

Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia* - detail (1571)

## Institution of Marriage in the Renaissance

“...she is to be silent” (1 Timothy 2-12). That is the tradition the Holy Bible bequeathed to Europe, and Renaissance women were treated accordingly. Regardless of social rank or lineage, women were considered to be pieces of merchandise, passed from man to man. The apex of their life was marriage and the subsequent bearing of children, preferably male.

Women had absolutely no agency in choosing their partners, the union was almost always arranged by the families, who had other priorities. A woman's family had to pay a dowry to the husband's family. The dowry represented the gratitude and respect of the family for liberating them from the burden of a daughter who could produce no income. Figuratively speaking, the institution of marriage was no more than a financial transaction. Henry Swinburne wrote a rulebook titled *A Treatise of Spousals* (1686), in which he explains what constitutes a valid marriage and referring to it as a 'contract'. Marital contracts were drawn up with increasing frequency which always had an economic angle. Therefore, the primary aim of the institution was economic security and never a perfect union. This 'contract' for a woman meant a lifetime of bearing and rearing children which, due to the living conditions, was no easy task.

Since women were not independent subjects, but properties of men, they had an almost non-existent chance of voicing their discontent with such an objectified life. Almost no court would listen to the voices of women; women were either illiterate or discouraged from speaking out about society's patriarchal constraints through treatises or literature. If they had the guts to refuse their own subjugation, they were simply deemed witches and burnt at the stake.

## Migration and Women

For the past 30 years, migration of self-employed women has also emerged, who have paid work and are therefore not financially dependent on men. In these cases, in addition to economic reasons, women's aspiration to self-reliance leads to migration and vice versa: migration contributes significantly to societal changes. Increasing employment among women in the industrial sector has led to a major change in migration scenarios (Choudhury 2017), the number of voluntarily migrating women is increasing: within the country, the urban youth labor market is open to self-employed women (Jesmin, Salway 2000, Kabeer, Mahmud 2004, Momsen 1993), but on an international scale.

Migration patterns are also influenced by family models. Kelly (2017) investigated the Iranian diaspora in Sweden, focusing on migrant children. According to her findings,

the traditional Iranian family model is dominated by men, and independent women's decision is not typical. In Bangladesh, the patriarchal family model is dominant, women are in a pending position from their husbands. So for a long time migration was seen only among men, and women followed their husbands abroad but did not work (Choudhury 2013).

## Women in contemporary Hungary

According to the Hungarian Government, our country is challenged by a crisis besides migration: the crisis of population decline. This is surprising as the world's overpopulation is a serious issue we all need to face one way or another, however they are adamant to make a pact with Hungarian women to have more children. The Prime Minister stated in a radio interview, that having children is “the most private public interest”, and he would like to hear under which conditions are women willing to bear more children. The leader of the Ministry of Human Capacities even stated that Hungary's Abortion Law is responsible for the decline. Rita Antoni, the head of the non-governmental organization for women's rights, “Nőkért Egyesület” (‘For Women’ Organisation) reminded everyone that this could lead to the erosion of the reproductive rights of women. Moreover, it disregards the CEDAW convention and the Istanbul Convention, this way ignoring women's dignity and physical integrity, not protecting them from domestic violence and treating them as “birthing machines”, which bears an alarming similarity with the world Margaret Atwood depicted in her popular novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).



The Nőkért NGO demonstrates for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Budapest, Sept 15, 2017.

## ‘For Women’ Organisation

The “Nőkért Egyesület” was founded in 2009, they have been registered since 2013. Their aim is to raise consciousness about gender equality and fight against sexism and violence against women. Their consciousness-raising programme includes giving talks and organizing roundtables on issues related to women, an archive on the history of the Hungarian feminist movement, a collection of portraits of famous and exceptional women, and an open university educating people on feminism. They are also frequent participants of demonstrations. One of the most important issue they are standing for is the ratification of the convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – on in short, the Istanbul Convention. The Convention aims to prevent domestic violence and violence against women, and to protect the victims of such crimes by creating a “comprehensive legal framework”. The Hungarian Government signed the Convention, but they have not ratified yet, arguing that the Convention's understanding of gender would corrupt the Hungarian family model. Antoni argues that most victims of domestic abuse are women who live and want to live in the family model Hungary prefers (ie. husband wife and child/ren), but their life depends on their legal protection, which is not provided without the Convention. The “Nőkért Egyesület” started a petition for the ratification and often demonstrate and spread information on various platforms (for example Facebook, their website, newspapers) to raise awareness hoping that the Istanbul Convention will be ratified in Hungary as well.

# NEW FACES: FACING EUROPE IN CRISIS SHAKESPEARE'S WORLD AND PRESENT CHALLENGES ERASMUS+ IP



**Tamara Muhel, Erik Papp, Réka Szarvas,  
Edit Szűcs, Zsolt Tóth (University of Szeged)**



This is one of the thousands of billboards employed by the Hungarian government in its **campaign against migrants** disseminating the following claim:  
“Did you know? Since the beginning of the migration crisis, violence against women has grown exponentially in Europe.”

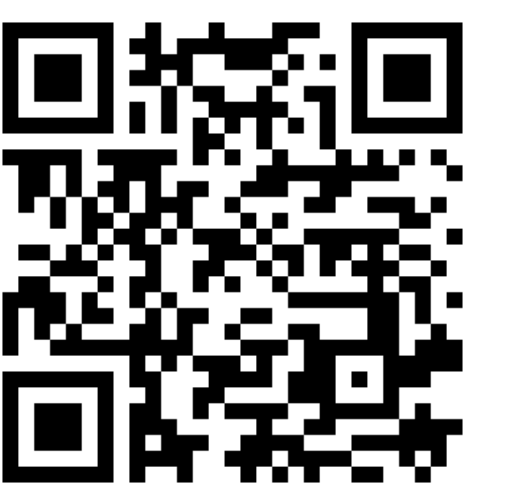
**APPROVED?**

**FRAILTY,  
THY NAME IS WOMAN!**

Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.2.146

## Follow up...

A poster would not do this crisis justice and since we are determined to address this issue at the length it deserves, we created a blog for you to view which you can reach through the QR-code below:



## Sources of information

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