Men and Development
Politicising Masculinities

EDITED BY
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHCV</td>
<td>Asociación de Hombres Contra la Violencia (Association of Men against Violence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDSCAP</td>
<td>AIDS Control and Prevention Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMNLAE</td>
<td>Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<td>ANCYL</td>
<td>African National Congress Youth League</td>
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<tr>
<td>APHRC</td>
<td>African Population and Health Research Centre</td>
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<td>AWID</td>
<td>Association for Women’s Rights in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CANTERA</td>
<td>Centro para Comunicación y Educación Popular (Centre for Popular Communications and Education)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIR</td>
<td>Catholic Institute for International Relations (now known as Progressio)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COU</td>
<td>Anglican Church of Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>CROME</td>
<td>Critical Research on Men in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSW</td>
<td>Commercial Sex Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-I-C</td>
<td>Drop-in-Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMSC</td>
<td>Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOS</td>
<td>Comunicação em Sexualidade</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSLN</td>
<td>Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional (Sandinsta Front for National Liberation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FtM</td>
<td>Female to Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHCV</td>
<td>Grupo de Hombres Contra la Violencia (Group of Men against Violence)</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRID</td>
<td>Gay Related Immuno-Deficiency</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Society for Technical Cooperation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGWG</td>
<td>Interagency Gender Working Group</td>
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<td>IMAGES</td>
<td>International Men and Gender Equality Survey</td>
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<td>IPPF</td>
<td>International Planned Parenthood Federation</td>
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<td>ITPA</td>
<td>Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Amendment</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTI</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex</td>
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<tr>
<td>MASVAW</td>
<td>Men's Action for Stopping Violence against Women</td>
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<td>MDHS</td>
<td>Malawian Democratic Health Survey</td>
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<td>MOVE</td>
<td>Men Overcoming Violence</td>
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<td>MSM</td>
<td>Men who have Sex with Men</td>
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<td>MST</td>
<td>Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MtF</td>
<td>Male to Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAC/NACO</td>
<td>National AIDS Commission</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
<td>National Resistance Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan American Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Protecting the Next Generation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMCV</td>
<td>Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (Women's Network Against Violence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAMFo</td>
<td>South African Men's Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMUG</td>
<td>Sexual Minorities Uganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRH</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDAW</td>
<td>United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNECA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission on Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>The United Nations Children's Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WID</td>
<td>Women in Development</td>
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Contributors

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**Chris Dolan** is Director of the Refugee Law Project (RLP) at University of Makerere, Kampala, Uganda. He has worked with a range of organizations in Africa, Europe and South-East Asia on issues related to conflict, forced migration, governance and gender. His publications include the book *Social Torture: the Case of Northern Uganda 1986–2006* (2009). In addition to its international video advocacy on gender issues (in October 2009 the video *Gender against Men* won the Best Documentary award at the Kenya International Film Festival), the RLP is an active member of the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law, which has consistently and publicly stated its opposition to the Anti-Homosexuality Bill currently before the Ugandan Parliament.
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akshay khanna is a Queer activist with a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh. Her doctoral fieldwork related to the Queer movement in India, with a focus on the law and epidemiology as two arenas where Queer activists negotiate claims to justice. In earlier avatars s/he has worked as a human rights lawyer and as a development consultant on issues
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Jerry Okal is currently a Programme Officer with the Population Council. Previously on the research team of the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) and International Center for Reproductive Health (ICRH), Kenya, Jerry is currently finalizing his doctoral degree (in Social Health Sciences) at the Ghent University in Belgium. His research interests are in gender, health, and sexuality. Jerry has recently authored a paper on sexual risks among men who have sex with men in Kenya.

Cheryl Overs is a founder of the Australian Prostitutes Collective, the Scarlet Alliance and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects. She has worked providing support to local, regional and international HIV prevention and care programmes with UN and bilateral agencies and NGOs in 37 developing countries, including helping establish sex worker networks in Ethiopia, Cambodia and Burma. She has published several key studies of sex work including ‘Making Sex Work Safe’ (1996) ‘Sex Workers: Part of the Solution’ (2001), ‘Understanding Sex Work’ (2005), ‘Caught Between the Tiger and the Crocodile’ and ‘Sex Work and the New Era of HIV Prevention and Care’ (2008). Cheryl currently works within the Paulo Longo Research Initiative, <http://www.plri.org>, as a Senior Research Fellow at Monash University School of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine in Melbourne.

Christine Ricardo is an independent consultant working on gender and health issues. Most recently, she was Co-Executive Director of Promundo, a Brazilian NGO that works to promote gender equality and end violence against women, children and youth. She has also co-authored several publications on gender, youth sexual and reproductive health, and violence prevention, including book chapters and technical reports for the World Bank, World Health Organization and UNFPA. Christine received her ScM in Population and International Health from the Harvard School of Public Health.

Márcio Segundo has a Masters Degree in Political Science from the University of Brasilia. His field of expertise is economic, political and social development in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. At Promundo, he designs and coordinates evaluation studies on topics such as violence against women and health promotion and gender equity among young men. His publications include ‘Engaging young Men in Violence Prevention: Reflections from Latin America and India’ (with G. Barker, M. Nascimento, J. Pulerwitz, C. Ricardo and R. Verma) in F. Leach and C. Mitchelle (eds), *Combating Gender Violence In and Around Schools* (2006).
Margrethe Silberschmidt works as an Associate Professor at the Unit of Women and Gender Research in Medicine, Department of Public Health at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Copenhagen. She has a PhD in social anthropology and has done extensive research in East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda). Her field of specialization includes gender, gender-focused methodologies, and sexual and policy issues in reproductive health and behaviour, including HIV/AIDS. She is the author of ‘Women Forget That Men Are the Masters’: Gender Antagonism in Kisii District, Kenya (1999) and has published a number of articles in international journals.

Cath Sluggett is an independent social researcher. Her work focuses on sexuality, gender and marginalization in South Asian contexts. With over 17 years of experience in the capacity of researcher and activist in India, she has worked with both non-government and international development sectors and a wide range of populations, including people in sex work, children, same-sex desiring and transgender individuals. Her research has diversified from interrogating how same-sex desiring women live in relation to the ‘lesbian’ identity and the politics of visibility in urban India, to studying how empowerment processes are affecting women sex workers’ gender relations with their intimate partners.

Patrick Welsh was born in Northern Ireland and raised in Scotland. He taught in Nigeria in the early 1980s before moving to Nicaragua in 1986, during the Sandinista Revolution, where he spent five years promoting popular education processes in rural areas affected by the Contra war. After a short spell working with CAFOD in London in the early 1990s, he returned to Nicaragua in 1993. As an ICD (now known as Progressio) development worker for ten years, he supported the work of two Nicaraguan NGOs, the Centre for Popular Communication and Education (CANTERA) and the Association of Men Against Violence (of which he is a founder member), in the development of participatory methodologies for gender training and awareness raising with men. Since 2003, as a freelance consultant, he has supported the initiatives of other organizations interested in ‘the masculinities issue’ and in working directly with men in several other countries in Central and South America, Africa and Europe.

He Xiaopei: The hills trained me to be a professional shepherd and the Himalayas turned me into a full-time mountaineer. A government job made me an economist while the women's movement and gender studies converted me into a feminist. Participating in LBGTQ organizing in China helped me...
realize many people are oppressed – especially sex workers, bisexuals, women married to gay men, and women with HIV – but also that talking about sexual pleasure could not only empower women, but also tear down sexual norms. I am now running 'Pink Space', an NGO in China, and mobilizing people who are oppressed because of their sexuality and gender to search for pleasure and claim sexual rights.
Chapter One

Introduction

Politicising Masculinities in Development

Andrea Cornwall, Jerker Edström and Alan Greig

Men and masculinities have captured greater space in development’s ‘gender agenda’ over the last decade. The growing visibility of gender violence and HIV has given rise to exciting gender work with men, addressing the impact of norms of masculinity on how they think and act as men. Yet there seems to have been relatively little transfer of energy or experience from initiatives focused on the more internal and interpersonal aspects of men’s lives to efforts to address the unjust effects of men’s privilege in the worlds of politics and the economy. Organizations working with men on gender issues are often surprisingly silent when it comes to gender injustice in the public sphere, from men’s dominance of leadership positions to persistent gender pay gaps. Mobilizing to demand equal pay, equal rights and equal representation still seems to be as much ‘women’s work’ as doing the housework.

At the same time, there is a widespread sense amongst feminist activists and researchers that the gender agenda has been depoliticized as it has been taken up by development agencies, stripped of the original concern with inequitable power relations and reduced to interventions that are palliative rather than genuinely transformative (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007). A number of writers have observed the extent to which this embrace of ‘gender’ has been accompanied by a tendency to play down challenges to the status quo and play up the benefits of instrumentalizing women in the service – or broader project – of development (Bathwala and Dhanraj, 2004; Chakravarti, 2008; Wilson, 2008). Power has come to be represented as something that can be bestowed or acquired rather than a structural relation that is in itself gendered. And targeted ‘investment’ has come to displace any consideration of the broader social changes that need to take place if the persistent inequalities associated with gender difference are to be eradicated. In a recent and extremely worrying trend, this instrumentalist logic is being taken to its
limit through an increasing focus on the adolescent female as the agent of economic recovery, if only she can be empowered sufficiently. From this deeply individualized perspective, the complex interactions between gender and other axes of inequality in the lives of both women and men are lost from view, and the policies and programmes of economic and political elites that shape such interactions rendered invisible. It is hardly surprising, then, that work on men and masculinities in development has seen the more radical edge of early interventions in this field blunted.

This book aims to contribute to shifting the gender agenda back to a concern with the fundamental structural inequities that continue to make our world unfair and unequal. Written and edited by practitioners and researchers engaged in work on men and masculinities in different institutional and geopolitical contexts, this volume is both self-reflection and self-critique. It builds on dialogues at a symposium on masculinities in Dakar in 2007, *Politicizing Masculinities: Beyond the Personal*, which brought together people from a diversity of engagements with men and masculinities. It examines key preoccupations, dilemmas and absences within the field and explores the challenge of engaging men in work that more explicitly addresses the structuring of gender orders and their concomitant inequalities and injustices. In this introduction, we first provide a brief sketch of the intellectual trajectories, advances and limitations which motivate the book. We then propose three dimensions of politicizing masculinities, around which the sections of the book take shape. Finally, we highlight emerging questions and challenges for future work on men, masculinities and the gender agenda in development.

**Of masculinities and men**

Debates on masculinity first began to capture the attention of social scientists in the 1980s. What came to be dubbed ‘the new men’s studies’ (Brod, 1987) and the ‘new sociology of masculinity’ (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985) focused on the cultural production of masculinities, alternative models of ‘manhood’ and questions of naturalized male power (Brittan, 1989; Kaufman, 1987; Kimmel, 1987; Kimmel and Messner, 1989). The emerging rubric of ‘men and masculinities’ proved remarkably fertile in generating new conversations and connections in relation to a diverse set of issues and social concerns (Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Connell, 1995). In reviewing the contours of this emergent field of enquiry and debate, Jeff Hearn noted in 1996, for example, ‘the increasing interest in the links between masculinity and power, masculinity and violence, masculinity and crime, masculinity and child abuse and masculinity and the law’ (1996: 206).
A strong thread in this literature from the beginning was a focus on male subjectivities, men’s inner lives and the harms of masculinity, with contributions to the field by authors as diverse as Robert Bly (1992), Lynne Segal (1990) and Victor Seidler (1997). An interest in men’s relationships to masculine representations brought into question the contingency of gendered identities and depictions of masculinity and power in culture and everyday life (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Silverman, 1992). Such contingency, in part, was the result of the queering of the gendered body in the work of Judith Butler (1999) and other queer theorists, whose inversion of the nature/culture model of the sex-gender system significantly troubled assumptions about the connections between masculine identifications, the maleness of bodies and ‘man’ as a social subject (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1995; Halberstam, 1998).

An interest in bodies and their practices led Connell, in her seminal *Masculinities* (1995) and subsequent writings to conceive of masculinity in terms of ‘body reflexive practices’, culturally constituted and institutionally embedded, that performed and thus produced maleness, or what it means to be a man, within distinct but overlapping domains of power. In emphasizing the plurality and plasticity of such meanings, Connell challenged the dichotomous thinking of sex role theory, helping to lay the groundwork for much of the subsequent work with men on doing ‘their’ masculinity differently. The concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ has proved particularly useful in this regard (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). As well as drawing attention to the reality of hierarchies among men, it has highlighted the interests that men have in challenging such hierarchies because of the harm that hegemonic practices of masculinity do not only to women but also to men.

Less well understood, though perhaps more important, was the utility of the concept of hegemonic masculinity for exploring the workings of power, and the ways in which specific practices, representations and narratives of masculinity secured consent to patriarchal arrangements of power. This wove together another thread of the emergent rubric of ‘men and masculinities’, a thread that emerged from men’s engagement with the women’s movement in the 1980s and was concerned with men’s experiences of and relationships to structural and institutional dimensions of power (Hearn and Morgan, 1990). Sociologists like Les Back (1994) and Paul Willis (1981) explored the lives of men and boys at the intersections of gender, class and race, and the complex interplay of privilege and oppression that shaped such lives.

Over the course of the last two decades, the literature on masculinity has expanded exponentially. Anthologies abound, as do websites populated with
literally hundreds of volumes dedicated to the study of men and masculinity, and to activism engaging men. The burgeoning nature of the field owes partly to its theoretical eclecticism, drawing variously on social psychology, psychoanalysis, social constructionist gender theory, post-structuralism and queer theory. The radical political promise of the turn toward masculinities was born of this plurality. In moving beyond the static binaries of sex role theory, the emerging ‘men and masculinities’ field opened up a deeper exploration of the relationship between gender and power, drawing attention to the extent to which certain ways of being a man are culturally and socially privileged. By insistently focusing the gender gaze on men, and thus decentring the traditionally unmarked male, the field has helped disrupt patriarchal knowledge-power systems and made room for new questions to be asked of sexuality and intimacy, as well as violence and trauma, in men’s lives.

As a result, there has been a remarkable growth in programming and policy debate on men and gender in international development. The 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was the first forum where the international community challenged men to play their full part in the fight for gender equality. Within a year, the Platform for Action outlined at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing restated the principle of shared responsibility and argued that women’s concerns could only be addressed in partnership with men. It called on men to support women by sharing childcare and household work equally, and for male responsibility in the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI). Indeed, as the international response to the HIV epidemic gathered momentum, so too did gender work with men. In 2000–1, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) mounted a world campaign on the theme ‘Men make a difference’, emphasizing the positive role men can play in HIV/AIDS prevention and care (UNAIDS, 2000); and the Declaration of Commitment from the 26th special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS the following year addressed men’s roles and responsibilities related to reducing the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS, especially the need to engage men in challenging the gender inequalities driving the epidemic (UNGASS, 2001).

Increasing attention to the relationship between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS has also helped expand violence prevention work with men and boys in many countries of the Global South, with a predominant focus on male violence in heterosexual relationships. This work has drawn on the longer traditions of men’s anti-violence activism and batterers’ treatment programming that emerged out of men’s work within the women-led domestic violence and sexual assault movements in the Global North (Funk,
A groundswell of public concern and policy debate about men and care – especially as fathers – has grown in recent years, and has been the focus for imaginative programming around the world. Men’s health has also emerged as a locus of attention and action for researchers and practitioners. For all the ambivalence about men in the Gender and Development field, there have been a number of initiatives and publications that have sought to highlight how development has been ‘missing men’, to make the argument that Masculinities Matter! (Cleaver, 2002), to explore what ‘men-streaming’ might mean (Chant and Gutmann, 2002) and to explore different dimensions of men’s gendered experiences in development settings, from men and work (Jackson, 2001; Whitehead, 2000) to the politics of the personal (Cornwall and White, 2000).

