefinition of not just sexuality and gender relations, but of the meaning of democracy, rights and a sense of history of particularly marginalized castes and ethnicities. A critical reflection on the use of “culture” in the discourse on gender relations, the emergence of different concepts of „culture“ – as ancient or originary, as associated with „backwardness“ and requiring „civilization“, as linked to memories and myths, as anchored in texts and traditions – will examine the ground on which gender relations have been debated since at least the late 18th century right up to the present. What is the resilience of the “cultural” in societies and states which have long made the transition to democracy, and how does “culture” become a political category when being instrumentalised to mobilize or impede political forces?

The fourth thematic focus will be on masculinity and its impact on gender-related violence. Proceeding from the assumption that masculinity can be usefully described as a discursive construct and cultural practice (rather than a fixed social role determined by a sexed body), our aim is to analyse the role that cultural, social and literary narratives play in the implementation of male gendered subjects.