

International Relations in the Czech Republic: Where Have All the Women Gone?

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Abstract: In this article, we strive to explore what are some of the causes of the scarcity of women researchers in Czech international relations in comparison to the representation of women students in the field. To answer this question, we analysed a set of semi-structured interviews with international relations students and accessible syllabi using the conceptual framework of Sandra Harding's gendered universe, which differentiates between the operations of gender on the individual, structural and symbolic level. We identified some gendered barriers that might be blocking women researchers' access to the field. On this basis we suggest that the lack of women researchers in the field parallels the situation in other social sciences and humanities disciplines, but the situation in international relations is further exacerbated by the local circumstances of the foundation of the discipline, which shaped it as a predominantly masculine field with a specific gender-blind version of doing research and academic careers.

Key words: international relations, working/study environment, research field, academic career, gender, women researchers, Czech Republic.

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Where have all the women researchers in Czech international relations (IR) gone? How does their scarcity affect the content of local IR? Could the lack of women researchers be attributed to the presentation of the discipline and its academic output and vice versa? What does it mean and feel like to be an IR student (including PhD candidates) and how is the experience gendered? And how have Czech universities and research centres responded to the on-going dialogue between feminist/gender studies and IR that has been developing since the 1980s at the latest (Hutchings 2008)? These are some of the questions behind our empirical research into the experience of IR students with gender as an analytical category and part of their discipline at an IR department of a major Czech public university.

In general, the reasons for researching the apparent dearth of women in not only Czech IR can be categorised as falling into one of two categories. First, there are normative reasons, most importantly the justice-related one assuming that since capacities necessary for the execution of IR are distributed evenly across society, all groups, including women, should be represented evenly and if that is not the case, there are probably barriers in place that need to be removed. Second, there are reasons concerning the possible and actual impact of the gender imbalance in IR. Since society remains gendered, men and women are socialised into a hierarchy of roles with different sets of skills, capacities and interests. As a result, women are underrepresented in IR as a men-dominated discipline and they are much more likely to be missing from certain subdisciplines, such as theory-building,

and be overrepresented in fields such as feminist IR. The perspectives of groups other than white men have been historically marked as particular, as opposed to white men's "universal" or even "objective" standpoint (Rees 2011; Schiebinger 1989, 1993). At the same time, organisation studies shows that given the hierarchy gender represents, women in masculine environments (both in terms of whose knowledge is valued more and who is mainly represented) need to achieve a certain number in order to even be able to voice a perspective that differs from the "universal" one (Acker 1990, 2006). In other words, the lack of women, who are more likely, for instance, to focus on feminist epistemology than men, is highly likely to result in limiting the scope of the discipline afflicted by such a lack.

IR is part of the social sciences and humanities (SSH). As such, it reflects the patterns regarding the make-up of the student and faculty body present in other disciplines (European Commission 2016; Kázmér 2018), i.e. there are many more women among BA students than among PhD candidates and researchers in IR. Similarly, women are underrepresented in the higher echelons of the academic hierarchy and overrepresented in administrative positions at universities and research institutes. These phenomena seem to be relatively universal as, e.g., the TRIP faculty surveys suggest (Teaching, Research and International Policy Project 2018). Nevertheless, there are few detailed studies into the reasons for the dearth of women in global IR, and there are no such studies available for the particular Czech context. This is why some in the local IR community who see the lack of women among its researchers as a problem designed a large research project within which our study was conducted. A complete absence or a low representation of women means a lack of role models for women students who could substantially increase the women students' motivation for pursuing an academic career (McAlpine et al. 2012) while it also seems to affect disciplinary knowledge (Saini 2018; Schiebinger 1999).

As researchers in the field of feminist sociology and science and technology studies, we use a conceptual framework that is informed by Sandra Harding's gendered universe (Harding 1986), which differentiates between the operation of gender on the individual, structural and symbolic level. Using semi-structured interviews as our primary source of data we strive to access the structural and symbolic levels as they are reflected on the individual level. We strive to, first, summarise the structural barriers stemming from the position of IR as an SSH discipline; second, analyse three types of gendered barriers – symbolic, institutional and individual – that we identified in the semi-structured interviews and that seem to hamper women researchers' access to the field of IR studies; and, third, ponder the overall situation in Czech IR from a gender studies perspective – showing gaps and lacks caused by not fully using the potential of gender as an analytical category, which seems to be at least partly related to the lack of women in the field. The goal of the article is to map how IR in the Czech Republic is gendered and suggest possible reasons for the low representation of women among scholars and researchers in the discipline, which is at odds with the representation of women students among all IR students.

The article is structured as follows: after summarising our theoretical inspirations, we introduce the research methodology; next, we focus on the structural barriers specific to the field of SSH and the disciplinary barriers that seem to dominate IR. Against this backdrop, we present our analysis of the conducted interviews together with our interpretation of the effects the identified problems may have on the numbers of women and researchers from disadvantaged groups in general; in the conclusion we ponder the wider implications of the present situation for the field of IR, suggest some measures to remedy it, and identify areas where future research is needed.

THEORETICAL INSPIRATIONS: GENDERING THE IR FIELD

Mainstream international relations emerged as a research field at a time when feminist theories and gender studies managed to get a foothold in the academia, mainly in the

USA and the UK. This has, nevertheless, not led to a systematic thematic and conceptual cross-fertilisation between the two disciplines, let alone a fully embraced integration of gender as a critical perspective and analytical category readily applied by IR researchers where appropriate, although several key feminist researchers have been active in the field since the late 1980s (e.g. Cohn 2007; Elshtain 1987; Ruddick 1990; Tickner 1992).¹ Rather, IR has only recently started to explore the terrain opened up by gender studies and feminist theory (Blanchard 2003; Hutchings 2008). The discipline has been dominated by men and it has therefore been easier for women to gain entry into the discipline via subdisciplines aligned with gendered expectations of women and femininity such as peace and conflict studies. The TRIP project suggests that in international comparison, women in IR focus predominantly on international organisations and human rights while men researchers rather focus on IR theory and international security (TRIP 2014a). Another aspect supporting the mentioned division concerns the prevailing paradigm – while most women IR researchers in the TRIP identify as liberal and embrace constructivism, the majority of men researchers identify as conservative and espouse realism (TRIP 2014b).