Across this diverse set of interests and issues, some common themes can be discerned. A key premise of a wide range of programmes and campaigns is that men can change and are changing, and that as masculinity is socially constructed, it can be reconstructed. This builds on long-established feminist arguments about ‘gender’ as malleable and amenable to change (Oakley, 1972). Such programmes often focus on the plurality of masculinities in order to emphasize the possibility of men’s resistance to hegemonic forms of masculinity. There is an emphasis, too, on motivating men to get involved in supporting gender equality through highlighting the costs of masculinity for men, as well as a desire to avoid “turning men off” by appearing to blame them for the harms of patriarchy – an approach that has engaged quite some hostility from feminists who have seen it as soft-pedalling on questions of men’s exercise of power (Win, 2010; Turquet, 2010).

Equally striking are some of the silences and absences in this work. For all the attention given to masculinities work with men on HIV/AIDS, surprisingly little is said about men’s plural sexualities. HIV work with men who have sex with men (MSM) has developed in parallel with, rather than as a part of, mainstream HIV prevention work with men. Much of the work that is done with men on the harms they suffer from norms of masculinity fails to locate these harms, and indeed the norms themselves, in the context of oppression, and many men’s experience of class exploitation, racism and ethnic exclusion and/or homophobia. When it comes to gender-based violence, the focus on behaviour and norms has precluded much discussion of the institutionalized nature of this violence and the kinds of mobilization that will be required to address it. The typical focus on fatherhood has said rather less about other issues relating to men in the domestic arena, particularly in relation to equity in the division of domestic labour. More fundamentally, this emergent body of masculinities work with men has paid
insufficient attention to the political and economic inequalities that constrain women's lives. This lack of attention includes both a neglect of the masculinities in the political domain that make it so difficult for women to gain and use their voice, as well as a failure to highlight men's lack of active involvement in advocating for gender justice in relation to issues like equal pay and representation of women in senior leadership positions.

Engaging men in the project of gender equality has come to be about addressing the need to transform masculinity by changing cultural or social norms that guide men's behaviour, rather than addressing the structural basis of gender inequalities. It is not surprising, then, that many feminists both recognize the need to engage with men and express concern over its potential implications, whether in terms of funding or control. Ensuring that this engagement gets to grips with gender and its structuring of inequalities is critical if the promise of masculinities work with men for greater gender justice is to be realized.

**Politicizing masculinities**

What, then, would it take to politicize the 'men and masculinities' field? Some would argue that the field is already politicized, arising as it has from a deeply political commitment to addressing men's abusive behaviour towards women, and rooted as it is in feminist and queer research from the 1980s that put the spotlight on patriarchal and heteronormative power structures. The premise of this collection is that much has indeed been done, but also that much more needs to be done. A concern with men and masculinities has been taken up selectively by development agencies to pursue a very partial gender agenda. This has involved the avoidance of certain topics for fear of 'scaring off' the men, and a selective emphasis on certain issues and areas at the cost of addressing the structural inequities at the root of gender inequality. At the same time, the field itself has developed in a way that has retreated from a more critical analysis of men's attitudes and behaviours, neither politicizing the personal nor exploring the interpersonal dynamics of power and privilege within broader struggles for gender justice (McMahon, 1993).

This book seeks to contribute to the project of politicizing masculinities in a number of ways. First, it seeks to challenge the normative perspectives on men and on masculinity that have come to pervade both Gender and Development and the ‘men and masculinities’ field. This involves challenging the naturalization of the gender binary in much work on gender in development. The first section of this book engages with this challenge, bringing to bear insights from queer theory and gender studies, as well as research and
activist perspectives from the worlds of HIV and sex work, on thinking about bodies, gender and power. We seek to make visible that which is often obscured, challenging the heteronormativity that is virtually hegemonic in development studies, as well as in the HIV and sexual and reproductive health fields. We do this by expanding the cast of characters associated with the category ‘men’ to include men as sex workers’ clients, as female-to-male transgenders or *meyeli chhele* (‘soft boys’), and explore men’s positionalities vis-à-vis idealized heterosexualities as well as queer alternatives.

A second move is to examine critically assumptions about men, money and structures of power that inform Gender and Development discourse, and to bring some of the contextually diverse dimensions of men’s experience into closer view. Despite the adoption of the notion of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ in analyses of men and masculinity, relatively little attention has been focused on the ‘subordinate variants’ of masculinity that their ground-breaking work identifies, and to the intersections of race, class and gender in men’s lives. The second section of this book grapples with what feminist economists have called ‘the structures of constraint’ (Folbre, 1994; Kabeer, 2008), and with a host of thorny issues relating to men’s positioning in the complex intersections between cultures of gender and the gendered economy in highly unequal societies. Refocusing debate on these intersections, and on the structural roots of poverty and disadvantage, contributors challenge some of Gender and Development’s sacred cows amidst divergent suggestions on what needs to be done to address social and economic injustice and its gendered dimensions.

A third move is to think beyond current framings and fields of practice towards the kind of actions, actors and alliances that are needed to (re)politicize work on men and masculinities in development. The last section of this book seeks to do this by exploring experiences in policy advocacy and activism, focusing on the potential for building constituencies and broadening alliances in work on masculinities. It is part dialogue between activist-academics from NGOs, social movements and universities, part narrative of efforts to influence policy and mobilize men to address broader issues of gender justice in their communities and everyday lives, and part provocation to think beyond the limiting frames of current approaches to engaging men with gender issues. In what follows, we pick up on the three themes identified here, and expand on what contributors offer to the project of politicizing masculinities.

**Narratives and bodies**

The first step in politicizing masculinities work in development practice is to put into question the gendered relationship between bodies and identities.
This is to interrogate the relationship between the terms ‘men’, ‘male’ and ‘masculinity’ rather than assume a necessary correspondence between them (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1995). The chapters in this section explore the location of bodies, practices, desires and identities within normative narratives of gender and sexuality that inform programmes and policies on HIV prevention, sex work and work with ‘sexual minorities’. Contributors discuss the complicated political effects of these narratives and the trajectories of the political subject within them, from using such narratives to claim voice and carve space, to being rendered a visible and passive object of, but not agent within, the development process. Contributions to this section are selected with a view to challenging us to deconstruct critically the essentially heteronormative constructions and taken-for-granted assumption of the gender binary that pervade Gender and Development practice and the ‘men and masculinities’ field. Taken together, these chapters help us look at myths and implicit assumptions about men and women, our bodies and gendered identities.

As a starting point, Chimaraoke Izugbara and Jerry Okal provide a grounded account of the normativity inherent in young men’s narratives of masculine identity and understandings of adequately ‘performing heterosexuality’. Drawing on their research with young Malawian men, they explore how dominant narratives of sexual performance interact with their notions of male identity. They describe the ways in which these stories represent male behaviour as deriving from men’s essential nature, normatively naturalizing potency, pleasure and risk taking. Male heterosexual performance is seen as confirming and sustaining this idealized masculinity, which is understood as a space for exerting masculine control and power over women. Izugbara and Okal outline resulting vulnerabilities, uncertainties and risks in relation to HIV for young Malawian men and boys as shaped by these local constructions of a fiercely macho heterosexual masculinity.

Cath Sluggett looks at issues of embodied gender identification, norms and aspirations through a focus on female to male (FtM) transgenders in India, and how they constitute their masculinity. Engaging with Judith Halberstam’s (1998) call for reimagining masculinity in terms of the female, she asks: ‘But what kinds of masculinity are being defended in the name of “queer” identity?’ She shows how performing masculinity from within a female to male transgender body can uphold highly stereotypical notions of what it is to be ‘man enough’. In doing so, she questions the claiming of transgressive sexualities and genders as queer, and the assumption that they are progressive and liberating, exploring the extent to which the subversion of sexuality and gender ruptures or reinforces heteronormativity. Also writing
about India, Akshay Khanna provides an account of how the epidemiological category of men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), created as part of the global AIDS response, has opened up opportunities for collective organizing across diverse local sexual and gendered identities in South Asia. Many of those who are given or who have come to occupy the label MSM identify neither with hegemonic forms of heterosexual masculinities nor, necessarily, with Western notions of a sexual minority organized under a ‘gay’ identity. Instead, Khanna argues, they have claimed a somewhat protected, and thus politically useful space through ‘transformation of idioms of sexualness into epidemiological forms’.

If understanding gender requires (explicit or implicit) reference to sexuality, it clearly also relates to the materiality of sex and power. Cheryl Overs explores this materiality through the intersection of representations of men, women, masculinities and femininities within the context of sex work. Overs argues that policies relating to sex work persistently feminize the sex worker by air-brushing out male or transgender sex workers, labelling them instead under other HIV industry categories, such as MSM. She highlights how the construct of the sex worker as female, victimized and devoid of agency depoliticizes the issues and shores up the gender binary in its portrayal of clients and pimps as evil men. These essentially Western stereotypes – of the entrapped female sex worker, the criminal male pimp and the pathological, shadowy male client – are captured ironically in her evocative title ‘The Good, the Bad and the Ugly’.

Jerker Edström reflects on some advances and shortcomings in gender work with men within HIV programmes and policy. He takes issue with common understandings of men and masculinities in relation to HIV epidemics and their bio-social dynamics. The latter, he argues, tend to be far more complex than standard gender binary constructs explain. He deconstructs the central notion of vulnerability and its association with femininity in HIV responses, arguing that it too easily becomes counter-productive for understanding the interplay between epidemic dynamics and the complex structural influences and inequalities that channel the progress of the virus. He argues that in order to make progress in HIV prevention, the gender issues that warrant most urgent attention are those facing communities most marginalized by the prevailing gender order, such as sex workers and men who don’t conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity. Edström maintains that narratives of gender and HIV continue to be deeply heteronormative and he points to the need for more politicized thinking and practice on masculinities and HIV, with more creative alliances across communities of dissident men, sex workers and feminists.
What becomes clear from this set of chapters is that femininities and masculinities are not only socially constituted, but also have political implications via morally loaded assumptions about sex and sexuality, agency and power. How we understand these constructs and our bodies, position-alities and multiple identities in relation to them will have fundamental implications for how we interpret and address broader issues of inequity and oppression.

**Masculinities and structures of oppression**

The second dimension of the politicizing project is to use masculinities as a tool with which to excavate the structures and workings of power, and look more closely at the sediments of gender within them. The second part of this book, then, is concerned with the political economy and geo-politics of masculinities, and their impacts on the lives of women and men at the intersections of class, race and gender. Contributors discuss different conjunctions of historical forces – economic, political, military, religious, cultural – and the masculine practices and ideologies that are both called upon and contested within these force fields.

This section's dialogue on structures is opened by Raewyn Connell, who uses a case study of Edward – a male Australian manager in a transnational corporation – to illustrate how aspects of global corporate capitalist masculinities impact on issues such as the HIV response in the South. She underlines the limitations of classic ethnographic studies and their attempts to fix a static picture of gender norms, stressing that the reality of 'globalization' is one in which social change is itself increasingly the norm, in the wake of colonization, post-colonial adjustment policies and in conflict-affected societies. "If there is no coherent gender order," Connell suggests, "we may have to think in new ways about how men and women improvise their gender arrangements and practices, across what kinds of fissures or gaps, and under what kinds of stresses." She reminds us that the corporate world described in this case study is only part of a larger system of neoliberalism and its creation of new market-oriented patriarchies. "Whilst we should not lose sight of the structural sources of violence or the global role of the rich and powerful," Connell concedes that "perhaps, we do need to focus for the moment on small-scale, achievable changes", whilst also urging us to be looking for the kinds of "reforms that might set in motion trends towards systemic change".

Margrethe Silberschmidt probes into the connections between masculinities and post-colonial capitalist development strategies, with their prevailing
assumptions about gender. She describes what, in the context of East Africa, she sees as happening to gender relations through a combination of neo-liberal economic policies – leading to economic hardship for many – and an emphasis on women’s empowerment initiatives within the development ‘industry’. In the midst of all this, men are left stranded and Silberschmidt documents some of the effects as men submit to ‘crises of masculinity’ and fall back on patriarchal attitudes and behaviours. She suggests that this is creating greater vulnerability amongst men to a host of problems, such as alcoholism, HIV and violence. Given this collision between powerful economic forces within the structures of capitalist development and men’s expectations of masculinity, Silberschmidt asks what would make men interested in engaging in the struggle for gender justice and broader social change.

The next chapter grew out of comments written by South African feminist practitioner Penny Morrell on her social historian brother Robert’s paper for the Politicizing Masculinities symposium in Dakar. Recognizing Penny’s comments as concerns raised by many feminists about the men and masculinities agenda, we encouraged them to develop the chapter in the form of a dialogue. They debate the extent to which men should be the object of gender equality work, which men are important to work with, and the reasons why they might engage in such work. Robert argues for a strong focus on the situation and needs of poor and disenfranchised African men, whilst Penny draws attention to the need to work with middle-class men, making the most of their capacity to affect change, and for more engagement with the women’s movement.

Chris Dolan introduces other dimensions of structural power that interact to construct oppressive hegemonic masculinity in northern Uganda. He focuses on the connections between the state’s military power, heteronormative Christian interests and populist nationalist sentiments opposing neo-colonialism, which draw on traditional notions of manhood and mix these with a Western Christian morality. This ‘triple bind’ of unholy alliances and ideologies, Dolan argues, upholds particularly violent and homophobic ideals of hegemonic masculinities and rejects alternative expressions of masculinity. Written before the infamous Anti-homosexuality Bill was discussed in the Ugandan Parliament, this piece is particularly pertinent for considering strategies for protecting and promoting gender justice and sexual rights in similarly challenging contexts.

The chapters in this section highlight the structural roots of many different aspects of masculinities and inequalities, whilst also showing how different dimensions of the structural context – whether economic, cultural, religious or political – can come into play or combine historically in unexpected ways.
This section makes clear, too, that the AIDS response has provided an arena, resources and energies for new debates and dialogues on the links between masculinities and inequalities. But developing clearer analyses of and responses to these links is about more than the epidemic; it is about social justice more broadly. Better structural analyses can inform better strategies for politicizing men’s engagement with gender justice along various intersecting fault-lines of inequity, strategies that necessarily link the struggles against gender oppression with, in Nancy Fraser’s words (2009: 6), a ‘radical transformation of the deep structures of the social totality’.

Radhika Chopra’s chapter takes us towards looking at structural transformations, by tackling the question of how we may understand the notion of men’s supportive practices in relation to women. She contrasts the gendered practices of men within domestic service with those of progressive men active in the processes of India’s post-colonial reforms. In a thoughtful meditation on histories of men’s practices as domestic workers and reformers, Chopra examines a dimension of the ‘men as partners’ discourse that has remained under-explored. Her contribution to opening up discussion about men’s supportive practices in relation to the domains of domestic labour and politics is especially valuable given the extent to which these are such under-emphasized themes in the contemporary men and masculinities field. What Chopra brings to the discussion is a nuanced understanding of ‘support’ which highlights its structural, ideological, material aspects but also the extent to which everyday practices of support shape men’s multiple subjectivities. In doing so, she highlights productive possibilities for men’s engagement in addressing the materiality of persistent gender inequities in the fields of the domestic and formal politics. It is to this that the last section of the book turns.

**Dissident masculinities in action**

The third and final dimension of the project of politicizing masculinities is where the domains of the structural and the institutional reconnect with the intimate. For all that has been done in the field of work with men and masculinities to focus on the arena of the personal, there has been relatively little emphasis in this work on developing men’s reflexive awareness of their own power and privilege, and locating that in relation to societal structures and institutions. For second-wave feminists it is this process – one that moves between the private and the public sphere, or between the personal and the structural – that was the fundamental entry point for developing a collective consciousness as women and for inspiring collective action. Politicizing
masculinities calls for a far greater focus on reflexive self-awareness in gender work with men, as a starting point for developing forms of collaborative political conduct that do not replicate conventions of oppressive male behaviour in other spheres. This kind of practical engagement with a political project, based on a commitment to personal change, is critical if effective alliances are to be built with women’s movements in pursuit of common concerns with equality and justice. Contributions to this third part of the book provide examples of the kind of conversations and connections that are an important part of making this happen.

The first set of connections is between efforts to change broader policies and grassroots organizing with men to address issues of gender inequity in their own lives. The section opens with a chapter by Jeff Hearn that looks at the challenge of changing gender regimes from the ‘top down’ through social policies that seek to bring about greater gender equality, and from the ‘bottom up’ by working with men to engage them in processes of transformation in gender relations in their everyday lives. Hearn draws attention to men and women as products of gendered social and economic policy, as well as actors for change and architects of policy.

