In_visibilities in the media's gendered discourse on the war in Ukraine

12 December 2022
18:00-20:00
Campus of the University of Vienna, Aula, Spitalgasse 2, 1090 Vienna

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Event organised by the Research Plattform Gender:
Ambivalent In_Visibilities

This event organised by the Research Plattform GAIN (Gender: Ambivalent In_Visibilities), a contribution to Campus Aktuell 2022, sets out to interrogate critically and from an intersectionally gendered perspective how the media have been and still are reporting on the Russian Federation´s war of aggression against Ukraine. Especially in times of war, media discourses tend to simplify matters. In the face of the complex political constellation, the historical entanglement of Ukraine and the Russian Federation as well as recent developments, continuing mass murder and destruction, this simplification might be a necessity. Given the Ukraine's dependence on the global community's continued support, it might even make sense as a communication strategy. However, it is also an inevitable consequence of this simplification that we tend to lose sight of certain perspectives or particular circumstances. Moreover, we are inadvertently made inattentive or even blind to how simplification often leads to generalising and homogenising, both of which especially affect marginalised groups.

In our panel discussion, we would like to shine a gender-sensitive light on the complexities and ambivalences that are often disregarded in media reports on the war in and on Ukraine. We plan on doing this by asking the following questions: Which groups of people and which institutional interrelations are frequently made invisible? What remains unsaid or is represented in a distorted way that favours or produces generalised images of low complexity? Which images of war become visible and how, and what constructions of gender are made intelligible through these images? Who, amongst the victims, is given a voice in and by the media's reporting? Which consequences of the war are invisibilised? How does prevalent reporting on the war bulldoze and thus eliminate existing complexities of lived (gendered) diversity and gender equality, for which people in Ukraine have been fighting for a long time?

Aiming to gain differentiated insights into correlations, complexities and consequences of the ongoing war in Ukraine that have not yet been properly thought through, we are going to discuss these and similar questions covering four topics:

1. Using female Ukrainian soldiers and male Ukrainian deserters as examples, we would like to trace the epistemological power of hegemonic and militarised constructions of gender.
2. We will discuss the function of the Churches and the role they play, both in Ukraine and in Russia, in the context of the ongoing war.
3. We are interested in bringing to the fore, how LGBTQI+ persons are affected by the war.
4. We look into sexual violence against women, girls and men committed within the context of groups of male soldiers.

Our panel assembles both Ukrainian and local experts. Following a brief introduction, we will kick off the debate. To provide a solid basis for each discussion, the panellists will be invited to give a brief statement and introduce the topic from their perspective. A chaired discussion between the panellists will follow, in which the audience will then be asked to join. Thus, we hope to be able to inform and stimulate a debate that includes the Ukrainian colleagues who currently work with us, do research and teach at the University of Vienna.

Schedule

18:00
Welcome by **Elisabeth Holzleithner** (Head of the Research Plattform GAIN, Professor of Legal Philosophy and Legal Gender Studies, University of Vienna)

18:10
Introductory remarks by **Christa Hämmerle** (Deputy-head of GAIN, Associate Professor of Modern History, University of Vienna) and
Andrea Lehner-Hartmann (GAIN member, Professor of Religious Education and Catechetics at the Department of Practical Theology, University of Vienna)

18:30
Input by panellists:

Birgit Sauer (GAIN member, Professor Emerita of Political Science, University of Vienna)

Kristina Stoeckl (Professor of Sociology, University of Innsbruck)

Friedrich Chernyshov (LGBTQI+ activist, executive director of a Ukrainian NGO for trans*people - Trans*Generation NGO)

Kateryna Busol (Ukrainian lawyer specialising in international human rights, humanitarian and criminal law, University of Regensburg)

Discussion chair:
Sylvia Mieszkowski (Deputy-head of GAIN, Professor of British Literature at the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna)

In 2020, the University of Vienna funded the interdisciplinary Research Plattform GAIN, an acronym that stands for "Gender: Ambivalent In_Visibilities" (see https://gain.univie.ac.at/). GAIN, the members of which work at six of our University's faculties, is dedicated to a wide spectrum of projects, organises different events and contributes to several initiatives. All of these activities focus on different aspects of the complex and ambivalent processes that bring about, stabilise and possibly subvert intersectionally gendered in_visibilities. One basic assumption of our collective work is that while 'being visible' is a condition for being perceived – both politically and socially –, visibility does not automatically or necessarily translate into political agency. At the same time, in_visibility may produce desirable safety that visibilisation may well take away.

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