Similarly, the delayed introduction of both (critical) IR and feminist and gender studies to Czech universities, which was only enabled by the change of the political regime in 1989, did not lead to any cross-fertilisation, and even an increased interest in the gender dimension of IR did not manage to significantly affect the local IR research agenda, even if the interest in it was prevalent elsewhere (see Narain 2014).

Now why should we care? This question seems to be all the more pertinent at a time when gender studies (GS) as a discipline is under an unprecedented attack (Hark 2016; Kováts 2017; Nyklová – Fárová 2018). While the whole questioning of an SSH discipline should not go without ardent attention of the whole SSH branch and academy as such, the answer to the question may be relatively simple. The practice of IR affects and is affected by global politics of security, access to political power and political economy, which are all fundamentally gendered, and it is therefore not possible to omit gender as an analytical category from the analysis of IR (Anderson et al. 2014; Steans 2003). Yet the answer may go much further. GS is a discipline grounded in feminist theory (see Sjoberg 2006, 2011). The epistemological implications of using GS in IR are what promises to have the most transformative effect on IR. Feminist challenges to IR theory building should lead to redefining the very scope of the IR field, the questions asked and actors' acknowledged agency (Enloe 1989; Hutchings 2008; Tickner 2001). On a more practical level, taking GS and feminist theory seriously should result in an increased self-reflexivity of the field scrutinising who contributes to the discipline in what ways and what the reasons for and implications of over- and underrepresentation of specific groups (social, ethnic, demographic, etc.) might be. A related practical realm is represented by feminist pedagogy strategies and explorations of how to best introduce GS concepts when teaching IR (Mertus 2007; Parisi et al. 2013; Stienstra 2000).

Many of the mentioned studies are critical of the failures to transform feminist theory and GS from a marginal perspective into an actual stable part of IR. What seems to have been achieved is a compartmentalisation of the GS perspective, a phenomenon where women, when underrepresented, are often put in charge of issues concerning women with insufficient resources and a very limited capacity to affect decision making (Roth 2004; Roth – Horan 2001). If we look at the broad field of IR, we can see a similar situation with feminist scholarship and practice limited to specific subfields such as development studies, international organisations research, and peace and conflict resolution studies, where women are present in higher numbers (TRIP 2018). At the core of this compartmentalisation seems to be the mistaken identification of gender issues with women and, more specifically, with characteristics and attributes stereotypically associated with femininity (Acker 1990, 2006; Kanter 1977).

Feminist IR shares an interest in the subjects that produce knowledge with feminist science and technology studies (STS), the field in which the authors of this article are based. Feminist STS challenges neo/positivist epistemological positions with the concept of standpoint and situated knowledges (Haraway 1988). Having shown that objectivity is a construct, this tradition relies on intersubjectivity and questions the hierarchies of knowledge in science and research theory and practice. One of the goals here is to analyse processes which lead to marginalising knowledge of underprivileged groups and their challenging of and contribution to mainstream knowledge building (e.g. Rossiter 1993). These groups include women as the historical bias still prevails and merits a focus on women's position within knowledge production. In addition to this epistemological focus, feminist STS addresses ethical issues, in practice related to the well-being of students, teachers, research participants and others, with special attention paid to effects of power.

Besides the theoretical input of feminist STS, our research is also informed by feminist sociology of gender. This broad field studies how gender gets constructed and reconstructed in everyday interactions of individuals, and their self-concept and life trajectory; in institutions and the division of labour; and also on the symbolic level, which is best represented in language for Sandra Harding (Harding 1986; Šmídová 2007).

As the university and science are defined as the sites of ultimate knowledge in modern societies, the ways in which they contribute to the maintenance of gendered hierarchies as the symbolic bastions of the least contested form of knowledge need to be scrutinised in great detail. As Harding claims: *"If we are not willing to try to see the favored intellectual structures and practices of science as cultural artifacts rather than as sacred commandments [...], then it will be hard to understand how gender symbolism, the gendered social structure of science, and the masculine identities and behaviors of individual scientists have left their marks on the problematics, concepts, theories, methods, interpretations, ethics, meanings, and goals of science"* (Harding 1986: 39). It is for this reason that the make-up of who is acknowledged as a knowledge producer and what that means in terms of division of labour and individual opportunities merits our attention.

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify and analyse the barriers that might prevent women researchers from entering the field of IR, we decided to carry out a qualitative study of a public university IR department. Qualitative research does not aim to be representative/generalisable but rather to capture the scope and nature of issues pertinent to the field of choice. Thus, the barriers associated with little integration of gender as an analytical category and feminist perspectives as an integral critical lens for the study of IR may be assumed to also apply to other IR departments as our overview of accessible syllabi suggests. The department in question was selected because of its wide scope of subdisciplines and a strong research focus as well as its stable collaboration with the contracting institution. Over the course of several months in 2018, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews with a group of women and men students we managed to recruit for the research via several points of access (see below). Although the sample is relatively small, the continuous team meetings to discuss and examine the conducted interviews proved the sample was saturated as new interviews stopped providing new information (Guest et al. 2006).