Hearn’s reflections are complemented by the contribution of Gary Barker, Marcos Nascimento, Christine Ricardo, Marianna Olinger and Marcio Segundo on the work of Instituto Promundo, an NGO addressing precisely this interface between policy and practice in its work in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The starting point for Promundo’s work has been the six million men ‘missing’ from the Brazilian population mostly as a result of death in traffic accidents and homicide, the vast majority of the latter being gun-related and mostly occurring in low-income, urban areas in Brazil. Barker and colleagues describe their efforts to amplify the voices of resistance from young men who were challenging these norms of violent masculinity and embracing gender-equitable ways of being a man. Recognizing the challenge of broadening beyond individual-level change to challenging the community conditions that fuel men’s violence, Promundo is working to stimulate and sustain community activism, in part by allying with youth-led social justice work and linking this with policy analysis and advocacy in relevant social, public health and public security policies. Barker and colleagues conclude that work with men on masculinities and violence is about developing a ‘gender literacy’ not only among individuals at the community level, but also among a cohort of partner civil society organizations and policy makers who understand that gender justice and social justice are indissolubly linked.

The second theme in this section is that of another kind of connection: alliances between social movements in pursuit of greater social justice. In a
dialogue between masculinities activist and researcher Fang Gang and queer feminist activist and researcher He Xiaopei, introduced by Susan Jolly, the two debate some of the difficulties inherent in seeking connections between an established feminist movement and emergent forms of gender work with men, with reference to their experiences in China. In the Chinese context, official commitments to gender equity and women’s empowerment have not always been reflected in the distribution of power within society, economy and polity. The idea that men should organize for gender equality remains distinctly marginal. As rapid social and economic change transforms the political economy of gender relations, women’s movements face new challenges. Against this backdrop, a nascent men’s movement will need to negotiate alliances carefully and with great sensitivity.

One of the concerns that has been articulated by women since the very beginnings of the emergence of the ‘men and masculinities’ field is the very real danger of existing forms of patriarchal gender relations being superimposed onto engagements by men in ‘gender work’ (Hanmer, 1990; Win, 2007, 2010). Asking the question ‘What do men have to do with women’s empowerment?’ Henry Armas, Mbuyiselo Botha and Andrea Cornwall explore areas of common ground with respect to women’s and men’s aspirations for gender justice, but also some of the challenges and contradictions that present themselves as men engage with issues of gendered power. Mbuyiselo Botha speaks of the motivations that men might have to address inequitable gender orders, but also the challenges of really taking on what is needed to make change happen. Henry Armas reflects on the power of small acts that unsettle assumptions about gender, and on the need to actively address the privileges vested in men at every level. Highlighting the absence of men’s voices in the articulation of demands on some of the most basic issues of equity and justice for which women continue to battle, Andrea Cornwall challenges those men who profess a commitment to gender equality to follow through with actions that challenge taken-for-granted male privilege.

Patrick Welsh brings another dimension of the contradictions of men’s engagement in activism on issues of masculinities and power to our attention, delving into the experiences of (mostly pro-feminist) men working on issues of gender at community and national levels in Nicaragua. Welsh’s chapter is a further reminder that men are not simply the products of context and underlines the essential link between the personal and the structural. He soberly reflects on the challenges and deep personal changes required for men to be able to work towards greater gender equality in a society like Nicaragua. In this, he stresses the importance of strategic moments of collaboration with women’s movements on feminist issues, the need for ongoing engagements,
networks for peer support and a sense of community as essential to providing the sustenance for this work, concluding that ‘swimming against the tide is easier in a shoal’.

In a closing provocation, Alan Greig rounds off this collection by looking critically at the ways in which much of the ‘men and masculinities’ field has been complicit in efforts to manage the anxieties of economic and political elites in the face of the changing political economy of gender. Greig delineates key features of this complicity and the possibilities of resistance. To seize the possibilities for radical political change inherent within a changing gender order, and its threats to the masculinity of hegemony, he argues that the goal must be to agitate for deepening the intrinsic gender insecurities of anxious states, especially as they coalesce around the figure of the masculine. This should be work that creates enough conceptual and political space between men and masculinity in which to organize around the shared political interests of people of all genders in specific communities targeted by intersecting forms of oppression.

Conclusion

Our call for the need to politicize masculinity in development work is for a return to the more radical roots of the moves made in the 1980s to open up a debate about men, masculinities and power. This is a debate about gender and power, about body politics and political bodies, about norms and hierarchies, about intimate and institutional violence, and about liberation and justice. By reclaiming a space within the contemporary men and masculinities field for a reappraisal of fundamental structural power relations that have tended to be neglected in the emphasis on changing men’s behaviour and attitudes, this book suggests a number of productive directions for future work.

One is the need to address the heteronormativity that characterizes much of the work that is done in the name of Gender and Development, and with it the essentialisms that abound about ‘men’ and ‘women’. This has become increasingly urgent, the more that the ‘gender agenda’ in development is transformed to accentuate a long-present tendency in development discourse towards highly reified representations of women and girls as heroines and victims and men as perpetrators, or indeed as shadowy figures who are being virtually airbrushed out of the picture. Addressing this calls for further excavation of the normativities that structure the field of Gender and Development and that are manifested in policies and practices on gender equality, women’s empowerment and men’s engagement. It calls for new ways
of addressing the effects of heteronormativity on us all, as gendered subjects, beyond a narrow focus on ‘sexual minorities’. Within that, it calls for greater consideration of the play of power in the production of particular sexual and gendered subjects through development interventions, and the role of international development agencies in reproducing inequitable sex and gender orders.

A second direction for work on men and masculinities is to return to a more explicit concern with the deeper structures of gendered oppression, redressing the tendency in recent years to focus primarily on the challenges of personal change within individual lives. Charting a course in this direction must involve greater attention to the institutional workings of gender orders in relation to hegemonic social, economic and political forces, and the ways in which masculinity, as a set of representations and practices, has become a site of struggle and instability within this hegemony. In this sense, perceived crises of masculinity become opportunities to highlight the political economy of gender in the context of the bankruptcy of neo-liberalism. Engaging men in conversation about the harms that norms of masculinity do to them opens ways to talk about privilege and oppression at a systemic level, enlisting men’s energies in working with women to overturn patriarchal ideologies and inequalities, for example through campaigns for equal pay, as a part of their own liberation. At the same time, the growing interest in working with men to change the violent norms of ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’ masculinity opens up a space for mobilizing men to challenge the social, economic and political institutions that reproduce this violence from which they, too, suffer in so many ways. In doing so, the calls for a new, gender-equitable masculinity become moments for forging alliances for gender justice among people of all gender identities, envisioning a world of equitable social relations in which masculinities and femininities are points of gender identification available to all.

Last, this book arose out of a desire to bring together people from different strands of work on gender, sexuality and development and spark a dialogue that could lead to new avenues for activism and action. These dialogues, and processes that make space for people from different contexts and areas of engagement to come together to explore common concerns in honest debate, are vital if we are to begin to build effective alliances for change. May this book start other conversations, inviting new perspectives and challenging the boundaries of the possible, so that we can begin to see the kinds of changes happen that are needed to make the world we live in a fairer place.
Notes

1 For a full report of the symposium, see <http://www.siyanda.org/docs/esplen_greig_masculinities.pdf>.

2 An excellent online bibliography can be found on XY online, <http://www.xyonline.net/>. Another useful resource is provided by MenEngage, an alliance of NGOs that seek to engage men and boys in effective ways to reduce gender inequalities and promote the health and well-being of women, men and children – see <http://www.menengage.org/>. Also useful is Engaging Men.Net, a gender justice information network – see <http://www.engagingmen.net/>.

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Despite years of HIV information, education and communication, young Malawian men continue to engage in risky sexual practices. Social research on vulnerability to HIV and sexually transmitted diseases in Malawi has been driven by doubtful assumptions about gender and has neglected young men and their narratives and practices of heterosexuality (Undie et al., 2007; Munthali et al., 2004, Izugbara and Undie, 2008). Public health discourses surrounding HIV blame risky sexual practices and behaviours for the pandemic. They are frequently challenged by cultural and political discourses and practices that cast ‘real’ men as risk takers and philanderers and women as subordinate to men. In public health narratives, fear-arousing imagery depicts HIV as pervasive and inescapable among young men who stick to normative standards of manliness. But calls for change in male behaviour as the key to preventing the spread of HIV have consistently failed to resonate among Malawian men and boys, as models of this new Malawian man do not intersect with accessible cultural and popular discourses. Recent scholarship shows the abiding influence of indigenous cultural values and discourses on both the spread and understanding of HIV in Malawi (Kaler, 2003, 2004; Poulin, 2005; Munthali et al., 2006; Izugbara et al., 2009). These include widow inheritance, the use of proxies to address male infertility, and ritual deflowering. Because these are increasingly covert practices, the discourses surrounding them are discreet and therefore hard to address with programmes. Pre-colonial Malawian masculine identity hinged, among other things, on a man’s ability to achieve uninhibited ejaculation, last the pace in sexual encounters, have many wives and concubines, and refuse to defer to women (Kaler, 2003). These ideals have persisted, assuming newer meanings in contemporary times. ‘Real’ men, in popular Malawian discourse, are still largely constituted as those
able to take sexual risk, have several female sex partners and exercise power over women.

This chapter will ask: What does being a heterosexual male mean to Malawian boys? What sexual practices do they pursue in performance of their heterosexual masculinities? And what connections do they make between these practices and HIV, in a context of high vulnerability?

The colonial and post-colonial context

Christianity and colonialism did little to transform gender relations in Malawi. If anything, they compounded matters. Besides supporting a silence on matters of sexuality among converts, Christianity demonized polygamy, wife inheritance and other indigenous sexuality-related practices that were framed as unnatural and ungodly, prompting some local people to practise them clandestinely. Others showed disdain for Christian discourses of monogamy and fidelity by publicly performing the behaviours pilloried by the church. While men were subjected to colonial patriarchal masculinity that sought to transform and place them in a subordinate position in relation to colonial officers, colonial family law marginalized women by introducing rigid marriage, divorce, property and inheritance laws. Colonial wage labour encouraged the movement of Malawian youth to urban and other areas, disengaging them from local controls and supervision by community and family. Young men seeking their fortune in the outside world would ideally return with their spoils, to the envy of their rural relatives (Chirwa, 1998, 2001). But they might also return home with sexually transmitted infections and sometimes with enough wealth to indulge openly in risky sexual practices and excesses. The role of changes in labour and gender relations in the HIV epidemic in Malawi is well documented (Kaler, 2003).

The earliest post-colonial Malawian leaders did not support and sometimes showed open hostility to public discussions on matters of sexuality. In the 1970s, long before HIV struck, Hastings Banda, Malawi's first President, devoted a three-hour speech to extolling traditional sexual and moral propriety as part of a perceived Malawian cultural heritage. He blamed decadence and waywardness on Westernization, calling for a return to indigenous sexual ideologies dating back to the pre-colonial Maravi Empire. When HIV ‘arrived’, Banda was also among the earliest political figures in Africa to dismiss it as a Western disease caused by decadence. Perhaps not wanting Africa to be seen as the ‘permissive’ origin of HIV, Banda heaped blame for the disease on foreigners, the sexually wayward and debased, homosexuals, prostitutes and those who had abandoned cultural traditions. Until he exited
power in 1994, his country did not recognize HIV/AIDS as a policy issue requiring a clear response by the state. Rather, his government resorted to rhetoric valorizing ‘traditional culture’ (Lwanda, 2002b, 2003). Supported by Malawian intellectuals, the then political leadership claimed that American Intention to Discourage Sex or American Invention Depriving Sex (AIDS) was part of a US plan to force Africa to reduce its population, a shibboleth which continues to resurface in explanations for condom non-use among Malawian men (Lwanda, 2002b, 2003; Muula, 2008). Banda also supported the culture of multiple sexual partners and polygamy as amply demonstrated by his public defence of Inkosi ya Makosi (Paramount Chief) Mbelwa’s polygyny (Ngulube-Chinoko, 1995; Lwanda, 2003).

This delayed recognition of HIV, partly due to fear of rocking the boat on the part of Banda and his key party chiefs (Lwanda, 2002b, 2003), who were also involved in the sexual exploitation of women (over ten members of Banda’s former cabinet died of AIDS shortly after Banda’s exit from power) is a frequently mentioned factor in explanations of the high prevalence of the disease in the country. Under Banda, the marginalization of women and gender inequality intensified. Little attention was paid to the education of women and girls or the expansion of employment opportunities for the teeming youth population. Development was largely urban-biased, leaving out rural areas and encouraging the massive movement of rural people with little education or other social capital into the urban areas, where they easily became vulnerable to sexual abuse, marginalization and exploitation.

At the point of democratic transition in 1993–4, the Malawian government affirmed its commitment to propagating gender equality by adopting a non-discrimination clause in its constitution and undertaking legal reform and policy initiatives. However, these reforms have yet to translate into reality in the absence of political resolve (Lwanda, 2002a, 2003). As a result, exceptionally low literacy rates for women continue even as educational retention rates increase (UNAIDS, 2001). Patriarchal structures in Malawi persist, in tandem with emerging global youth culture and lifestyles characterized by unbridled consumption of sex and sexual goods and artifacts. Sexual activity has thus become a means both for performing gender and for realizing images and ideals of modernity and belonging celebrated by media and globalization (Smith, 2001). In this chapter, we show how masculinist discourses and practices of sexuality, anxieties caused by HIV and the lack of attractive alternative models of heterosexual masculinity prompt male youth in Malawi to reconstitute a particular normative form of masculinity that encourages the pursuit of risky heterosexual practices.
The social significance of heterosexuality

The boys in the study regarded heterosexuality as the normal and natural way of being male and regularly invoked the 'creation hypothesis' to justify claims that heterosexuality is the natural order of things. 'God created humans that way', 'It is God that made people men and women', 'How would children be born?', 'Even the animals are not different' (in that they practise heterosexuality), the boys would say in support of their beliefs and arguments that heterosexuality was the natural order. The existence of homosexuality and homosexuals was widely acknowledged. However, narratives surrounding homosexuality considered it both rare and a perversion. Narratives suggested that Malawians practising homosexuality learnt it from white people and from watching 'blue' films. A common sentiment among the boys was that homosexuals had to be surreptitious in their sexual conduct because same-sex relationships were both abnormal and wrong:

Those people [homosexuals] . . . they exist, but they do it secretly . . . Most of us won't know because they don't tell us. But . . . us when we have sex with girls we tell our friends because there is no need to hide. What we are doing is good . . . only that these days HIV that makes it dangerous [for us].

One narrative strand depicted homosexual Malawians as debased, immoral and depraved. Another framed them as biologically and mentally underdeveloped. So, besides their ungodliness, homosexuals were considered to be less than human. One urban boy offered that homosexuals 'were supposed to be men, then they did not mature well before birth'. Another boy suggested that homosexual men were supposed to be women, but were born well before they could develop properly. Essentially, the narratives suggested that homosexual men are both morally and biologically less than heterosexual men. Besides being natural and moral, heterosexuality reportedly guaranteed the survival of the human race and promoted sexual fulfilment between men and women. Indeed, although none of the boys reported homosexual experience, they generally believed that hetero sex was also more enjoyable that homo sex, with several respondents not being able to comprehend how homosexuals enjoy sex – a sentiment that one interlocutor articulated thus: 'They don't enjoy sex, they just do it because they have a problem.'

Heterosexuality signified real manliness and entitled boys to benefits such as sex. 'If you are a real boy, you need to have sex; it keeps your strength and makes you fresh,' suggested one urban interlocutor. The centrality of sex to the boys’ identity as heterosexual males was evident in its frequent mention as a major and justified pastime of real boys and men. Indeed, as the majority of them acknowledged, one could not be a true male without (regular)
heterosexual intercourse. ‘Here you can’t call yourself a boy if you don’t have girlfriends that you can have sex with. Your own friends will ask you “Why don’t you have girlfriends to be playing sex with you?”’ (16-year old boy, Blantyre).

