

Introduction.

«Women’s Rights are Human Rights!» Gender and Society Thirty Years After Beijing

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Thirty years have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked a significant turning point in the global agenda for gender equality, clearly establishing that women’s rights are human rights, and that equality between genders is a matter of global concern and benefits everyone.

Indeed, between the 4th and the 15th of September 1995, more than 17.000 participants – representatives of 189 governments, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union and League of Arab States, as well as activists and organizations from across the world – attended what has been hailed as one of the most significant symposiums to date in the struggle for gender equality and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Gender Equality, thus ratifying their commitment to address civil, political, social, economic and cultural inequalities.

Nevertheless, thirty years after “Beijing 1995”, a patriarchal culture made of discrimination, prejudice, and violence endures and permeates institutions, public spaces, and public discourse, shaping the living conditions of millions of women who find themselves in a disadvantaged position in terms of access to political and economic power and – more generally – to the public sphere, but not only. In 2025, women continue to face discrimination also in the private sphere, frequently becoming victims of gender-based violence or experiencing the denial of their self-determination through practices – grounded in patriarchal gender roles – that restrict their freedom to choose over

their bodies, their sexuality and their reproductive health. Such power asymmetries endanger women's (human) rights, expose women to gender violence, embed social exclusion and poverty, and hinder the achievement of full autonomy for half of the world's population.

So, decades of feminist struggles and achievements, gender equality has not yet been achieved in any country in the world. Indeed, according to the 19th edition of the Global gender gap report, published in June 2025 by the World Economic Forum¹ – that annually benchmarks the state and evolution of gender parity in terms of economic participation and opportunities, educational attainments, health and survival, and political empowerment – it will take 123 years to reach full parity globally. It will suffice to consider that Iceland, that has closed the 92.6% of its gender gap, still remains the only country to have closed more than 90% of its gender gap since 2022.

The current widespread growth of conservative populist leaders and parties certainly, often aligned with the anti-gender movement, does not contribute to the achievement of gender equality. On the contrary, it has contributed to a backlash against women empowerment, reinforcing traditional gender roles and undermining women's rights. Conservative populist rhetoric often frames women's rights as threats to national identity, family values, or cultural cohesion. Through restrictive policies and anti-gender narratives, these actors weaken institutional commitments to equality and exacerbate existing gender inequalities. As a result, women's autonomy and participation in public sphere become increasingly constrained, questioning the results achieved by the feminist movement in years of struggles for women emancipation.

These issues (and more) – that were discussed during the third edition of the GENS (Gender Studies) International Conference «*Women's Rights are Human Rights!*». *Gender and Society Thirty Years After Beijing* held from the 1st to the 5th of September 2025 in Stintino – are examined from a variety of perspectives in this issue of Power Asymmetries.

The articles included examine a wide range of socio-political and cultural contexts, analysing different institutional configurations and mobilizing diverse methodological approaches. Together, they offer a

¹ Since launching in 2006, it is the longest-standing index tracking the progress of numerous countries' efforts towards closing these gaps over time (https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf).

multilayered view of how global debates on gender, rights, and power asymmetries are articulated across contexts, highlighting the specific dynamics that continue to shape the trajectories of gender equality worldwide. The articles show how contemporary patriarchy operates through multiple devices — cultural, political, discursive, and material — that continue to shape women's lives, their possibilities for self-determination, and their access to citizenship.

Specifically, the article by Sabrina Garofalo and Maria Mirabelli investigates the relationship between culture, institutions, and gender-based violence. In particular — focusing on the work of antiviolence centers, understood as political actors — the authors analyze the capacity of civil society organizations working to prevent and combat gender-based violence to influence political agendas.

Building on this reflection on gender-based violence and its institutional and political implications, the contribution by Carmen Lizárraga, Alejandro L. Grindlay and Isabel Castillo-Pérez shifts the focus to the urban environment, showing how the threat and experience of violence also translate into feelings of insecurity in public spaces. Their research analyzes victimization experiences in public spaces among university students in Granada, Spain, focusing on how such experiences shape perceptions of insecurity and behavioral responses. The study reveals that women report significantly higher levels of both direct and indirect victimization, particularly related to sexual violence and street harassment, which influence protective behaviors limiting their mobility.

The asymmetry of security, freedom and power between men and women is thus evident and persists, as it is argued by Natale Feo and Assunta Penna. Their article reflects on the increasing visibility of women in the public sphere, noting that such visibility does not coincide with a redistribution of power. What is at stake, therefore, is not “being there”, but rather rearticulating the rules of representability in order to convert visibility into institutional capacity.

The article written by Natalya Velikaya and Marina Rodionova also addresses the relation between women and public sphere. It does so, by examining the representation of women's reproductive rights in the public discourse within the context of contemporary Russia, which is characterized by a deepening demographic crisis and conservative turn. Their analysis reveals how — in the Russian public discourse — the issues related to women's rights are increasingly replaced by the

rhetoric of traditional values, as well as the representation of reproductive rights is accompanied by the formation of a normative model of femininity as a set of maternal responsibilities.

Even the article proposed by Vera Peshkova provides a look at the Russian society. In this case, author's lens focuses on the experiences of migrant women from Central Asia to Russia. The scholar reconstructs women's pre-migration conditions, decision-making trajectories, and the gendered configurations of power within which these decisions unfold, and argues that Central Asian migrant women act within and through constraining structures, transforming traditional gender roles and obligations into resources that enable mobility and the pursuit of safety, stability, and expanded life possibilities. The article, therefore, provides us with an insight into the most vulnerable women in Russia, offering a markedly intersectional perspective that intertwines gender, migration, class and socio-economic conditions.

Mattia Diletti's contribution shifts the focus on the United States and, in particular, on the topic of the manosphere, that constellation of misogynistic male groups that operate mainly online, building a culture of gender-based violence. With his paper, the author offers a sociological analysis of the ideological configurations emerging from the American manosphere during the 2024 U.S. presidential election and its immediate aftermath. Drawing on a grounded empirical study of digital outputs, the analysis focuses on how leading manosphere figures constructed the symbolic meaning of Donald Trump and traces how these actors mobilize narratives of dislocation, betrayal, and resentment in response to perceived losses of status in a feminized and post-industrial society.

Finally, the article by Lieta Vivaldi and Fabiola Miranda Perez offers an encouraging perspective on the advancement of women's rights. It illustrates how feminist ideas in Chile have increasingly shaped institutional agendas through advocacy and state feminism. By examining conflicts involving sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence, care and labour within the Chilean judicial system, the authors demonstrate that gender mainstreaming can go beyond protocols and training. Instead, it entails a broader cultural and organisational transformation that reshapes legal reasoning and institutional practice.

Taken together, the contributions collected here offer a multifaceted picture of the contemporary geopolitics of gender thirty years after Beijing. They reveal both the persistence of inequalities and the capacity of

individual and collective actors to challenge and transform them. By examining how violence, representation, mobility, reproductive rights, masculinities, and institutional change intersect, this issue invites us to consider gender as a dynamic field of power and conflict—one that is fundamental to the future of democracy, citizenship, and human rights.