The research process started with choosing a department that would be accessible and willing to take part in the project. The heads of departments we contacted promptly agreed and so we sent out an invitation for their students to take part in a qualitative study with a brief description of the objectives of the study. This first recruitment attempt did not lead to recruiting any research participants. We therefore contacted a lecturer at a department interested in the project that shared their views on the situation in the discipline and helped us organise a seminar for students. With this help, we were eventually able to conduct ten interviews. Since the focus was on barriers, we also strived to find

individuals who left the discipline. The research participants were five men PhD candidates, one woman MA student and four women PhD candidates. Based on a review of literature on gender-related issues in IR as well as on the long term expertise of the research team's department, we constructed an interview guide that focused on the following main issues: one's study path and visions of future employment, work and internship experience, science (e.g. what it means to be a good researcher) and disciplinary characteristics (e.g. the percentage of men and women at the department and in the discipline), sexual harassment, bullying and gender sensitivity, and academic mobility. The limitations of the study include the fact that the students who granted us an interview were all at least partially interested in the issue of GS in their discipline and they were able to give up about two hours of their free time for the interview.

Analytically, we used thematic analysis, which is used for identifying themes in data through a process combining inductive and deductive coding (Braun – Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis allows the researchers to analyse the content of the interviews – e.g. to see which themes tend to emerge repeatedly while accounting for who tends to mention them, and to note similarities and differences in even big qualitative data sets – and is easy to use in team research (Nowell et al. 2017). Once the themes were identified from initial codes, we outlined their structure and checked for adequacy with the raw data. We then selected the themes clearly related to gender issues and decided to use Harding's theoretical framework to group the themes in a clear manner. The interviews were anonymised and so was the institution.

In order to contextualise our findings, we conducted a literature review of three Czech journals dedicated to IR: the *Czech Journal of International Relations*,² *Defence & Strategy*³ and *Global Politics*.⁴ These journals were selected because they print Czech language articles and thus may foster local academic discussion. We looked for articles on GS and feminism/feminist theory in order to establish how and whether these topics affect the recorded local academic debates. As there is a single comprehensive overview of the status and numbers of women in international politics as it is practiced and as a field (Borčány 2017) and it does not include information on the numbers of women in individual stages of higher education (HE), we listed the relevant departments in the Czech Republic and asked them for data regarding their student bodies. As the first round of requests was in vain, the Institute of International Relations Prague tasked an intern, Kristina Berdar,⁵ with collecting the data from individual departments. Finally, we also looked into the literature and topics required for the PhD level final state exam at the universities where this information is available. This was done to see whether the feminist/gender perspective is understood as marginal and therefore not a necessary part of the final exam or whether it is reflected in the questions as part and parcel of the discipline. After coding the interviews, we integrated the findings with the insights from the other sources to identify key themes in these based on a combination of inductive and deductive coding.

We will now focus on some of the structural and disciplinary barriers that follow especially from two sets of data. First, we present an analysis of the broader SSH field conducted by the Gender and Research department of the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Cidlinská et al. 2018; Vohlidalová 2018) as its findings are also applicable to the IR field. Second, we present the data we were able to gather on the numbers of students and researchers in the discipline.

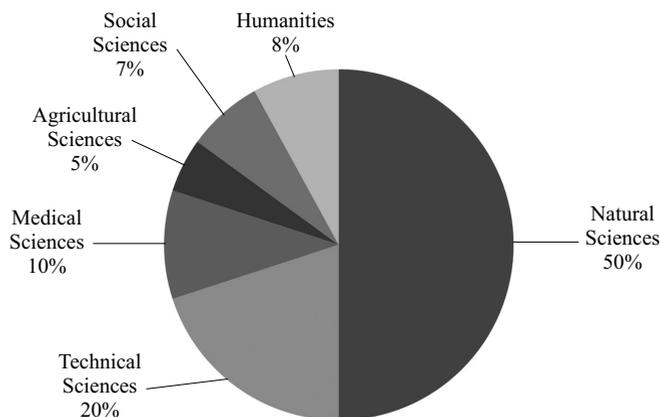
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

In Europe, female PhD graduates in SSH have outnumbered their male counterparts (e.g., in the field of humanities and arts, women represent 55%; in the field of social sciences 51%) but the percentage of female researchers is still not at 50% (European Commission 2016). In the Czech Republic, in SSH women represent 63.3% of graduate

students, while only 25.3% of researchers are women (Tenglerová 2017: 20–21). There is also strong vertical and horizontal segregation in representation of men and women in the SSH field in academia. In other words, women in SSH tend to be more junior and less likely to hold tenure than their male counterparts, and men and women tend to focus on different areas (see above). With respect to representation of women in academic leadership, the Czech Republic performs very poorly in all academic fields compared to other EU countries (Kázmér 2018). The imbalance in the proportion of women among university students and among academicians is more pronounced in SSH than in STEM. Moreover, women in SSH and STEM tend to quit their academic career at different stages. While in STEM it is largely in the postdoctoral phase, SSH women researchers tend to give up on their academic ambitions already during their doctoral studies (Cidlinská 2018; Kázmér 2018: 22–24; Tenglerová 2017: 21).

If we focus on the HE sector where IR departments are dominantly placed, we can see that women are overrepresented on lower and less stable positions and disappear as we move up in the hierarchy. The survey we use here showed that academicians' job satisfaction was closely linked with their satisfaction with career prospects, i.e. the feeling that they have some prospects in their current job (Vohlídalová 2018: 13–14). There is a significant connection between career prospects and funding for work positions. Vohlídalová's survey showed that economic stability and security only comes with an associate and a full professorship in HE. All lower positions typically mean short-term contracts (55.7% of all respondents) (Vohlídalová 2018: 18). This is mostly caused by the system of funding, where not only grant money but also institutional funding is distributed through competition, i.e. it is uncertain. The share of academicians fully or mostly paid from grant funds is relatively small in HE (less than 18%) and in SSH it is much more common to be wholly or mostly paid from institutional funds (Vohlídalová 2018: 43), which might imply greater stability. However, when it comes to starting one's research career and career prospects, it means there are fewer grant opportunities in SSH in general, which is problematic since grant projects of senior researchers are a prerequisite for creating positions for beginning researchers, i.e. doctoral candidates and postdocs. The generally lower amount of funding in the SSH field (see Chart 1) also means that new stable positions are either not established at all or established very slowly. This results in petrification of the present personnel structure and further harms the career prospects of beginning researchers.