Given the centrality of sexual activity to boys’ identity as heterosexual males, sex was a popular topic of interest, curiosity and fascination among them, occupying a key part of their social world. Sexual activity was both an end in itself and a means to an end. Having sex with women sometimes assuaged the boys’ desires for intimacy and pleasure. At other times it validated young boys as males, helping them to assert power and achieve reputation and respect among peers. The boys could easily converse about sex even in the presence of parents and adults, because they had developed elaborate sexual vernacular and slang that made it possible to talk about sex without raising the suspicion of parents, teachers and other adults. Saying that they had just ‘taken a bath’, ‘hit water’, ‘been for a swim’, ‘removed dust’, ‘put water on beans’ or ‘eaten’ were some of the veiled ways in which they described sex. Conversations on sexual matters were unconstrained by time or space. They could occur anywhere and anytime, including in schools, playgrounds, marketplaces, bars and at home. There were even admissions that they discussed sex on their way to or from church.

Sexual conversations among Malawian male youth range from the number of sexual partners one had or was aspiring to have, to strategies for winning, tricking and retaining girls for sex. One respondent admitted: ‘What I see is that whenever you find two, three, or four boys [gathered], most of the times their stories are about women and how to get sex.’ Another noted: ‘It is true . . . we, boys, always discuss girls . . . saying my girlfriends are so and so . . . or do you know that girl? I will like to chase her.’ A third observed that ‘when boys chat together, much of their discussions are about women and girls. They often boast to each other about their latest catch.’ Even when respondents drew attention to the fact that not all boys liked to engage in sexual conversations, they often took pains to stress that such boys were in the minority. Boys’ conversational groups also often engaged in discussions about what they liked in their girls and women, how and where to get easy women, how to sexually satisfy women, and how to improve one’s sexual performance. Tales of sexual escapades and experiences were also reported as important and regular features of male youth sexual discussions. Male youths in the study revealed that they voraciously sought information related to sex from a variety of sources, including erotic films, peers, and pornographic literature. They talked of seeking sex at every possible opportunity and from a variety of women, including widows, street girls, bar girls, sex workers and female
schoolmates, in schools, playgrounds, churches, pubs, the street, festivals, markets and cinema halls. Sexual activity with consenting women could occur at home, in the bush, at a friend’s house, in the classroom, in school toilets, in the street, at the roadside and in hotel rooms.

Practices of heterosexual masculinity

Judging by the narratives, Malawian boys enact their heterosexuality through a number of critical sexual practices including regularly seeking sexual partners, multiple sex partnerships, sexual exchange, sexual harassment of women, unprotected sex, and the quest for sex from ‘easy’ women. They also generally felt that it was their natural due, as heterosexual men, to receive high-grade sexual pleasure from women and not to have their sexual advances rebuffed. Responding rural and urban young men not only confirmed regular personal engagement in these practices but also admitted to personal knowledge of peers who did the same. Multiple sexual partnerships were common and perceived to be beneficial, boosting their sense of manliness, and setting them apart as sexually accomplished among peers. One boy noted: ‘Most boys have one in their street, another at school and others in other places.’ The practice of having several sexual partners was also frequently referred to as ‘common and enjoyed by most boys’. It was also reported as key to sustaining one’s heterosexuality. An unexercised heterosexuality portends danger for all real men. It could turn them into homosexuals, lead to sterility, reduce their sexual prowess and appetite, make their penises shrink and even lead to mental breakdown.

Having several girlfriends helped real men prove their authority over women because ‘if you have many girlfriends they don’t become boastful. . . . If they [girls] know you have many girlfriends they plead with you very much.’ Many of the narratives dwelt long on how all popular men – particularly film stars, musicians, politicians and soccer stars – were also sexually accomplished people. Such people were said to have many girlfriends, able to access sex regularly and thus stay refreshed, healthy and strong. To several of the boys, therefore, one could hardly be a real male without ‘having different girls that you will sleep with whenever you want’.

Being refused sex raises doubts about the boys’ heterosexual identities as go-getters with access to women and girls. Real men are not refused sex. They also call the shots in sexual liaisons, receive pleasure during sex, and choose and drop female partners at will. The boys also spoke of using money as a means to enable them to perform their heterosexual masculinity: ‘Once you have your money, it means you can get them (girls). So you don’t have to
bother yourself that a girl will reject your advances.’ The practice of sexual exchange was so common and popular that in some rural communities, sex was reportedly exchanged with *mpiru* (vegetables). Male youths also sometimes ‘walked about with bunches of money, for instance in marketplaces and other public spaces, to attract girls. When a girl gets interested . . . they then negotiate and have sex.’ Narratives indicated that paying for sex entitled boys to full control of women’s sexuality, ‘to even obtain unprotected sex from them’, and ‘to take the women and . . . do whatever they want’. Essentially, the social function of sexual exchange was not merely to certify the boys’ identity as go-getters, but also to guarantee their access to women who will allow them to live out their dream of being men known to receive sexual pleasure from women on a regular basis.

Malawian male youth also practised unprotected sex to demonstrate their heterosexuality. To many of them, vaginal, penetrative, heterosexual intercourse without condoms was the real, normal, or natural way. Acts such as masturbation, stroking a woman’s breasts, or fondling oneself or another person did not constitute sex. As in Manuel’s 2008 study in Mozambique, these were viewed as a prelude to real sex: penetration. Frequently basing their contention on personal experiences as well as what they knew of their male peers, the boys admitted that many of the sexual encounters involving male youth and women in their communities were unprotected. Narratives suggested that the boys’ non-use of condoms during sexual activity was due neither to a lack of awareness of the protective value of condoms nor to ignorance of how to use them. There was also no evidence to suggest that unprotected sex resulted from a lack of access to condoms among young people. Rather, data suggest that the main attraction of unprotected sex lay in the belief that condoms benefited women and made men losers during sexual episodes. The boys viewed skin-to-skin ejaculation as the ultimate male heterosexual behaviour, depicting condoms as both unmanly and likely to raise doubts about boys’ masculinity. Condoms reportedly left true males disempowered, defeated, and above all, cheated out of their presumed natural right to high-grade sexual pleasure. Having protected sex with a girl was to concede to her, a behaviour that real men avoid. Unprotected sex was thus a key strategy for asserting heterosexual masculine identity among the boys. The following dialogue between four boys when an investigator asked them why condoms were so unpopular is revealing:

P1: When you wear a condom, you don’t ejaculate easily.

P2: The story about the condom . . . the condom has no use.

P3: When I use a condom, I see that I lose . . . I lose very much.
Boys in the study demonstrated a pervasive anxiety about being refused sex, reporting it as the major reason they preferred to seek women and girls who they regarded as ‘easy’. To be refused sex was considered shameful, humiliating and unmanly. True men are never refused sex. The boys also engaged in age-discrepant sexual relationships, with narratives indicating that their preference for younger girls and older women hinged on two key issues: these women were less likely to resist their sexual advances and often offered them a higher degree of sexual pleasure, authenticating them as go-getting heterosexual males. One boy preferred older women because ‘they were very sweet and do not say no’. Another claimed that ‘older women know how to please a man and know how to allow us do what we want’, while a third admitted that: ‘Adult women don’t rebuff or say no to you, they just say ah . . .’ A similar logic explained another respondent’s preference for younger girls as sexual partners: ‘Some of these small girls are easy to convince. They are not stubborn . . . just with 5 blues [kwacha notes] you can have them and . . . they are sweeter and you may be the first one opening [deflowering] her . . .’

Malawian male youth also frequently engaged in sexual harassment and intimidation, often justifying it with claims that they were merely standing up to girls who tried to outsmart them or challenged their resolve as (real) men. While reportedly the use of physical coercion to elicit sexual favours from girls was not uncommon, sexual harassment was very subtle in some instances:

P: Yes she has asked you for 2 blues . . . You give [her] . . .
Interviewer: For what purpose?
P: With the purpose of sleeping with her!
Interviewer: If she refuses?
P: If she refuses? Ah . . . You say: ‘You have eaten my things so your parents will know . . .’ So with fear she accepts to have sex with you, that is all!
P: You may even add to the money . . . you don’t say I gave you K10, you say I gave you K200 or K500!
P: The way it happens, they [girls] don’t normally refuse . . .!

**HIV, heterosexuality and masculinity**

Anxiety over HIV has affected boys’ heterosexuality in a variety of critical ways. The boys regularly spoke about how confused they felt, and how some of them were not enjoying it as much as they could have because of HIV
and now 'only ate with their eyes' (only admired girls, but did not approach them for sex). They implied that the bulk of anti-HIV messages primarily targeted men, seeking to encourage sexual abstention, partner reduction, faithfulness and condom use, undermining their capacity to perform as 'real men'. Many HIV messages seek to exact compliance through fear-inspiring images and messages centred on the inescapability, pervasiveness, incurability and wasting character of the disease. The most poignant articulation of this perspective found expression in the comment of one urban-based respondent who suggested that HIV messages circulating in Malawi aimed to turn boys into girls. In his words, they aim to: 'force boys to stop those things which make them happy. They tell you: “Don’t have girlfriends, go for HIV testing and stop playing sex, and use condoms.” They want to make you fear about HIV. They want you to just stay like that and many of us don’t like it.’

Narratives suggest boys were not only uncomfortable with the messages circulating about HIV and its prevention in Malawi, but also particularly unhappy with the demand of current HIV messages that they give up the very practices that make them 'true men'. Respondents bemoaned the lack of attractive alternative routes for enacting their manliness. One rural boy noted: 'They don’t want us to do these things [have sex, engage in multiple sex partnerships, have unprotected sex]; so what do we do as boys?' A common emerging practice among Malawian boys is to reconstitute manliness in terms of the ability to be more blatant and audacious in engaging in the very sexual practices that put them at risk of HIV. What was clear from their responses about the epidemic and their lives as boys was that HIV would not restrain them from being boys and that they would not refrain from behaviours that put people at risk of HIV. 'Me, I have stopped eating with eyes only,' declared one rural boy. Another respondent asserted that no matter what is said about HIV, boys will still be themselves. 'Those things they say on TV and radio won’t stop us from having sex,' he proffered. Data clearly suggests that an important and common way boys in the study asserted themselves was to downplay the HIV risks and to become brazenly involved in risky sexual practices.

Boys in the study told us that given the fear and tension caused by HIV, a common practice among them and their peers was to ignore it, and live their lives as if it never existed. 'Most of us live now without thinking about AIDS. We don’t want it to prevent us from enjoying ourselves,' maintained a rural boy in Nchinji. In many instances, respondents noted that those exercising too much care in trying to avoid HIV infection were wasting their time. The best one could do, they regularly said, was to carry on as if HIV does not exist. 'If it wants to kill us, let it kill us,' asserted one participant. Reminiscent of a
popular Malawian saying that the cautious or careful raven may not always live long, many young male respondents maintained that the key to survival as a man in the current era of HIV was to throw caution to the wind, to be careless.

Being fearless and careless about HIV was often defined in terms of being ‘able to continue living like a man’, to ‘stop eating with the eyes’, ‘to continue enjoying oneself’ without bothering about getting infected’ and ‘enjoying yourself’ and ignoring the disease’. It was also described in terms of ‘not allowing the fear of HIV to prevent you from enjoying yourself’, ‘proving to your friends that you do not fear to die’, and ‘to dare HIV to kill you if it can’. Evidently, being a true male in a period of HIV involved demonstrating one’s fearlessness and invulnerability by increasingly engaging in risky sexual practices. Indeed, according to many responding boys, HIV no longer bothered them and they no longer feared it. ‘Now since HIV wants to kill everybody, let it also kill us. That’s what many of us here say,’ declared one young boy. And, indeed so many others said just this in their responses that they seemed to be defining a collective mood, defiant and reckless: ‘It is better to enjoy life when you are still alive,’ as another declared. Emphasis was also laid on demonstrating one’s courage to others. One respondent said he preferred to be killed by HIV rather than to ‘live in fear like a small girl’. But participants in the study also regularly invoked the lack of alternative models of manliness to explain their readiness to die in pursuit of conventional images of manliness in Malawi, with respondents in one focus group discussion noting that ‘we have to continue living like this until they tell us how else to enjoy our life’.

Concluding thoughts

It is widely accepted that the sexual behaviour of its present generation of youth will be a critical factor in HIV outcomes in Malawi (NAC, 2003; MDHS, 2004; UNAIDS, 2006). Yet, as we have shown in this chapter, the country’s heterosexual male youth presently aim to reconstitute a neo-traditional version of manliness by engaging in the very sexual behaviours that spread HIV. And while current public health narratives continue to criticize the sexual practices around which heterosexual masculinity is constituted, they fail to offer young men attractive, culturally resonant alternative models of heterosexuality. Instead, engagement in inherently risky heterosexual practices has emerged as the new marker of proper maleness among Malawian boys. Their vulnerability to poor sexual and reproductive health is thus driven by their own efforts to become and stay male within the regime of a disease surrounded by narratives
of fear and unavoidability, without access to alternative manhood courses.

There is little doubt that this study presents critical entry points for addressing vulnerability among Malawian youth. The current findings suggest that HIV programmes aiming to change the sexual behaviours of young people must be carefully articulated and cautiously delivered. It is not enough for current campaigns and interventions to target dangerous masculine subjectivities circulating among male youth. Depending on how they are delivered, well-intentioned programmes can boomerang. This appears to be the case with anti-HIV messages and interventions circulating in Malawi. They have not only caused fear, anxiety and tension, and created a sense of inescapability from HIV for male youth in Malawi, but have also failed to articulate persuasive substitute forms of manliness for boys. The main challenge is finding the right voice to tap into. The voices of the young men described here can provide an anchor for efforts to foster much-needed change.

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Chapter Three

Is s/He More of a Man?

Constructing Masculinity as a Female to Male Transexual in India

Cath Sluggett

In *Female Masculinity* (1998) Judith Halberstam argues for a reimagining and ratification of masculinity for female-bodied individuals. But what kinds of masculinity are being defended in the name of ‘queer’ identity? In this chapter I explore how female to male (FtM) transgenders in India constitute their masculinity. How do they challenge hegemonic constructs of gender? What are the resources they draw upon to construct their masculinity and, in the transition from F to M, how is power accrued and mediated? Drawing on in-depth interviews with six Indian FtMs, I explore the way they represent and perform masculinity and maleness in their personal, social and intimate lives. The study on which this chapter is based (Sluggett, 2005a) grew out of my work from 1997 to 2002 with the Sangini Project, a support group for lesbian and bisexual women in Delhi. A number of transgender FtMs came to this group for information and contact. It was interesting to see how they were accepted into the group, despite identifying as men, whereas male to female transgenders (MtF) identifying as ‘women’ were not. I began thinking about how transgressive sexualities and genders are thought about as progressive, liberatory and ethical, and how ultimately they are claimed as ‘queer’, and how far the subversion of sexuality and gender ruptures hetero-normative patterns of relating in general.

Masculinities and maleness

Initiating an enquiry into FtM subjectivity requires placing it within domains of both masculinity and maleness. As noted by Chopra *et al.* (2004), there is a need to interrogate enquiries that universalize patriarchy and essentialist models of gender. However, I maintain it is crucial to understand the ideology and practice of masculinity as a power relation maintained through hegemony,
in order to dismantle the belief that only biological men espouse ‘masculinity’ ideology. Otherwise there is a danger of seeing other gendered experience, such as queer, as immune from hegemonic ways of relating. While acknowledging that other masculinities, like kothi masculinity, are posited as alternatives (Kumar, 2005), I would argue that, if these representations are devoid of criticality, they do not undo hegemonic gender relations but, instead, reinforce them.