Chart 1
Percentage of state funding of the public academic sector (including HE institutions) by discipline



Source: Science and Research indicators, Czech Statistical Office 2017.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AS PART OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

To get a better picture of the situation in the IR field, departments teaching IR and related disciplines⁶ were contacted in several rounds. However, it soon transpired that accessing these types of statistics would not be an easy task: out of the institutions we contacted, only Masaryk University in Brno, Charles University in Prague, Palacký University Olomouc, and University of West Bohemia in Pilsen publish or were able to provide us with at least some of the required figures.⁷ The missing data was supplemented by some data from the Ministry of Education, but this data did not include information on security and European studies – see Table 1 for an overview. The statistics show that women's domination in student bodies has prevailed for the past 18 years and has been increasing on all levels but this has not translated into women's representation among academics.

Table 1
Student population distribution 2000–2018; percentages of women among the total numbers of students at the given level

	BA level of study			MA level of study			PhD level of study		
	Men	Women	%	Men	Women	%	Men	Women	%
2000	481	696	59	953	1451	60	139	94	40
2018	1999	3432	63	1230	2575	68	83	84	50

Source: Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic.

Based on openly accessible information on the faculties of the reviewed institutions, we learnt that out of all of their 184 employees (both internal and contract) only 24.5% were women. All of the heads of the respective departments (100%) were men. In his study into the position of women in Czech international, European and security policy, Vít Borčány provides an overview of numbers of women at IR departments and think tanks. He states the “*sociodemographic trends [i.e. the high proportion of women among especially BA and MA students] will probably only have an impact in the long term*”⁸ (emphasis in original, Borčány 2017: 16). However, when it comes to the situation of research and faculty staff, this assumption seems to be incorrect as the statistics from the monitoring reports on the position of women in Czech science have shown (Kázmér 2018: 10–11).

As the conceptualisation of the operation of gender in society by Harding suggests, figures such as those presented in this section on the make-up of the student and faculty body can only suggest general trends regarding the division of labour: if we look beyond the research staff, faculty and students, we can see that unlike the positions of heads of departments, the positions of secretaries and assistants are dominated by women.⁹ However, the link between the numbers of men and women and actual gender sensitivity is not a straightforward one. While the statistics may shed some light on the actual access of men and women to power and decision making in an institution, there is not a straightforward connection between such descriptive representation and content produced by an institution.¹⁰ Thus, the basic comparative statistics looking into men/women ratios may serve but as the first indicator of general equality, as the access to especially leading positions should be equally distributed in a society with gender equality (Norris – Inglehart 2003).

In order to establish whether the lack of women researchers and scholars is accompanied by a lack of attention paid to gender as a category and feminist theory, we decided to investigate the requirements on PhD candidates regarding their state exams and syllabi,

and examine the local scientific production in the IR field. While the information as to the actual questions/areas of inquiry for state exams is usually not readily accessible, we were, e.g., able to look into the list of literature required for the two PhD specialisations at Masaryk University. Both include books with chapters that specifically focus on feminist approaches to the matters at hand. It does not seem, however, that gender relations and their impact on IR topics would be of special focus. Similarly, when it comes to the syllabi, feminist theories and gender seem to be mostly relegated to facultative courses (when present at all) and may be expected to form part of critical studies classes.

The local academic production and its reflection of the salience of gender as an analytical category proved to provide a more straightforward clue. As described in the Methodology section, we reviewed three Czech language academic journals dedicated to IR. Using their search engines, we looked for the words “gender” and “feminis”/“feminis*”. We then focused only on original academic articles with these words. Based on this search, the first article specifically outlining the relation between GS and IR was published already in 1998 in the *Czech Journal of International Relations* (Kodíčková 1998). The second article striving to provide its readers with introductory information on the link between feminism and IR was published in *Global Politics* (Kryštofik 2003). Finally, the journal *Defence & Strategy* featured an empirical study on the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war from a feminist perspective (Ptáčnicková 2013). The last text, by Iveta Ptáčnicková, was explicitly welcomed by the journal’s editor: “*We may expect this contribution on an untraditional topic will raise a discussion and draw the attention it deserves*” (Frank 2013: 3). Unfortunately, the search suggests this has not been the case.¹¹

The presented search for accessible articles on gender and feminism in IR has already hinted that the topic does not seem to be a mainstream one for the local IR community. Similarly, the fact that IR departments do not have sex segregated statistics for their student bodies does little to suggest the gendered division of labour and its reproduction are a concern for those running the departments. In a society dominated by a hierarchy of the only two widely acknowledged genders (heterosexual feminine and heterosexual masculine – see Butler 1999), this situation supports the reading of underrepresentation of one of the genders as one that inevitably leads to the erasure or at least ignoring of issues and attributes associated with it. This pertains to the actual work environment as women face a double standard in men-dominated environments: they either fail to be perceived as feminine when they manifest the same characteristics as those identified with successful professional masculinity or they fail to be perceived as professional when they manifest characteristics associated with femininity (Kanter 1977; Křížková 2003). This phenomenon does not only affect work environments but also the environment of the classroom, where women students are typically not assessed in a gender-neutral way (Mertus 2007; Parisi et al. 2013; Stienstra 2000), which may have effects on their self-perception and visions of their professional future. At the same time, the lack of women among the faculty and especially among those making the decisions may impact the content of knowledge seen as core to the given discipline although there does not seem to be an open hostility to gender topics in the university programmes. In the following section, we turn to the results of the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with the students of an IR department.

THE GENDERED UNIVERSE OF CZECH INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

How do graduate students reflect on the structural barriers and the hints at disciplinary and institutional barriers identified above? Are their perceptions of their discipline gendered? And if so, on what level(s)? To answer these questions, we now turn to the three most salient themes that emerged from the interviews: gender sensitivity, the rivalry culture at the given department, and differences in self-representation of men and women.

We offer here their analysis and interpretation framed by the categorisation of functioning of gender penned by Harding (1986).

Gender blind, gender sensitive: Roots of gender inequality

The symbolic level of functioning of gender can be typically studied on how language and conceptual thinking are structured and with what consequences. The first theme we would like to address here is therefore gender sensitivity and how it transpires from the interviews in two respects. Firstly, how and if it affects the students' perception of the department as a place of research and instruction. Secondly, how and if it affects the students' thinking about the discipline. Here, we were interested in their research experience and imaginations of the discipline. Gender sensitivity thus pertains to at least two areas: the work environment, and the content of knowledge produced and research done within the scope of the discipline. As explained above, their connection is not a straightforward one, but gender sensitivity may be seen as lacking if it only pertains to one of the two realms.

Given the bias in our sample, as only people willing to share their views of gender and inequalities in general agreed to talk to us, we expected the research participants (RPs) to have some basic academic knowledge about gender. The RPs were indeed very open and willing to discuss gender-related issues with us. This was most importantly manifested when discussing the roots of inequalities the RPs perceived in their discipline as well as in their respective specialisations. Our discussions of the topic of socialisation, which was raised by many of the RPs, at least partially confirmed the assumption of our RPs' knowledge of GS. Socialisation was indeed the most frequently named root cause of gender inequality as it gets expressed in the classroom and later (although for many of the RPs, less clearly) in the discipline itself. As a man PhD candidate put it:

There are cultural issues [...] the way women are brought up here,

later adding:

It's really important to establish relations with one's supervisors and, [because of socialisation] this may be more difficult for women fellow students, to be active [...] even from my own classes I rather remember the active students. [...] It's more difficult for my women colleagues.

While there is clearly a belief in the link between social conditioning and one's gendered subjectivity, there seems to be much less agreement on the link between the symbolic realm represented by the university as the site of knowledge, and the reiteration and inscription of the hierarchical nature of the gender dichotomy, i.e. some of the means through which the criticised gendered socialisation is delivered. This inadvertently limits one's imaginations as to how perceived gender inequality could be remedied on institutional level since it is believed to be the result of an external factor, i.e. socialisation. In turn, most of the RPs agreed that there is little, besides setting up a crèche or a kindergarten, the institution could do about this problem.

The theme emerging from how the RPs approached and enacted gender in their accounts is remarkable not just for the relative openness the students manifested towards issues of gender but also in how they more or less acknowledged there is gender inequality in their field. In the light of these concessions, perhaps the most interesting feature is that the RPs did not reflect on the symbolic functioning of gender. Specifically, the role of language and symbolism in the university's operation and staffing, and areas researched and theoretically engaged with by university faculty was not acknowledged as having much importance as the RPs' comments on divisions within their discipline illustrate. The most widely used dichotomy deployed by them is that of *soft* and *hard* topics. While some recognize that this dichotomy is gendered, they only do this to deny there is any

essential core to its gendering. Thus, they are aware of the cultural tendency to associate similar dichotomies with either pole of the gender binary, including its hierarchical ordering – in this particular case, *hard* is symbolically associated with masculinity and deemed superior to *soft*, which associated with femininity (Prokhovnik 1999). The RPs readily discerned the gendered nature of the dichotomy and stressed that they did not believe women would be rather associated with soft topics and men with hard ones or at least that there are any reasons why this should be so. Yet none of them acknowledged how such symbolic dichotomies help to maintain the gender divide on the other levels, where the RPs identified the sources and expressions of the perceived gender inequalities. This is important, as not reflecting on the symbolic salience of similar descriptors may contribute to obscuring the actual work that needs to be done in order to challenge the clearly present gendered perceptions of the field's divisions, such as those that are present when a woman researcher wishes to propose an IR theory. In a similar vein, a woman PhD candidate suggested that the perceived horizontal segregation within the discipline means that even though women pursue certain topics that were not historically dominated by men, this should not be regarded as problematic as it means the topics get addressed and women get space in the discipline:

Critical [IR] women researchers focus on security studies issues associated with gender such as women in war because they feel such topics are underrepresented but as a result they are not exactly because the women researchers take them up.

While the RP recognises that there is compartmentalisation in her field, she does not question its inherently problematic dynamics, i.e. the fact that it works to effectively maintain extant power hierarchies by keeping the core of the given activity/field intact and immune to the critique offered (Roth 2004). The gender of the knower is understood as irrelevant and it therefore suffices when previously ignored topics are covered by anyone, disregarding inequalities related to the gender of the knowledge producer. The gendered hierarchy of knowledge and topics thus seems to be immune to critical analysis. The hierarchy is further downplayed by invoking the concept of complementarity, which is frequently used to justify the gender binary itself. The shift in focus to how the discipline works globally then works towards obscuring the fact that little attention is paid to gender and feminism in the curriculum, research and the very operation of the local IR academic community.

This observation is further strengthened by the fact that while the students are open to the concept of gender, they have only a very vague or no idea as to how it could broaden/change/challenge their academic work and specifically their own research, as is apparent from this quote:

I do not take it [the gender perspective] into consideration, because I have an absolutely macro approach. I do not do microanalysis. I treat the [state] actor de facto as a black box. [...] I do not care about the [men/women] ratio. [...] It is simply a violent state actor and I attribute an agency to it. I look at the actor just as we are used to looking at the state: 'the state has decided that, the state has done, the state said, the non-state actor has done, the non-state actor said'. You also do not ask yourself if you consider gender when you research the state. You attribute a gender-neutral agency to it.