The benchmark by which men are compelled to perform remains the pursuit of hegemonic masculine ideals. FtM subjectivity compels not only an analytical dismantling of masculinity and the body; it demands a critical engagement with maleness, defined here as that which is identified with and inhabited, irrespective of chromosomal or genital status. Masculinity and maleness are distinct concepts and discrete categories, which can be mapped on to each other. In gender theory, it is understood that ‘masculinity’ is constituted through the body and by adopting certain behaviours. As suggested by John Beynon, ‘men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated’ (2002: 2). Feminist scholars have interrogated the very idea of sex as two ‘natural’ or biological, distinct and immutable categories. Anne Fausto-Sterling in *Sexing the Body* posits that ‘bodily signals and functions we define as male and female come already entangled in our ideas about gender’ (2000: 5). Judith Butler (1993, 1999) explores the processes by which the body is sexed and constituted thus, over time and through its corporeality. She theorizes how sex is constructed as a norm and how this norm materializes and animates the body. In her account, gender performativity is not a singular act but must be understood as ‘a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms’ that enables the subject’s performativity (1993: 95). This body is physically and behaviourally produced through mundane, bodily gestures, movements and enactments, which give the ‘illusion’ of a gendered self (1999: 179). Pierre Bourdieu develops a similar idea that bodies (and minds) are transformed by imposition of a differentiated definition of the body, established through visual signifiers of male and female sex organs. He explains ‘symbolic construction’ of the male and female body, inhabited by each person, prescribing a ‘differentiated definition of the legitimate uses of the body, in particular sexual ones’ (2001: 23).

Fausto-Sterling, Butler and Bourdieu unsettle the idea that gender is distinct from sex and that gender is a cultural production and expression of sex. Instead they affirm that gender is the same as sex and a regulating mechanism to keep the logic of sex understood as a ‘natural’ and static binary. These theories persistently refuse notions of gender as an internal core part of the
self. As a result, they are problematic when attempting to theorize transsexual subjectivity. Butler, for example, states that gendered acts and gestures are ‘fictive’ and negates any claim to an essence of gender identity. Bourdieu likewise argues that biological facts do not determine the social sexual order, but that construction gives the ‘apparently natural foundation’ (2001: 23). Both theorists explain the embodiment of gender in relation to power; yet repudiate an explanation of maleness (or femaleness) as a palpable sense of oneself. It is precisely this interior feeling of gendered self, at odds with the corporeal body, that requires affirmation in the transgender person. As noted by Jay Prosser:

The transsexual doesn't necessarily look differently gendered but by definition feels differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex. . . . The transsexual narrative depends on an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality (1998: 43).

The foundational premises of Butler and Bourdieu are challenged when gender identity is associated with ‘internal bodily sensations’ and sex understood as ‘external surface’. To reconcile this, I suggest that the ways a person performs their gender is informed by their internal sense of maleness or femaleness. A self-intelligence of being male or female can be regarded as part of a ‘core’ identity or the ‘self’, and unchanging. Such core maleness or femaleness, at odds with the biological body, constitutes the crux of the transsexual narrative. This is expressed most powerfully in the urgency to ‘correct’ the body amongst transsexuals, despite huge medical and social risks. For male identified individuals, ‘masculinity’ is the myriad ways in which maleness is expressed in performative styles and behaviour. These ways change according to situations and the need to be read in various roles such as macho, authoritative, provider or protector. But this is not to suggest that only those who identify as male exercise masculine behaviours such as constructing women as sex objects, control over the other and using violence to control. As I argue elsewhere, masculine behaviours can play out in lesbian relationships, suggesting that masculine domination can exceed the boundary of the male sexed body altogether (Sluggett, 2005b).

While the notion of an essential gendered self has been widely rejected on the premise that male/female has no essential reality (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994), it is impossible to dismiss this perception of self by the transgender subjects in this study. Masculinity, for my purposes here, then, is
a product of a male selfhood – a male selfhood emancipated from chromosomes or genital maleness. While maleness is a constituent of self, masculinity is a constructed boundary, which requires navigation in relation to the other. For a man who inhabits a genetically male body, maleness is assured, irrespective of the way his masculinity manifests. The FtM has to establish both maleness and masculinity.

**Ideas of maleness and expressions of masculinity**

Studies on masculinities in India move away from a generic notion of masculinity, situating masculinities within localized social and political spheres. In a social context where male bodies are endowed with dispensation, the promise of male social privilege is in tension with the risk of exposure for an FtM. How masculinity is exercised by FtM’s would seem critical considering the fragility of their status in society, especially with regard to intimate relationships. If queer means subverting parameters of normative gender and sexuality, should it not extend to challenging hetero-normative behaviours and patterns of relating rather than remain in the realm of sexual activity or the visual?

**Body**

In all the interviews, a preoccupation with the male body surfaced, even while speaking about those the FtMs admired or their insecurities. The most defining aspect of the male body was that it must be flat-chested. All the respondents referred to a desire to remove their breasts and their varying endeavours to make their chest appear flat. This ranged from wearing a tight T-shirt under a loose shirt, wearing many layers (even at 45 degrees Celsius!), using a chest binder and arranging clothes in a particular way. ‘I used to tuck my inners very tightly at the waist so that they don’t give a loose feeling... so that the lump is not so damn prominent,’ recalls one respondent. All described contempt for their breasts; as one respondent said, he wanted to ‘take the blade and cut it off’. The pursuit of a flat chest is also determined by the visibility of female breasts to others; a male body with breasts is neither sexualized nor seen as contemptuous, and yet for respondents the construct of a male body is one without breasts.

The visibility of breasts as a signifier of femaleness explains the high level of anxiety around them and strong desire for their removal. As one respondent said, ‘it’s just that a guy should look like a guy and a girl should look like a girl’. Accounts of ‘embarrassment’ and discomfort at having breasts – the feeling that, ‘somebody is staring at me... and I really have to
save myself from that person’s eyes’ – can be placed within a larger social framework where female breasts are shameful and must be hidden. This shame is exacerbated for the FtM who has a male identity and a female body. Even after mastectomy, the public domain of a swimming pool or going to the doctor present problems because of scars. One respondent reported that he wanted liposuction on his chest because of what he described as ‘dog-eared sides’. ‘There is still a lump prominent... doesn’t give a good feeling without your vest,’ he said. This suggests that an ideal male chest should have a ‘natural’, slim look, similar to that of a young, healthy man.

Respondents placed less importance on the penis as a signifier of masculinity and maleness. However, it was regarded by all as a necessary part of the body in order to make a ‘real’ man; as one respondent put it, ‘the male part is in the penis, right? That’s what makes you feel a man.’ Having a penis signals to others that this body is male. Three respondents remarked that the public act of standing to urinate would ‘complete’ their sense of maleness. One respondent simply stated that it made him feel good to ‘have the shape of the dick coming in the trousers’. The desire to have a penis was further driven by ideas of virility, especially in intimate relationships. Four respondents said that a penis would enable them to sexually ‘perform’. They stressed that having a penis would provide confidence, comfort and security in their sexual relationships. This appeared to be linked to insecurity that their partners might leave them for a biological male: ‘I feel if my girl sees my body someday, she’ll go with a man, even if the man is the ugliest, doesn’t earn, just because he has a dick, my girl will go with him.’ The male body must have a ‘natural-looking’ penis, to comply with how it should appear and function sexually (that is, in penetrative sex). Another respondent stated: ‘If I had got married I would have used an artificial phallus, prosthesis, or a dildo. I would’ve preferred prosthesis because it gives a more natural look rather than a dildo.’

Shielding the female genitalia and breasts from the sight of an intimate partner was compulsory for all respondents. Not removing clothes during sex and not allowing the partner to touch their genitals and breasts helped to affirm a male identity. The visual characteristics of maleness were stabilized through this. However, the non-removal of clothes during sex must also be situated within the cultural norms of sex, where it is commonplace for many people to have sex with clothes on.

All respondents aspired to have a male body that was tall and muscular. A ‘gym body’, as one respondent described it, was sought, not for fitness or health, but rather to bolster confidence, attract or protect females, or establish a ‘macho’ image. The notion that women should be thinner, smaller and less
stronger than men correlates with the myth of women’s vulnerability and need of protection. Drawing constant comparison between the male and female body structure suggests the need to establish a boundary between masculinity and femininity. Facial hair featured as a key signifier of masculinity. All the respondents aspired to have a moustache and beard because it is thought to be ‘manly’. This signals adherence to a traditional representation of masculinity. The clean-shaven ‘metrosexual’ look, projected in men’s lifestyle magazines, did not appeal to respondents.

The need to eliminate other visual markers of femininity in the body was a preoccupation. Two respondents referred to having hips and buttocks, which they disliked because it gave ‘a feminine look’ to the body. Another respondent abhorred his ‘thin voice and thin hands’, which he felt to be a sign of femininity. Having periods was problematized in the same way that women generally protest against cultural restrictions imposed by menstruation, such as being made to sit in a separate room, and the concept that it is ‘dirty’. Though all respondents expressed a disdain for their female genitalia, the ability to hide genitals from public view rendered it less of a ‘problem’.

**Sex**

Five out of six respondents defined themselves as sexually active. Sex was generally thought of as genital contact. Four of these respondents said they thought of themselves as male during sexual acts, and one said he did not think of himself as male but ‘took on the masculine role’ during sex. This was a respondent who did not have a core male identity. All of the respondents spoke of sex in the framework of male ‘on top’/‘dominant’ and female as ‘passive’. Being ‘on top’ was non-negotiable. Respondents who had undergone sex reassignment felt unable to have satisfactory sex until after phalloplasty. One respondent said, ‘I don’t want my lover to touch me and think that it’s a female.’ In addition to these feelings of vulnerability, the assertion of a male gender identity creates a framework of control over the female body during sex. In Western terminology, this is articulated as ‘stone butch’. The next extract reveals that the desire to remain clothed during sex comes from this respondent’s desire to have control over a partner:

A male will remove all his clothes when he has sex with a woman, but I don’t remove . . . but I remove all the woman’s clothes because I prefer her to be naked fully. It satisfies me because I want to see how her body structure is. If body structure is not good, just for the sake of sex I have sex and finish.

Notably, none of the respondents refer to the clitoris in giving a partner sexual pleasure. Sex is only formulated as the penis penetrating the vagina. This is
illustrated by frequent reference to ‘complete’ sex. For example, when one respondent was asked to describe what sex is, he replied with embarrassment: ‘They put it inside . . . he takes it out and puts it in’. Female sexuality is thus reduced to the place where the penis is put, and entering the vagina is constructed as sanctified and the only ‘real’ sexual activity. Another respondent displays similar views: ‘I really worship that area (the vagina), it is meant for the wedding night, it is meant for the D Day.’ The purity of virginity is implied here, and the speaker invests in the significance of the suhagraat (the first night). The view endorsed is that the only legitimate space for penetrative sex is within marriage. This echoes the opinion that only sex for procreation is correct. When read alongside how the respondents view non-reproductive sexual activities in general, an extremely hetero-normative and hegemonic view of sexual activity emerges. For example, only one respondent expressed comfort with giving oral sex. Another spoke of using sex toys as, ‘insulting the body’.

The stress on penile/vaginal penetration is arresting considering many of the respondents express a despairing attitude about not being able to ‘perform’ this act. Sexual performance is by and large articulated as ‘incomplete’ due to the ‘inability to satisfy’ a partner, for want of a penis. This manifests as a major anxiety in sexual relationships, as this respondent explains: ‘You can just tell your partner you are incompetent to perform sex. But really you have that empty feeling in you that “kash, meri pas voh cheez hoti” (I wish if only I had that thing [a penis]).’ This limited construct of sexual activity is irreconcilable with the corporeality of the FtM body. Even after phalloplasty the notion of failed sexual performance haunts. To overcome this, the FtM would have to abandon the very construct of male body and sexuality that they fervently champion.

Some counter-hegemonic views of what constitutes pleasurable sex for a partner emerged. For example, all respondents felt that sexual satisfaction of the partner was very important. One respondent, who had sexual experiences only with married women, reflected on the likes and dislikes of his sexual partners: ‘They don’t like penetration because it hurts a lot . . . they like oral sex very much, they can come, which they’ve not done with their husbands.’ Such statements challenge the hegemonic view that penile penetration is required for women to be sexually pleasured and posit that the penis does not have to be central to sexual activity.

Thinking of the male sexual organs as superfluous in sex comes from the knowledge that pleasure can be both given and received in different ways. For one respondent, sex was not limited to genitalia and included ‘kissing the body all over’. Another respondent had decided not to reassign based on the limits
of prosthesis. He said, ‘it doesn’t give the pleasure and I need that pleasure.’ Similarly, remarks from one respondent reveal an attitude that challenges the very notion of what constitutes a male body. As discussed already, the archetypal image of a male body held by the respondents is the presence of male sex organs and absence of vagina and breasts. Overturning the archetype, this respondent invents his own formulation of maleness. In his version, ‘internally I am a male, [the] internal part is more than what the appearance is’. Here, he offers a construct of the male body that disrupts archetypes by privileging the ‘corporeal interiority’ of maleness referred to by Jay Prosser and Stephen Whittle.

The positioning of maleness as internal radically alters this respondent’s journey – namely, his need to hide all physical traces of femaleness while passing in public and an exigency to reassign. Privileging maleness as interior, even as a temporary strategy, enables him to deal with being read as female as no longer his problem but rather society’s problem. He explains: ‘How much can I hide . . . I know I am a guy . . . If physically I do not appear like that it’s not my problem.’ A sense of weariness at checking his appearance for signs of femininity repeatedly comes through. But more interesting is his defiance in refusing maleness as the presence or absence of particular body parts. This defiance is illustrated thus: ‘Sometimes I feel like going nude on the road and saying “OK, this is me and I’m a guy.”’

Representing masculinity/femininity
Hegemonic masculinity plays out through the donning of a role of protector and provider. Femininity is conversely projected as needing this protection and a male provider. Aggressive behaviours are legitimized as ‘expressions’ of masculinity while emotions such as tearfulness in men are vilified as feminine and therefore weak. Respondents on the whole endorsed these representations. When respondents were asked if any aspect of femininity applied to them, there was instantaneous and vehement denial. Only two respondents said they had feminine traits and these were constructed very stereotypically – ‘liking crockery’ or being ‘soft-hearted’. It was stressed that a partner should be a femme and conform to a traditional idea of femininity, in looks and behaviour. All respondents preferred partners not to wear make-up, be slim and have long hair. They preferred a partner to have an ‘Indian look’ which was constructed as a ‘respectful’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘sexy’ look. Other desired attributes of a partner were those typically attributed to the ‘necessary’ qualities of ‘good wife’ – such as being able to cook.

The contempt respondents held towards indicators of femininity in their own bodies manifested in disparaging views about women as a category.
Three respondents referred to women as ‘silly’, ‘lazy’, and ‘jealous’. Others said women ‘talk too much, are ‘back biters’, and ‘don’t have guts’. Such misogyny, I suggest, is rooted in insecurity about establishing maleness/masculinity. Constant reiteration of women as ‘silly’ implies men are the opposite. This move reinforces the respondents’ sense of their own masculinity and superiority. Further, positing women as silly legitimates the need to protect them, which emerged as a strong belief in the respondents. The construct is that masculinity needs no protection. If protection is ultimately about guarding the vagina, which seems to be the dominant claim – based on the notion that women can get raped and men cannot – it is noteworthy that the female-bodied status of some FtMs escapes acknowledgement of the same vulnerability. Again, this denial of vulnerability through denial of female corporeal reality is tied in with the need to establish a male identity or masculine persona. This logic, in my view, enables the respondents’ access to a central aspect of masculinity – protection. It is both a strategy to anchor the respondents’ masculinity, and a mechanism to legitimate control over the partner under the guise of protection. But the undergrid is the myriad restrictions that are placed on women in choice of dress, behaviour, movement, work and associations.

Manhood was uncritically upheld as ‘independent’, ‘straightforward’, and ‘having the ability to make decisions’. These traits were often juxtaposed by saying these were not qualities found in women. For example, one respondent stated: ‘Why should I be scared to go out? I’m a man, should I sit like a woman in a corner?’ A wider social norm of discounting women as inferior can be seen here. Another common modality of hegemonic masculinity is male exclusivity and bonding through the act of sexually objectifying women. This is reflected in one respondent’s statement that as a man, ‘I can talk about my sex life with men – we can letch at women together.’ This seems to reflect the familiar discourse of the ‘boys’ club’, where women bear the brunt of sexist jokes and innuendo. Two respondents spoke quite proudly of how they used to sexually harass girls during school days. The celebration of this behaviour can be read as another display of masculinity for the purpose of signalling to others a male self or masculinity.

The respondents related the many ways in which they performed masculinity as they grew up. This act is performative because based on conveying information to the other, rather than being an act located in the self. For one respondent, carrying a ‘man’s hanky and wearing a man’s watch’ made him more readably masculine. Two respondents spoke of domestic activities that conveyed ‘being a boy’, such as carrying the water bucket or gas cylinder. It is noteworthy that none of the respondents spoke of resenting performing
female gendered activities such as cooking, cleaning or sewing. However, they spoke at length of being forced to wear feminine clothes. For all respondents, dress was a crucial aspect of securing masculinity/maleness for themselves and performing and presenting masculinity to others. Three respondents spoke of wearing shorts under their school skirts, a self-avowal of their masculinity. Dressing in a ‘pant and shirt’ (invariably taken from a brother’s wardrobe), wearing ‘heavy’ shoes, occupying the men’s section of the bus, using men’s toilets and going to a men’s barber were cited as methods of expressing masculinity while growing up.

Respondents reflected the dominant notion that men are ‘naturally’ aggressive. One respondent noted that, ‘even while fighting (men should) talk smoothly and well’ adding that, ‘when others are rough, he should also be rough’. One respondent spoke of physical fights with a partner, but inferred there was equality in the violence. Two spoke normatively of ‘slapping’ a partner. The relative ease with which respondents spoke about enacting violence echoes a social atmosphere where wife battering is accepted.

Popular cinema emerged as a resource that fed into the respondents’ constructs of masculinity and femininity. Archetypal images of women happy in the home and men satisfied in the public sphere appear regularly in mainstream Indian films. Protecting a woman’s sexual integrity is a role often taken by the male protagonist and is linked with winning the female character’s heart. Although the respondents affirmed protection of women as ‘heroic’ behaviour, they simultaneously expressed an inability to protect a partner in the event of a man ‘misbehaving’ with them in public. This added to their burden of ‘failed’ masculinity. Another common influence was romantic scenes in popular cinema and love songs. Respondents identified with a range of male actors who play amorous lovers in romantic dance sequences with the heroine. As one respondent stated, his ideal was a man who ‘woos his love with a rose from a rooftop’. The identification with romantic sentiment in ‘Mills and Boon’ novels, Western love songs and filmy ‘partner songs’ is characteristic of the heterosexual love paradigm.

Intimate relationships
Success in romance and partnership was a major concern for the respondents, all of whom expressed insecurity in the area of relationships. In all but one case, this came from experiences of a partner leaving them for a biological male. One respondent related that his partner would not have left him, ‘had I been completed with all my stages, had I been a complete man, a biological man’. The impossibility of attaining this completion exacerbates the sense of insecurity.
All the respondents were either currently or had previously been in a relationship with a woman. They viewed their relationships as heterosexual and reported that partners similarly identified and related to them as men. High value was placed on marriage as a framework for long-term relationships. Two respondents, who had transitioned, proposed marriage to their partners. This was related as a painful experience since, for both, the relationships collapsed with opposition from the partner’s family. Several respondents indicated that ‘live-in’ relationships were not comparable to marriage, which, they believed, provided more security. This can be placed within a larger cultural context, which legitimates sex only within the boundaries of marriage.

A common position held by respondents was that they should be able to provide for a partner, earn more and be the one to pay. ‘Allowing’ a partner to pay was perceived as something that could be done only occasionally. As one respondent said of his partners, ‘I didn’t want them to spend their cash... when I have the money I take them out and give them a treat... they can take me out but not always.’ The need to pay and, more importantly, to be seen to pay, is rooted in the construct of man as provider. This is informed by the idea that only men are capable of earning. Despite the fact that women can, and often do, earn as much if not more than men, some respondents felt a need to reinscribe the notion that women are essentially dependent. This respondent explained: ‘A female must get support from the father, brother, husband or son.’ He described himself as ‘free from all that hardship’.

The intimate relationship is where hegemonic masculinity plays out most potently. Four respondents felt it was not safe for their partners to go out alone late at night, and said they monitored a partner’s movements at night. The argument of ‘tradition’ is often invoked to regulate women’s movement in the public domain, so that home is continually cited as a woman’s ‘natural’ domain. This is precisely how women are sequestered in the name of protection. The display of hegemonic behaviour in the intimate relationship is not limited to the private but spills over into the public domain. The intimate relationship provides the only secure ground for the FtM’s masculinity to be established in public spaces. This is because social approval is given when men exert power over a female partner in public. This is done by putting down partners in public, humiliating them, and even demonstrating violence towards them.

Despite respondents stating that their relationships with partners were ‘equal’, this is not seen in practice. The repetition of difference between masculinity and femininity, and the constant abjuration of everything feminine, functions to legitimize unequal practice. Association with the feminine is only
as an object of desire, a body to assert control over and a site where the performance of masculinity can be reasserted. The powerlessness felt in other public spaces is partially ameliorated when authority finds expression in relation to a partner.

Conclusions

A sense of maleness and the expression of masculinity can come from a core place or can be produced from other sites such as sexual desire or experiences of sexual abuse. The male identity pursued by the FtM respondents is contoured by a criterion of masculinity that fails to unfasten itself from the ethos of male domination. The obvious apolitical standing of the respondents is problematic because of its maintenance of a status quo that is oppressive to women. Equally, however, the cultivation of such masculinities is oppressive for the respondents themselves. Founding a male identity upon hegemonic constructs of the male body and through wielding male privilege and power cannot sustain biological, ‘normal’ men, much less ‘trans-bodied’ men. The trans male body will never fit this ideal construct. Neither will the pursuit of extremely hegemonized women as partners be likely to open doors to relationships built on support and understanding of different kinds of men.

Within a social and cultural frame that validates the exercise of male power in disproportionate ways, the respondents uncritically assume the position of power as male. The site of this power remains unquestioned by the respondents in much the same way as it is accepted uncritically by biological males. The respondents complain about the gender discrimination they have faced in wanting to be men. However, the intolerance shown towards them by parents or society in general does not appear to have led the respondents to engage with wider gender politics. On the contrary, in the areas discussed, respondents seem to be reinforcing the very mechanisms and styles of oppression that they themselves were subjected to and resisted.

At a socio-political level, since India’s independence, democratic movements and changes in policy have produced a wide range of progressive measures, aimed at enfranchising women with more of their constitutional rights. As a result, women have achieved visible political presence and expression in the public arena to the extent that this is now normative rather than extraordinary. To some degree this has altered gender relations and offered a challenge to traditional forms of masculine expression. Different formulae of gender relations are appearing gradually in media, offering alternatives to the archetype of men as dominator and women as dominated. In addition media depictions of masculinity are now stretching to encompass
men having a ‘softer’ look, showing them engaging with women as persons, outside of the narrow roles of wife and mother. Alternative models may not be a forceful discourse but they are moving from the margins into the mainstream. They are more available for men to draw upon, without fearing a backlash that would disgrace their masculinity. This begs the question of why the respondents presented here adhere to hegemonic and traditional masculinity so effortlessly and uncritically.

At one level, it is ironic that FtMs, who in body contravene the constancy of the gender binary, do not struggle against hegemonic gender norms, but reinforce them. One conjecture could be that they strap on normativity to compensate for corporeal status. Another could be that in the move from powerlessness to being powerful they do not question the use of power, or engage with the notion of ethics and equality that goes with it. Exercising hegemonic power in public spaces is difficult for the FtMs who have not transitioned. Their bodies often betray them as female. In the case of FtMs who have transitioned, the public sphere becomes a site where power can be exercised but, as is generally the case, its possession and exercise can be contested. The intimate relationships of FtMs are a private space in which power is uncontested. However, in the sexual realm an FtM is most vulnerable and inescapably confronted with his lack of a penis and, as he insists, a lack of power. Passing in public as male is sustained through visuality and behaviour. But in the sexual realm, denial of body parts is required and a suspension of disbelief is demanded in order to maintain maleness. It is in the everyday arena of the intimate relationship that hegemonic masculinity is most vehemently exercised. Given the impossibility of achieving the kind of masculinities tied in with hetero-patriarchy, a possible FtM paradigm is clearly needed.

4

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Notes

1 See Sluggett (2005a) for a fuller account of the methodology for this study and details about the respondents.

3 Stephen Whittle is a trans man activist and lawyer based in England. He maintains that even with the aid of hormones and surgery, stepping over the line from female to male does not result in ‘full manhood’. He says, ‘When I theorize I talk about some essence of the essential self, and people understand. But when you cross over that line you don’t ever gain full entry into a man’s world’ (cited in Self and Gamble, 2000: 48).

4 This is suggested by Satya, an FtM transsexual person who says, ‘It’s very interesting from the trans perspective – because no one, whether FtM or MtF, can achieve the kind of manhood or womanhood, respectively, that comes from heteropatriarchy’ (cited in Sukthankar, 2003).

References

Chapter Four

*Meyeli Chhele Becomes MSM*

Transformations of Idioms of Sexualness into Epidemiological Forms in India

akshay khanna

Yes, men hold hands in India . . .

Reflecting on conversations with various European and North American visitors to India in the last few years, I recently logged on to Flickr and did a quick search with the words ‘men holding hands India’. Of several hundred images, a sizeable number were simply of men, holding hands, on streets in India. Many of these photographs were clearly taken candidly. Those taken face to face suggest a nonchalance on the part of the subjects, as though the fact of holding hands is nothing out of the ordinary. My random group of photographs has some interesting common features. First, they are largely taken or posted online by European and North American travellers. Second, the visible aesthetic values of the subjects suggest a lower-to-middle-class background. Third, almost all these photographs have been given strikingly similar titles by the photographers – ‘just good friends’, ‘friends’, and ‘men holding hands – a normal occurrence in India’. Some photographers go a step further and include explanatory captions below the photograph, such as – ‘they are NOT gay’, and ‘Yes . . . men in India hold hands. At first I thought everyone was homosexual then realized it’s a sign of friendship’.

There is something fascinating about this. First, that the sight of men holding hands in public is experienced as remarkable in this Euro-North American gaze – remarkable enough not just to be photographed, but to be displayed alongside snake charmers and the Taj Mahal, as a cultural peculiarity these visitors were privy to in their travels around India. Second, that the image of two men holding hands suggests the realm of (homo)sexuality to this peculiar gaze. And third, that this suggestion must be simultaneously negated – it apparently cannot be the case that the act of holding hands is erotic. In a ‘conservative’ society, such as India, clearly men cannot be ‘gay’ –
or, at least, cannot articulate homosexual personhood publicly. The image must thus be divested of (its) eroticism and the act of holding hands firmly placed in the realm of asexual sociality.

But who is to say that these men are not ‘homosexual’? On what basis is it being said that their ‘homosociality’ is not also simultaneously erotic? Is ‘friendship’ in India the same as that in North America? Or is the cleaving of ‘friendship’ from ‘eroticism’ a Euro-North American peculiarity, arising out of a melancholic gender universe where real (heterosexual) men and women are created through the continual denial of homoeroticism, and where this homoeroticism must therefore be accommodated neatly in a homosexual body (see Butler’s discussion on Freud, 1997: 132–50)? Is there a possibility, for instance, that to be ‘friends’ in India already entails an easy eroticism between tactile selves, and that the entire framework that cleaves eroticism away from an asexual sociality is an unnecessary imposition, a projection of a gender-anxious Euro-North American masculinity onto everybody else?

My focus in this chapter is on the processes through which a particular claim to speak the truth of Indian sexuality, strikingly in the image of a (Euro-North American) ‘global’ original, is made, how this truth is then brought to circulate, and to what effect. I am particularly interested in the context of HIV/AIDS programming and the production of epidemiological knowledge and categories relating to same-sex sexualness between men. The tensions that I seek to elucidate play out not in a ‘cross-cultural’ interface, between ‘international’ development professionals and subaltern Indians, but ‘within’ the community that is being characterized in the discursive construction of MSM, in this case, the community known by the name kothi – males typically framed in HIV/AIDS discourse as effeminate, working-class and non-English-speaking, and as those who are penetrated in sexual encounters with men. This is a story, in some sense, of a community and an identity coming into being, and thus of a community and identity in the process of creating an effect of its ‘self’. My quest is then to lay out the adoption and appropriation of particular epidemiological forms in this process of creation.

Idioms of gender and sexualness in India

This article is based on doctoral fieldwork carried out over a period of 15 months in different parts of India between 2005 and 2007. This broader research relates the emergence of ‘sexuality’ as a political object and as an arena for activism. Having already been part of the urban Queer movement in India for some six years prior to this period, and having a deep familiarity with its setting in Delhi (and to a lesser extent, Bangalore and Bombay), I
took this as an opportunity to take a look at what was happening in other parts of the country. This took me to other cities, some smaller towns, and some rural areas. An aspect of this research was to understand the connectedness between what is happening in these disparate sites. As would be expected in a vast country such as India, I encountered a rich diversity. In almost every place that I visited – from West Bengal to Gujarat, to North Karnataka, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh, I encountered idioms, identities, rituals and customs, institutions, spaces and languages relating to sexualness, non-normative gender articulation and same-sex desire. Many of these idioms relate to personhood, some relate to forms of relativity, some to forms of employment – each with its own universe of aesthetics, each articulating in a particular political economy, each finding intelligibility in relation to localized cosmologies of gender.

Many of the languages I encountered, learning a bit of this and a bit of that as I went along, have explicit terms to describe masculine females, effeminate males, various sex acts and transactions. And these are neither isolated nor necessarily marginalized from a ‘mainstream’ – temples, festivals, mythologies, pilgrimages and practices including large numbers of people for whom the thirdness of gender, movement between gender identities, and same-sex desire are seemingly not out of the ‘ordinary’. While I am hard pressed to be able to speak of all these instances within a coherent inclusive frame, one thing became clear to me. To simply say that ‘Indian society is conservative’ or ‘homophobic’, and to examine these various sexual economies within an epistemology of ‘homosexuality’ would miss the point completely. Queerness, in the sense of multiple genders and forms of sexualness, in other words, is far from ‘marginal’ to ‘India’.

If I was confounded by the diversity of idioms in my travels, I was equally struck by the persistence of a particular form – the kothi identity, which has dominated much writing and work on same-sex sexuality in India in the last fifteen years. This identity is most often portrayed as the ‘traditional’, authentic, pan-Indian male homosexual identity – as against the ‘gay’ identity, which is portrayed as ‘Western’ – and an inappropriate category for understanding sexuality in India. My sense is that this is not quite the case. It is not, in other words, a timeless embodiment that magically exists across the length and breadth of the vast subcontinent. While there are many histories of this term, of this identity, and its attachment to disparate bodies, the kothi as we know it is a product of our times, articulating at this particular historical juncture, a product of a specific political economy, moving along highways and re-articulating in disparate corners of the country. It is, in other words, as much an artefact of modernity, globalization and neo-liberal expansion as
is the gay identity. What is fascinating about it is that it articulates as ‘traditional’, as though always already present, as though rising from the land rather than taking (very successfully) to it.

The persistence of the kothi

Kothi has circulated most widely as the Indian synonym for MSM, the form through which the HIV/AIDS industry apprehends same-sex sexualness between men in most parts of the Global South (same-sex sexualness in Europe and North America is apparently exhausted in the gay identity, at least as far as visible HIV/AIDS programming is concerned). Recognition as ‘the penetrated’ makes this identity a perfect subject of HIV/AIDS programming, based on the bio-medical postulate that anal sex is more infective than any other form owing to higher chances of breaking skin and bleeding. And it is through the rather large MSM sector of the HIV/AIDS industry – with dedicated and widespread networks of interventions, organizations, support groups and ‘drop-in-centres’ underwritten by some of the bigger development players – that the kothi has emerged as a ’prevailing trope’ (Boyce, 2007a: 178).

From a series of conversations with kothi-identified folk in different parts of West Bengal, something of a pattern had begun to emerge. Being interested in the questions of identity and senses of self, and having a general idea that the kothi as a category of self is a recent phenomenon, I would invariably bring the conversation around to what kothi meant, and how the person I was with identified. Typically, the self-description of kothi-identified persons in West Bengal would go: ‘Aami chhele (I am a boy), but I have always been meyeli meyeli (“girlish”/”girl-like”);’ or, alternatively, ‘My body is that of a chhele, but inside I am mei (girl/woman);’ or, most significantly, ‘I found out that I am a kothi only after coming here (to the drop-in-centre/support group meeting).’ I found this last statement – one that I was offered in almost all narratives of kothi selves across the country – most telling. Identification as a kothi is typically post facto; in most of these cases, it comes about after interaction with the HIV/AIDS industry.