The interviews strongly suggest there is no pressure exerted on the students from their senior colleagues and supervisors to consider how gender and feminist perspectives could improve their work and when and how they should consider deploying them. The very fact that some view the position of women as strong through relying on horizontal segregation of the subdisciplines and topics within the broader IR field suggests that the power aspect of hierarchies should be paid attention to when methodologies are discussed, as this is one of the weakest points of the instruction at the given department, and it was

identified as such by several RPs. At the same time, the “male-stream” IR has been at the centre of feminist critique for at least three decades – at least since the publishing of the 1988 special issue of *Millennium* on women and IR – and continues to be so, and it is therefore a relatively easy segment to implement into the curriculum (Sjoberg 2009; Tickner 1998). Translating the theoretical input of various approaches into methodology might help remedy the pragmatic approach to gender and feminist theory the students manifest. It may be argued that the interviewed students are gender sensitive on a pragmatic level, i.e. they are aware of the dearth of women in their discipline and at their department but they lack insights into the symbolic functioning of gender that follows from critically engaging with feminist theory (in general or in feminist IR). The current situation thus may contribute to the perpetuation of the present gendered hierarchies precisely because the gender perspective is not really engaged with in the parts of study that have to do with theory and methodology. This in turn affects even the understanding of the inequality identified by the students and the possibilities of challenging it.

The “macho” rivalry culture

If we want to answer the question “Where have all the women gone?” we must also focus on how gender is constructed and reconstructed at the structural level (Harding 1986). That means, in our case, what the role of the IR department itself is.

The interviews with the students from the IR department show that there is a huge rivalry at the department. In academic environments, competition at some level can be useful but this does not seem to be the case here. The students recounted that there are at least two separate and (hostilely) competing groups at the department that fight over power, influence and money. These groups are not ashamed to use practices like manipulation, denigration, cheating, or threats. Some students try to stay outside these groups although there is great pressure exerted especially on PhD candidates (both men and women) to join one of the “teams”. Because of this rivalry culture, some PhD candidates are actually ready to leave the department once they have finished their degree. Some of them have even experienced burnout and mental breakdown because of how stressful the environment is.

Even the big package of money that came to the department did not help to calm the atmosphere down. There is still a lot of competition and arguments about money. Maybe I could stay there, but I would like to escape from this stressful environment. I stopped feeling like it. (a man PhD candidate)

The students also believe that this competitive environment is a consequence of a “macho” culture that operates at the department. According to the students the “macho” culture is characterised by male-domination (and overrepresentation of men), a hostile atmosphere, aggression and rivalry and fraternity at the same time. These characteristics refer to one specific local form of hegemonic masculinity (Wetherell – Edley 1999) that is perceived as dominant in the department. This type of networking is also especially impenetrable for women, as men who belong to either of the teams often support each other, build networks and make important decisions connected to the present and the future of the department on an invisible and informal level, as the next citation shows:

To get there [to the department] you need to know someone. From this perspective, this is like a tribal structure. The only thing that gets you in the right place is connections. It all comes from the fact that you’ve already grabbed some beer together or that you’ve made some important decision at lunch. It is a limited circle of people and you will not meet many women there. (a man PhD candidate)

Personal relationships are crucial in this type of environment. If you are not able or you do not want to build these unhealthy relationships, it is very complicated to succeed

in this place. As the students claim, at the department there are also no vacancies because all the positions are filled by the older (male) generation or by male classmates from the time when the department was founded. And if there is an opening it is difficult to hire someone new because everyone in the IR field knows what the atmosphere at the department looks like.

The macho culture also entails an accentuation of hierarchies of positions and relations, including the hierarchies of different types of masculinities. Our RPs described a phenomenon of “vassalage”, where strong loyalty and quid pro quo are expected of students in exchange for the lecturer’s assistance with research and studies or the arrangement of a job for the student. These kinds of social bonds and personal relationships between men have gender consequences, especially for women who cannot take part in these networking practices (van den Brink – Benschop 2011).

Another part of this “macho” culture is omitting and devaluing gender and feminist topics and approaches. The students are aware of the fact that these topics are recognised internationally but not nationally. Especially security studies is described as “*a boys’ club*” or as “*boys playing soldiers*” (women PhD candidates) and is seen as a space where gender studies has no place. When this is combined with the lack of interest in family or work-life balance policies that is also present, it is no exaggeration to claim that the culture described above is hostile to women researchers. The extreme importance of personal relations at the department further complicates the situation of women going on maternity and parental leave and then trying to re-enter the discipline after the career break. Since it looks harder for women to build relations at the department and they may fail to establish them, they may easily have nowhere to go back to. The RPs’ accounts suggested that such a scenario is not uncommon as they said the young women researchers they remember mostly did not return after their parental leave and disappeared from research. Some comments that our RPs cited as common at the given department suggest it is not welcoming for mothers-researchers: “that one will have kids”, “you know, a woman on maternity leave”. Both students and lecturers regularly laugh at such remarks.

At the structural level, the “macho” culture indirectly defines only a certain place for women in this abstract system of division of labour. There exists an underlying assumption that women do not want to be a part of these structures because it is not natural for them to be in the centre of a rivalrous environment for they are not as tough as men are. This is often used as an excuse for why there are almost no women in IR and the department. A related phenomenon seems to be that of providing women with employment opportunities in non-expert areas, mainly administrative ones. It appears that even highly scholarly productive women students/early career scholars have a much heavier administrative workload compared to their men counterparts. As one woman PhD candidate put it: “*I don’t know why it is so. Maybe women decide they have to embrace a support role.*” The gendered division of labour is thus attributed to decisions made by those navigating it rather than to the culture of the workplace.

As we can see, the culture of the department contributes to the gendered division of labour that is a product of the symbolic level (Harding 1986), and in combination with the individual level described in the next chapter, it reinforces the gendered universe hostile to women researchers.

Femininity and IR: An uneasy fit

The mentioned assumption prevailing at the department claiming that women are not tough enough seemed to be connected with another assumption: that women’s intellectual capacities are different than men’s, which makes women less suitable for being researchers. This assumption can be tracked across all three levels of Harding’s gendered universe. In this section, we focus on the individual level of identity and self-presentation linked to

behavioural and mental patterns, the level which was the most accessible through the interviews.

Pronounced sexist beliefs regarding women's and men's intellectual capacity are not prevalent in SSH. However, the analysis of our interviews shows that women's intellectual and research capacity in IR is underestimated at the given department, as the following quotes illustrate.

When I started, I heard that two men lecturers spread rumours about me, claiming I was not good enough. But I have never taken any classes with them. [...] Most people are fair but some lecturers sometimes say that women do not do as good research as men do, that it shows on the diploma theses, and that men write better, and are more daring while women rather deliver a literature review. (a woman PhD candidate)

None of our men RPs mentioned having their intellectual capacities questioned. Some of the men students also stated that they believe women's intellectual capacities are questioned even more when they are attractive. Moreover, it transpired that this approach was not solely limited to lecturers but was also held by some students:

They admitted a PhD candidate, very beautiful, young, slim, and a man doctoral student told me that he was positive she was not intelligent and that her supervisor definitely admitted her because he has an affair with her [...]. Similarly to presumption of innocence, there is also something such as presumption of intelligence or lack thereof. As a woman, you always have to prove to somebody that you are good while it's taken for granted when you're a man. (a woman PhD candidate)

This RP also stated that throughout her studies she learnt from similar hints from her lecturers and fellow men students that she needs to shed her "femininity" if she wants to be taken seriously as a researcher. In this case, femininity was defined as sexual attractiveness, i.e. the possibility to dress the way the student likes. This suggests that women students face an identity conflict at the researched department, a conflict typical for women building their careers in gender non-traditional professions such as the one of a researcher (Pifer – Baker 2016). Science and research, an area not associated with care but intellectual performance, is coded as masculine (Harding 1986). It seems, however, that the atmosphere at the researched department exacerbates the conflict. Although the women students who became targets of sexist comments from their men lecturers and fellow students do not take them seriously and see them, e.g., as "silly", such comments impact the standing of women and men in the workplace and their chances for professional and career development, as we demonstrate below. The fact that some lecturers, i.e. role models, make such comments also means that they legitimise them for the students.

Moreover, it appears that women's research potential is not only underestimated because of beliefs in their different (lower) intellectual capacity but also due to the different academic self-presentation of men and women, which is also a product of the gendered universe. As a rural discipline (Becher – Towler 2001), IR stresses self-presentation and makes it crucial. In such disciplines, one's own opinion, interpretation and argumentation constitute an integral part of theory building and disciplinary knowledge as such. Rural disciplines accentuate interpretative, argumentative and critical skills (Becher – Trowler 2001: 118). Critical skills here mean not only critical thinking but also critique of the work, thoughts and procedures of others, both predecessors and contemporaries, including colleagues and fellow students.

The gendered universe then leads men to focus on self-assertion and competition while women are led to cooperation, consensus and even obedience (Harding 1986; Renzetti – Curran 2003). This makes it more difficult for women to start a conflict, especially with those with authority such as distinguished IR experts. This means women may attack other people's work less, which may be at the root of the idea that women

“are less daring than men”, which then may make the impression that women are less capable researchers. Our RPs readily identified socialisation as one of the potential sources of why women are less represented among IR researchers. In connection with the willingness to criticise others’ work, we also need to take into account that one’s readiness to criticise others depends on one’s self-esteem. Hitherto research shows that in general, men feel more self-assured when it comes to their intellectual performance and even tend to overestimate their performance (Grunspan et al. 2016) while women are more critical of themselves, especially women in gender non-traditional professions and positions (Tao – Gloria 2018). Such feelings are further fostered by those surrounding them. This is why IR women students (but also others in a hierarchically lower position such as juniors, while the grounds for misrecognition may combine) may tend to criticise others less, and less forcefully put forward and defend their own ideas, as one of our RPs describes it:

Sometimes I’m afraid to say my own suggestion in the research team. I’m ashamed to show up in the teams. I’m afraid my ideas are not good enough. That’s probably the biggest problem for me. (a woman PhD candidate)

Women’s more critical perspective on their own intellectual performance compared to men is also reflected in differences in self-assured self-presentation: self-criticism leads to less self-assured and distinct public speaking. In addition, the gendered universe results in a double standard so that a self-assured man is perceived differently than a woman acting in the very same way. In the case of a woman, self-assuredness equals a deviation from a gender norm that is usually sanctioned (Basow 2016). The way of speaking combined with different cultural expectations of men and women substantially affects our perceptions of the contents. At the researched department our analysis has shown that what men say is given more attention and is seen as more important than what women say, as the following quotes show:

The men can often speak about something in a self-assured way but when you then think about it, you realise that what they said was not good at all but at the moment of speaking they spoke with such confidence that they persuaded everyone. (a woman PhD candidate)

When you say it in a deeper voice, they may be more prone to pay attention to you [laughing]. (a woman PhD candidate)

Self-presentation and perception by others are connected with career prospects and the very possibility to start and keep a research career. When sources are scarce, gate keepers’ perception of one’s self-presentation becomes all the more salient. Any form of handicap in such a fierce competition, e.g. in the form of one’s different self-presentation compared to the norm of the given discipline, may substantially impact the individual’s chances of engaging in a research career. It is clear from the described phenomena that women are those at the greatest disadvantage in this respect as this quote shows:

When we go for lunch together, PhD candidates and lecturers, we compete even in banal conversations. You have to keep in mind that it’s all about contacts and showing yourself. It is very demanding. And I feel the men don’t have much of a problem with it. (woman PhD candidate)

We see that when considering the barriers for academic careers of women on the individual level, we can identify the reflection and influence of barriers on the symbolic (underestimation of characteristics coded as feminine) and structural (dominance of men in the relevant networks and in gate-keeper positions) levels of the gendered universe. It seems that due to this mixture of barriers it is more difficult for women to feel like

capable researchers and to be seen as such researchers by others, which has an impact on women's career prospects.

Additionally, we also need to note that while it is easier for men in a strongly masculine environment to get engaged in the academic community and build the needed relations, it does not mean that such an environment suits all men. There were several men in our sample who did not identify with the dominant "macho" masculinity, which seems to be the norm at the given department. These men seem rather uninterested in staying at the given department. In the long-term perspective, not only women but men who do not identify with the dominant masculinity will leave the department. Given the small scale of the Czech Republic and the discipline, such a situation at one workplace may impact the shape of the whole discipline in the country.