I needed to examine the conditions – political, economic, cultural – under which this naming and this identification were taking place. My point here is not that the kothi is in some sense less ‘real’ because (s)he comes about at a particular juncture – the fact that something is ‘socially constructed’ does not make its experience any less real. Of course the kothi exists as an embodiment, as a frame for a coherent self; of course being kothi is a reality for an increasing number of queer folk in India. But what the specificity of this identification
points us to is the need to examine the conditions of its construction, adoption, embodiment and circulation, as much as the contestation of this category.

This sense that the *kothi* is a product of the HIV/AIDS industry (or more precisely that it is an idiom that has been transformed into a bio-medical category and an identity through HIV/AIDS intervention) resonates with at least three insightful and compelling ethnographies – Lawrence Cohen (2005), Gayatri Reddy (2005) and most recently Paul Boyce (2007a and 2007b). These works have variously highlighted the socio-political conditions of the emergence of the *kothi* in recent years and, in one way or another, examine how and why this term has come to be so pervasive in the way same-sex sexuality in India is understood. Cohen provides us a narrative of how this concept came to be ‘black boxed’, becoming an unquestioned and unquestionable fact. Boyce also examines, inter alia, the logic that makes the *kothi* framework especially seductive to HIV/AIDS programming. He goes beyond this originary narrative, however, and brings us to the realm of sexual subjectivity, examining dissonances between understandings of self evinced by people identifying as *kothi* and the ways in which the *kothi* is represented in HIV programming discourse. Making a distinction between ‘forms of identity’, and ‘subjectivities’, he argues for:

>a more nuanced conceptualization of kothis (and panthis) as subjects of intervention strategies, not as archetypical characters simply locked into temporally dislocated and culturally static sexual roles, but as social actors engaged in the changing circumstances of their sexual worlds, with the potential to address risk and safety within them. (2007a: 198)

There is connectedness between queer bodies in different parts of the subcontinent that is not mediated through the HIV/AIDS industry, through train routes, through rituals and festivals, through political formations of the *bijra* community – a social, economic and political community that is famously ‘neither man nor woman’ (Nanda, 1990) and which is now being increasingly translated as ‘transgender’ – moving from one gender to another. The simple point is that there are various spaces and networks of these queer bodies, and that the designation of *kothi* is far from exhausted by the *kothi* identity of the HIV/AIDS industry.

**The epidemiological *kothi* and her is global form**

The epidemiological model of the HIV/AIDS industry in India, in line with World Health Organization wisdom, divides the population into types of
people – ‘high-risk’/‘vulnerable groups’, ‘bridge populations’ and ‘general population’. These become, on the one hand, building blocks of the explanatory framework through which the epidemic is understood, and on the other, sites where the success of interventions is assessed. This is based on the presumptions that, first, these are pre-formed ‘communities’ or ‘groups’ and, second, that sexuality is of a certain sort in each of these groups. These presumptions are challenged and exposed as inadequate on a regular basis ‘in the field’. For instance, one of the problems with operationalizing targeted interventions with ‘CSWs’ or ‘commercial sex workers’ in some of the small towns that my larger research has taken me to, is that the ‘sex worker’ as a type of person, or as a community, simply does not exist. This is not to say that women are not selling sexual services. But the point is that the fact of their doing sex work need not be the basis of their identity at all. Women who sell sexual services are often also involved in other forms of employment – selling vegetables, working as construction workers, and the like. As much as these women may be considered ‘sex workers’, in fact, they may be considered as vegetable traders, construction workers, Adivasis, Dalits, Muslims. … What we are seeing, then, is that one aspect of their lives is being made to become the basis of identity as far as access to rights and services is concerned, and this aspect is ‘risk behaviour’. In some sense these are people, who have been excluded from the benefits of citizenship, are now being seen as citizens, but only in so far as they form part of a ‘high risk group’.

The phrase Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) was initially conceived of as a behavioural category and not an identity or a category of personhood. This related to the move of concern with AIDS from the male gay community of San Francisco (from the time when ‘AIDS’ was called ‘GRID’ – or Gay-Related Immuno-Deficiency) to the Global South. The presumption was that the homosexual community everywhere would be worst affected by the looming epidemic, and thus, that it was a high priority to address the sexual health needs of this group of people. The problem was that, first, in large parts of the Global South a gay identity did not exist in the same way as in North America, and, second, that same-sex sexual transactions were not limited to people who identified as homosexual. Such terms as ‘situational homosexuality’ came into popular circulation (for instance, men having sex with each other in male-only spaces such as prisons and the armed forces). To deal with this messiness, the category of ‘men who have sex with men’ was created – the HIV/AIDS industry could now address sex between men that was not captured by sexual identity. It is ironic, then, that today MSM circulates for the most part as an identity – it is now possible to say: ‘I am akshay, and I am MSM’. The MSM is then evidence of a persistence of the
form of ‘sexuality-as-personhood’, of the presumption that who one fucks determines what one is.

But this MSM is not universal in any simple sense. Ironically, this ‘global form’ is marked by the emergence of ‘indigenous’ or ‘traditional’ cultural categories and systems of classification that are seen to structure and define sexual experience in different social and cultural contexts, and simultaneously, the disavowal of categories such as ‘homosexual’. This has resulted in the proliferation of ‘indigenous identities’ in the HIV/AIDS sector, in queer movements and in anthropology. In India and Bangladesh it is the kothi, in Thailand the kathoey, the warias in Indonesia, ponnaya in Sri Lanka, fletes in Lima, metis in Nepal, zenanas in Pakistan – these are all seemingly just different names for the same thing – forming a series of equivalences (Zizek, 1989). And their defining feature is that they are all, quite simply put, penetrated.

I was having a conversation with a leading activist over dinner, late in my fieldwork. Gushing with excitement at the diversity of forms of same-sex sexualness between men, I was rattling off their names and idioms. Wasn’t it strange, I asked, that in the face of such diversity, the HIV/AIDS industry was concerned primarily with the kothi? ‘But, at the end of the day, they are all different names for the same thing?’ s/he said, referring to the kothi. An ontological unity was being presumed between these disparate bodies that were circulating in different ways, in diverse sexual economies, in disparate lexical indices. In what remains of this article I hone in on one such idiom, one such phenomenon that is being read into this unity, and which emerged in the self-descriptions of kothis in West Bengal discussed above – the meyeli chhele.

The meyeli-ness of Bengali chhele

In my initial encounters with meyeli chhele, it came across as something of an adjective-noun coupling, as which indeed it was occasionally articulated, as in one of the examples above, ‘Aami chhele, kintu meyeli meyeli’ (‘I am a boy, but girlish/girl-like’). Such a coupling could be merely contingent – that same chhele could easily be a Dalit, a Muslim, a lawyer, a dancer. But over a period of time it seemed that the phrase meyeli chhele itself evoked an image, a type of person. Meyeli chhele is as much a noun, in other words, as it is an idiom of gender. I brought the meyeli chhele into conversations with other Bengalis, many of whom have nothing to do with either the queer movement or the HIV/AIDS industry – lawyers in Delhi, geologists in Edinburgh, anthropologists from New York and managers in backpackers’ hostels in
Calcutta. The meyeli chhele has been a known quantity in every one of these spaces, and almost everyone can remember an uncle or a cousin (and in some cases, a self) who was or is a meyeli chhele. And those who identified as meyeli chhele claim that same personhood for many public figures, including Rabindranath Tagore. Maybe Tagore was a meyeli chhele, maybe he was not, maybe his many biographers tussle with his articulations of gender, or it could be the case that his meyeli-ness has been erased from the abstract figure of the Nobel Laureate.

What also emerged was that meyeli chhele was not necessarily a sexual category at all. Many meyeli chhele are straight, I have been told, and many are bisexual. The idiom does not, in other words, speak of a ‘sexuality type’ (Khanna, 2007). Rather, it is an idiom of gender, an idiom/identity available to boys growing up, and in the context of Bengal, it seems, it is not necessarily a stigmatized idiom through which to articulate oneself. There are similar idioms in other languages, too – in Khasi (spoken in Megahlaya), for instance – and these are not abuses, but rather idioms of gender that are capable of being used tenderly, with admiration and merely as descriptions that do not immediately amount to insult.

Given this context, and that almost all the kothis suggested that taking on the kothi identity was post-interaction with the HIV/AIDS industry, I was curious: how does the outreach worker, the peer educator or the counsellor who makes the entry of kothi into the various registers at the drop-in-centre (or D-I-C, as it is called in HIV/AIDS parlance), decide that a person is, in fact, a kothi? Most of these registers offer various categories in which to classify every body that comes in contact with the D-I-C. There is the kothi, the penetrated male; the dupli, that effeminate male who is penetrated and also penetrates; the bijra, a category of ‘thirdness’ and increasingly of ‘transsexuality’; and the parekh (or panthi, in other parts of India), the masculine male, ‘original man’, who kothis identify as their lovers. Each entry is transformed into a number, as it is entered from the paper register to the Excel sheet, and from there into a statistic as it enters data-analysis software, and into a point on a gradient as statistical software churns its data around, and into a variable in an epidemiological equation where it meets various other ‘epidemiological facts’, and finally into a prosaic narrative of the epidemic on the tables of policy makers at the States AIDS Control Society, at the National AIDS Control Organization, the UNAIDS, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

How, I asked a peer educator who had only just finished describing her own process of self-identification, do you decide which category to put people in, in the register? The answer I got (and this is similar to answers...
I got in many D-I-Cs across the country), was intriguing. *Woh pata chal jata hai!* s/he said, it is obvious/it makes itself known/it can be made out. *Chool ko aise karna, matak matak ke chalna . . . .* S/he describes the exaggerated sway of hips, the flicking of the hair, the aesthetic performance, the soft curves of the voice – and my interviewee becomes the body her herself. And we laughed, for it was obvious; and we both knew that we could recognize that body, become it ourselves. The absurdity of ticking the *kothi* box was suddenly outed. Here was a sensory experience of the *meyeli chhele*, a visible performance of gender, an auditory experience – and the resonance of one’s own embodiment with what one saw. And this experience engendered an entry of a person as a *kothi*, a penetrated male.

This is not, in other words, a ‘translation’, or a simple ‘reading’ of what the body offers up, but rather a leap across a huge ontological disjuncture of a particularly gendered embodiment into an epidemiological category, a sexual type: the ‘penetrated male’. That is to say this is not merely a ‘reduction’ or even a ‘translation’, but a disjuncture that is an effect of particular socio-economic conditions, cultural readings and practices, and reclaiming of legitimacy in conditions of political marginalization. Indeed, a large number of *kothis* prefer non-penetrative forms of sex, and, at the very least, do not place a desire for being penetrated at the centre of their senses of self.

Let me emphasize here that this is not a question of self-identification, but rather, the entry of a body into the epidemiological register. That story of self-identification (rather than subjectivity, or ‘self work’ (Butler, 1997)) may be told as well, of course – perhaps as the articulation of an ‘always-already’ postulate of the sort: ‘I was always a penetrated male and just did not know it’ – but that is another project. The point I want to emphasize here is that this entry into epidemiological registers is not contingent on that self-identification. This is a process through which various embodiments, various senses of self, inner psychic realities, socio-economic conditions and struggles in gender-aggressive conditions are made irrelevant by being made simply instances of each other, laid out in the register as a series of equivalences. The epidemiological knowledge of the *kothi*, then, speaks not of the reality of the *kothi* as an embodiment or experience, but rather, of the conditions under which the *kothi* is abstracted from the *meyeli* body of *chhele*, and the conditions under which this abstraction is transformed in its mobility. The emergence of these marginalized bodies into the epidemiological equation on the basis of which public health resources are distributed, is not simply a (democratic) inclusion of pre-discursive embodiments-in-the-world. This entry into registers of governmentality may more appropriately be understood to be contingent upon the peculiarities of these registers, and, in this case,
upon public health agendas and the political economy of the HIV/AIDS industry. The acknowledgement/production of these identity categories is a process of the appropriation and transformation of a disparate number of hitherto (officially) unacknowledged idioms and embodiments.

Two-Bit

Let me finally crystallize some points from these discussions. First, there is a disjuncture between idioms and embodiments on the one hand, and the forms through which they gain entry into registers of governmentality. There is a disjuncture, for instance, between being a girlish boy, negotiating her gender transgression in every aspect of life, in her participation in the political economy, on the street and in the house, drawing on various idioms, and being, simply, a ‘penetrated male’ that is deemed worthy of the attention of the state, and of the development industry. The jump across this disjuncture, the transformation of a chhele who is meyeli into a kothi, and to an MSM, is an effect of her political economic conditions, and of those under which the HIV/AIDS industry seeks to understand and address the epidemic. These ‘forms’, then, rather than being reified embodiments-in-the-world, need to be understood as effects of political economy. In this sense, this is a call to centring political economy in the understanding of the production of masculinities.

This centring of political economy may have some significant implications. On the one hand, this offers a challenge to positivist understandings of epidemiological knowledge – an understanding that presumes that science studies, or can study things in the world without simultaneously transforming them. If epidemiological knowledge is understood instead as the articulations made possible due to particular political economic conditions, we can begin conceptualizing ways in which the production and form of this knowledge may itself be democratized. From a queer activist perspective, this centring also makes a case for focusing on the political and economic nuts and bolts of heteronormativity, the processes of exclusion and marginalization, rather than focusing on the (epidemiologically ascertained) effects of that heteronormativity.

This transformation from meyeli chhele to MSM is not a wholly unfortunate thing. It has opened up some interesting possibilities for political action. The emergence of the MSM as an identity, for instance, has brought about the interaction and collaboration of queer folk from disparate parts of the world. And while the conditions of these interactions – conferences and the like – are often consciously designed to be apolitical in tone, programmatic in focus
and instrumentalist in approach, the sheer size and breadth of reach of these interactions opens up possibilities for new solidarities beyond the apparent epidemiological commonalities that brings these bodies together.

Finally, the world presents to us a delicious diversity of idioms through which gender and sexualness are transacted and experienced. To apprehend them through positivist frames and reduce them simply to variants of each other is something of a failure of the imagination. It may be more exciting, and politically significant, to seek to invigorate these idioms and bring them to circulate in our various worlds, creating new hybrid options for ways of being which may contest the virulent masculinities that dominate our era.

References


When I first began to think about masculinity and sex work for this chapter, I was in the UK writing about sex work issues in developing countries. I was writing about new law to prevent human trafficking in Cambodia and new UN policy on sex work. Gradually I noticed that the words on my screen – trafficking, demand reduction, forced, exploitation, slavery – were also coming from the radio playing in the background.

An official British delegation was talking about their trip to Sweden to see the impact of the criminalization of buying sex – the ‘Swedish model’. They were discussing punishing men for buying sex as a way of eliminating trafficking in women and the commercial sexual abuse of children. A woman MP claimed that a whopping 80 per cent of women currently selling sex in Britain are trafficked. I don’t know much about the British sex industry but this seems a bit far-fetched, I think. Have local women all but abandoned selling sex? Has the welfare state triumphed while I wasn’t looking? Have British student grants quadrupled? And if a mere 20 per cent of sex workers are non-migrants why did a two-year-long nationwide campaign involving raids on hundreds of brothels and massage parlours unearth and deport a mere 88 foreigners considered to be trafficked?

A woman from an organization that rescues and resettles the tiny numbers of ‘trafficked women’ caught in UK brothels comes on. She explains how her service helps trafficked women, which is to make deportation more palatable, primarily by convincing women that they were being exploited and didn’t deserve it. There is no place in the discourse for the migrant sex worker. Millions of sex workers from developing countries who want to migrate to one of the wealthiest countries on earth are deemed simply not to exist.