CONCLUSION: WAYS FORWARD?

The research at hand primarily engaged with the views of individual students and their sense making of their past and future educational and professional trajectories but our interpretation inexorably concerns all three layers of the gendered universe as outlined by Harding. The barriers we strived to identify affect individual life trajectories but are the result of interaction of the other layers and therefore cannot be conceived of – or successfully addressed – as affecting only, e.g., the symbolic level of language without any consequences for the division of labour (meaning, for instance, the chances of acquiring a postdoctoral position for different groups of students) and individual experience.

The present study has first identified several possibly problematic areas concerning gender aspects in local IR as a research discipline and a field of human activity. Some are linked to the structural issues stemming from the position of the discipline within the Czech academic setting. As an SSH discipline, the IR field suffers from petrification of its departments. It is extremely difficult for its PhD graduates to find openings that would lead to having a career in research. This becomes a highly gendered problem and a problem for achieving a semblance of gender equality at the department once we consider the fact that the founders of the researched department were all men and the second "generation" was recruited from their students/informal mentees, i.e. also mostly men. This situation seems to be replicated in most other IR departments in the country as the percentages of women among faculty and specifically in the university hierarchy seem to suggest.

We strived to interpret the interview data for graduate and postgraduate students with the operation of the gendered universe (Harding 1986) in mind. Investigating the individual themes identified throughout our analysis made it clear that the symbolic level of the functioning of gender at the given institution, which is closely linked to the university's standing in social hierarchies, is mostly ignored by the research participants, which leads to the lack of imagination about possible solutions on institutional level. Our research participants did not reflect on the symbolic functioning of gender, such as the role of language and symbolism in the functioning, staffing and areas researched and theoretically engaged with by university faculty. The key issue seems to be a lack of familiarity with gender as a research category and the related incapability to distinguish certain dynamics concerning the discipline on a personnel as well as epistemological level as gendered.

Given the absence of substantive attention paid to the insights from feminist IR at the very least and GS as such, it is not surprising. On the contrary, the presence of so many students who seem to endorse most of the ideals of gender equality is remarkable given the negligible amount of attention GS is paid in the curriculum. However, this negligence is reflected in the lack of ideas of how GS could be used in the students' own work, which means the potential is not tapped. The masculine culture of the department downplays sensitivity to gender-related nuances and issues, which then leads to marginalising women

students and their performance and output compared to their men counterparts. This negatively impacts their professional development opportunities and chances for staying in research.

The gendered universe conceptual framework allows us to see how the symbolic bias against women as knowledge producers, specifically in an individualistic discipline such as IR, is reflected and furthered on the level of division of labour and on the individual level. In terms of the institution, women and non-conforming men are disadvantaged in fostering relations in networks crucial for one's career development. The lack of gender sensitivity means that both men and women students fail to see systemic obstacles and tend to individualise them, which is especially paradoxical in the case of parenting. On the individual level the greatest hindrances are gender characteristics developed through socialisation in a gender conservative country, such as the Czech Republic, and the incompatibility of the feminine characteristics with the normative image of a capable researcher.

The presented study together with findings regarding the academic environment in the Czech Republic led to a formulation of several recommendations that might help improve the presently largely absent gender equality in the IR discipline. This is crucial especially because the departments are in charge of educating future generations of both IR researchers and practitioners. The recommendations are the following: include classes that specifically focus on GS and feminist theory in the syllabi; explore feminist approaches to teaching IR; given the petrification of the department and the slim chances of opening new stable positions, we also recommend the use of shared working positions; introduce a simple and reliable means for settling disagreements and dealing with possible acts of bullying and other such behaviour.

In order to establish the overall situation in Czech IR, the present case study would need to be expanded to other departments. In addition to the methods used, a thorough analysis of the output of the local IR academic community from a critical perspective focused on the category of gender should be conducted. This might help shed some light on what – other than women – is missing from Czech IR.

¹ There is a range of readers and overviews of feminist IR available – see, e.g., Sylvester (2011); True (2010).

² See: <https://mv.iir.cz/index> - this journal also publishes articles in English.

³ See: <https://www.obranastrategie.cz/en/>.

⁴ See: <http://www.globalpolitics.cz/en>.

⁵ Here, we would like to thank Kristina Berdar for her relentless effort to collect and organise the data.

⁶ Namely Security Studies, European Studies, and International Area Studies; where possible, we did not include Political Science as it is not primarily concerned with interaction between and among states.

⁷ For the University of West Bohemia's Department of Politics and International Relations, we only obtained summary figures stating that as of 2016 there were 236 women students and 177 men students, and 64 women graduates as compared to 34 men graduates. The other institutions were: the Metropolitan University in Prague, the Cevro Institute, the University of Economics, Prague, and the College of International and Public Relations Prague.

⁸ Translated and commented on by Blanka Nyklová.

⁹ For instance, the Institute of Political Studies at Charles University has an all-women administrative staff: <https://ips.fsv.cuni.cz/IPSFSV-175.html> (site accessed on 28 October 2018).

¹⁰ This has been studied in detail both in connection with the political realm and in media studies (Macharia et al. 2015; Vochocová 2008; Van Zoonen 2000).

¹¹ The search is not exhaustive in terms of mentions of gender and feminist theory in relation to IR as, e.g., Pavel Barša has dedicated a profound analysis to the challenges offered by feminist theory in his books (Barša 2002, 2011). Moreover, some IR authors have published on the topic elsewhere (Horký 2008) just like some feminist authors have written on the relation between GS/feminism and IR (Krulišová – Kolmašová 2019 [in review process]; Kolářová 2009, 2010). Nevertheless, the presented search comprises sources most readily accessible to those interested in IR, i.e. including students.

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