The politicians drift promiscuously between talk of eliminating trafficking and eliminating prostitution. Even the presenter of BBC Radio’s Women’s...
Hour becomes openly perplexed by the incoherent argument before her. Eventually, at her behest, they declare that prostitution and trafficking are one and the same because ‘no woman voluntarily sells sex’. So the 80 per cent estimate is actually rubbish, let’s just say 100 per cent of sex workers are trafficked. The complex and varied drivers of human mobility – managed migration, people smuggling, debt bondage, the pull of adventure and aspirations or geopolitical and technological changes – do not come into the conversation. Nor do male and transgender sex workers.

I mull over the assertion that 80 per cent of women selling sex in the UK are trafficked; that is, in a state of slavery and not consenting to the sex. This means that a lot of the ordinary men who buy sex in flats in thousands of suburban streets throughout the country are in fact rapists. Do people believe this? Have early feminist assertions that all men are rapists really become that commonly accepted?

Although I have had a bird’s eye view of the appalling behaviour of men throughout many years of working with female sex workers, I am bothered increasingly by the reduction of women to duped innocents and men to abusers. The storyline and character development of this binary morality tale doesn’t match the complex world of men, transgenders and women who buy, sell, trade or broker sexual services. It doesn’t match descriptions of clients, lovers, sons, pimps or traffickers I have heard from hundreds of sex workers over the decades. That this gender analysis is driving entirely new approaches to sex work, including the criminalization of buying sex, illustrates that understandings of masculinity and men’s sexuality are important in relation to sex work.

Doezema (2000) suggests that the duped innocent is an enduring myth that periodically reappears to prop up conservative authoritarian policies and laws. In her analysis, the contemporary trafficking discourse is a re-run of the mythology of the white slave trade of the early twentieth century. A glance at the language and basic tenets of the modern ‘fight against trafficking’ certainly throws up immediate parallels. Whatever cultural and political drivers are combining to create the current obsession with saving women who sell sex from clients and pimps, they depend on acceptance of a particular version of male sexuality.

A modified version of the Swedish model came close to making its way into UK law and policy under the previous Labour administration. It was proposed to outlaw, not buying sex per se, but buying it from a prostitute who is coerced. The impact of all this on female sex workers is much discussed, but there is less comment about masculinity and male sexuality in contemporary discourses on commercial sex. This is my focus in this chapter. Here
I discuss the role and meaning of sexuality in the male characters in the sex work story and analyse the notional elimination of entire categories of actual men with whom sex workers interact – the reasonable client, the male sex worker, the fair boss, the client who does not want sex with a non-consenting woman. I argue that misguided understandings of men, masculinity and sexuality underpin the recasting of female sex workers as slaves and victims, which both drives repressive policy and furthers hetero-normative and oppressive accounts of masculinity.

The client

In most countries, criminal laws and police actions govern commercial sex, primarily by criminalizing those who sell sex or those who manage or facilitate commercial sex. Until recently there have been few examples of the criminalization of buying sex. Clients have variously been ‘excused’ as acting on essential sexual needs, pathologized as misguided and confused, or even pitied (often caricatured as middle-aged, overweight and ‘ugly’) for having to pay for sex.

However, Sweden was the first country to have made buying sex a criminal offence. The Swedish position associates sex work with male violence against women and children, and as a form of exploitation that needs to be eradicated if gender equality is to be achieved (de Santis, 2004). The UK is among several other countries – they include Norway, Korea, Canada, India, Italy, Bulgaria and Finland – that have enacted or are considering similar laws.

Sex workers from Sweden and elsewhere have spoken out against ‘demand reduction’ laws or the criminalization of clients. Sex workers in India have argued strongly that the proposed change to the Indian prostitution law (ITPA Sections 2 and 5) will, if passed, both undermine HIV prevention and obstruct their attempts to organize and empower themselves to resist HIV, discrimination and violence.

The International Union of Sex Workers and their supporters, including the International Network of Sex Work Projects, called on Sweden to abandon this approach, and on other countries to reject it, at the EUROPAP/ENMP Conference in the UK in 2002. In their view the model is counterproductive and inhumane; it increases levels of violence and the vulnerability of sex workers, while violating their basic human rights and those of their clients. Leading Swedish campaigner for the criminalization of buying sex, Sven-Axel Månsson (n.d.) describes the controversy the law has generated and makes the case that forcing clients to confront the social and human implications of their actions (that are presumed to be negative) is a key
component of the campaign to abolish commercial sex and therefore sexual exploitation. Månsson offers accounts of men’s motivations for buying sex and none of them are good: to fulfil a ‘dirty whore fantasy’; to access kinds of sex not performed by women they respect; because they can’t get free sex; because they see sex as a commodity; and to express strong regressive and anti-feminist attitudes linked to the loss of male supremacy caused by the extension of equal rights to women.

Sweden’s attempt to do away with the ‘world’s oldest profession’ through making criminal the buying of sexual services has been met by ridicule, but also by the dismay of those who argue for the acceptance of prostitution as work and for commercial sex as a legitimate industrial sector of society. However, those who view prostitution as an expression of men’s sexual exploitation and violence against women greeted the law as a major breakthrough. While Månsson locates blame with men, he does leave a space for rehabilitation and for a turn to masculinity and heterosexuality that are non-violent in his terms. But these terms entail levels of gender equality rarely seen or dreamt of outside certain sections of some Western middle classes. They also embrace essentialist notions of when sex is ‘good’ and when it is ‘bad’. Criminalization of ‘bad sex’, then, is a stopgap measure to protect women from bad sex until these happy conditions are available to all – presumably as a result of a feminist welfare state.

For others the idea that men buying sex from women is violence relies on a construction of sex and/or heterosexuality characterized by power relations that are so inherently unequal as to render the least powerful party without agency at all, and therefore unable to consent to commercial sex – or, according to some, even to heterosexual sex. In a 2008 article in the UK’s liberal newspaper, The Guardian, Julie Bindel (2008) describes one such campaigner, Sheila Jeffreys, as holding ‘a firm belief that men maintain power over women by the act of sexual intercourse, and that heterosexuality is therefore bad for women’. According to Bindel, ‘this belief is reflected in Jeffreys’s book The Industrial Vagina, in her description of marriage as a type of prostitution; a legal transaction that has traditionally guaranteed sexual access to women’s bodies in return for subsistence’. She cites Jeffreys: “Prostitution and marriage have always been related….. What is shocking is that today marriage is becoming more fashionable amongst some young women” (Bindel, 2008).

For Janice Raymond there are virtually no limits to just how bad sex can, and does, get. She says ‘the sexual service provided in prostitution is most often violent, degrading and abusive sexual acts, including sex between a buyer and several women; slashing the woman with razor blades, tying women to
bedposts and lashing them till they bleed; biting women's breasts, burning the
women with cigarettes, cutting her arms, legs and genital areas; and urinating
or defecating on women' (2004: 1175).

Masculinity out of control – clients as rapists, and pimps as slave traders
– are themes that appear when Mark P. Lagon, the director of the US Office
to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, talks about his work:

[I]t is repulsive that hundreds of johns – the sex buyers who constitute demand
– who rape [girls] walk away. Where once victims discovered by police were jailed
and forcibly deported, today, far more victims are treated with care, allowing them
to become survivors of this traumatic crime.¹

New York Times columnist Bob Herbert describes victims, and importantly
those who victimize them, in stark terms when he writes:

They are the prey in the predatory world of pimps, johns and perverts that goes by
the euphemism: adult entertainment. As we rightly focus on victims, we must also
confront the demand and those causal actors who perpetuate the exploitation.²

But what do sex workers say about the sexuality of their clients? In my
experience, female sex workers typically portray both the men who pay them
and the services they provide as diverse. Accounts of clients and sex are more
sympathetic than the lurid accounts by Melissa Farley, Donna Hughes and
others, and probably more charitable to men than most of us would expect.³

One of the few documents available that addresses sexuality and sex work is
a 2006 edition of Namaskar, the newsletter of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya
Committee (DMSC) sex workers’ organization in Kolkata. It echoes the voices
and the kinds of poignantly similar stories I hear female and transgender sex
workers everywhere tell about their sexual, emotional, economic and practical
relationships with clients as well as husbands, boyfriends, regular and casual
lovers. (Spookily similar in some cases – who would have thought that Kolkata
rickshaw drivers would pay to be tied up or spanked just like upper class
British judges?)

How do these stories depart from the accounts of academics, gender
specialists and public health agencies? Perhaps most noticeable is that women
who sell ‘sex’ describe a complex mix of activities, services, tastes and
motivations that lead to an enormous range of paid interactions. These
certainly include violence and exploitation, but reach far beyond it too. Many
of those interactions are non-penetrative or even completely non-sexual
services, and many have real emotional content. Some services involve skills,
compassion and commitment and some are strongly defended as therapeutic
and humanizing. The range of interactions is too wide to defy reduction to
'sex work', or any other single label. From the sex workers’ point of view
there are good and bad clients and boyfriends, male and female brothel owners, and family members. Sex workers assign blame for violence to the actual perpetrators and to lack of rights rather than notional categories of abusers or ‘prostitution’ itself. That might be why sex workers don’t usually join the blanket condemnation of clients and other men in their lives.

Another striking aspect of the Kolkata newsletter is the explicit language about sex and the sex workers’ accounts of pleasure, which are illustrated with examples. These leap out at the reader for their portrayal of emotional and sexual literacy and agency in women who are usually viewed exclusively in terms of their poverty and vulnerability. A third interesting challenge from the Kolkata women is how they locate sexual exploitation in relation to sex work. Several challenge the almost universally accepted belief that women are vulnerable in sex work and emancipated by wage earning in ‘decent’ work and protected by marriage.

It strikes me as odd that, contrary to the generally accepted account of why men buy sex, sex workers rarely include the idea that men have a biological programmed need for sex, including short and brutish sex. Sex workers agree with Månsson and the abolitionist feminists that there is something more than biologically driven desire going on when a man buys sex. But for sex workers biological determinism isn’t an excuse for the brutishness of bad clients. Sex workers’ portrayal of men’s emotional and sexual diversity and their defence of clients as human and sexual beings is persuasive. Good clients are those whose expectations and performance complement a sex worker’s own.

The sex worker

Although men and transgenders sell sex pretty much everywhere, and there are some places where more men than women sell sex, the conventional focus is on women and girls who sell sex to men. The sex worker’s femininity may mark her out for an innocent role in the discourses surrounding her. She is more easily cast than her male counterpart as exploited and devoid of power or significant autonomous agency. She is often very keen to confirm this assessment by affirming that she would prefer a traditional gender role, that she would not be selling sex if there were another option. Men are assumed to be powerful, to have autonomy and to be held responsible in their social and sexual relations. Men selling sex does not seem to fit into this script and fewer men say they are forced by circumstances to sell sex. Though selling sex is considered effeminate, it nevertheless rattles these simple scripts for explaining the commercial sex sector as a tale of (male) exploiters and (female) innocent victims.
Male sex workers pose a challenge to gender analysis of sex work. The problem of locating them has often been addressed by feminist writers by casting them as a kind of honorary woman, a body feminized by the combined forces of homophobia and whore phobia. Others have suggested that the dynamics of male/male (and possibly male/transgender) commercial sexual transaction are significantly different to the male/female transaction because it takes place between people who are equal, or at least equal in gender terms.

Recently, a significant shift has occurred in the gendering of language around sex work. The category ‘male sex worker’ is slowly but surely being eliminated. Male sex workers have been subsumed into the epidemiological category ‘men who have sex with men’. Few projects are funded to provide services to male sex workers these days. USAID and UNAIDS have removed male sex workers from their lists of Most at Risk Populations. Even references to male sex workers in policy documents and epidemiological studies have become scarce. By halfway through the first screen on an internet search of ‘male prostitution’ or ‘male sex work’ the publications are a decade old. Not only does re-labelling male sex workers ‘MSM’ eliminate male sex workers’ claims for labour rights, it recasts sex work as an exclusively female activity, feminized in specific terms, concordant with an essentialist binary view of a patriarchal oppressive gender – in other word a ‘gender issue’. Obviously it also invisibilizes men that sell sex and their female clients.

In turn the debates of the day on trafficking and slavery are framed exclusively around the female sex worker. Selling sex has to be a feminine activity in order to be juxtaposed with pimping or exploiting, which are conceptualized as exclusively male activities, regardless of the gender of actual perpetrator. Female sex workers claiming agency have been dismissed by abolitionists as a minority, as agents of pimps or as suffering false consciousness (Sonderland, 2005: 74). But transgender and male sex workers’ claims of agency cannot be so easily dismissed. Just as sex workers’ claims of agency threaten the view and position that to buy sex is an act of gender-based violence, so does the fact that sex is also sold by men and transgenders. This has made elimination of the male sex worker a key element in locating sex work as a form of gender violence.6

The pimp

While historically the client has remained mostly invisible and only relatively recently made any significant appearances in law and policy on prostitution, male roles have always been strongly referenced in discussions about
prostitution, usually embodied as the ‘pimp’ of one kind or another; and typically cast as the villains, inherently bad.

Modern accounts of the trafficker differ only in the minutiae from the exploiter and deceiver of past moral panics. But so too the deification and elevation of the flash pimp, usually foreign, black or both, as sexual outlaw and symbolic villain of literature, film, ethnography and even religion (there is a pimp deity in some Afro-Brazilian religions). This pimp of the imagination – the African-American ‘pimp’ resplendent in bling and white fur – exists simultaneously in reality, in mythology and increasingly in popular culture. In his role as a symbol in the popular imaginations of feminists and teenage boys alike, the pimp throws up some of the most puzzling and anxiety-inducing questions about gender relations.

US Ambassador on Human Trafficking, Mark Lagon, expressed this anxiety at a rally against a television network that screened a drama set in a brothel:

“To emancipate those enslaved in prostitution, rented over and over to johns and paedophiles (sic), as a nation, we must decide that it is not OK to buy a body – buy a fellow human being – for 30 minutes. Sadly our pop culture, which is exported around the world, glamorizes the role of the pimp. We need only turn on the television, or the radio and we will doubtless face an onslaught, both in subtle messaging and explicit language, which elevates the culture of pimps. Take for example MTV’s Pimp My Ride or the rapper Nelly’s Pimp Juice, an energy drink which is advertised as being for all those who know ‘pimp’n ain’t easy’. The result of this messaging is insidious and devastating – to put it bluntly, most pimps are in fact sex traffickers under federal law, using force, fraud, and coercion to profit from commercial sexual exploitation. The normalization of this criminal behavior carries with it larger implications for how society views women, their worth, and what it teaches today’s boys and tomorrow’s men about what is acceptable behaviour.\(^7\)

In his inaugural speech as chair of the inter-agency anti-trafficking group, Ambassador Lagon pledged to encourage domestic agencies and public–private partnerships to influence American popular culture:

“It’s high time we treat pimps as exploiters rather than hip urban rebels. When a pimp insists his name or symbol be tattooed on his ‘girls’, he is branding them like cattle, dehumanizing them, treating them like property.\(^8\)”

That Mr Lagon thinks that pimps need to insist on the tattooing tells us that he has no knowledge of the terrain. The tattooing is of course initiated by the women. If pimp worship is denied and replaced with notions of victimhood that have no basis in reality we could be missing some important information. Is it an expression by young women and men of rejecting normative gender
rules in favour of transgressive sexuality and masculinity? Certainly it finds favour among boys, for whom the question of why ‘the bad guy always gets the girl’ is a pressing matter.

In the real world, the current invention of pimp as ‘trafficker’ is variously applied to brothel managers, people smugglers, sex workers’ husbands and boyfriends, taxi drivers, bar staff and other sex workers. The trafficker in all these configurations is viewed through the lens of the mythologized foreign, hypersexual, duper of innocents. But is it that straightforward? Are women that easily duped? We need to measure the extent to which the reality and stereotype overlap, but we lack tools for this. There is no clear idea or agreed definition of the pimp. The Wikipedia account focuses with some confidence on the function of finding clients, managing prostitutes and providing protection:

pimp (also called fleshmonger or panderer) finds and manages clients for prostitutes and engages them in prostitution (in brothels in most cases and some cases street prostitution) in order to profit from their earnings. Typically, a pimp will not force prostitutes to stay with him, although some have been known to be abusive in order to keep their prostitutes submissive or to maximize profits. A pimp may also offer to protect his prostitutes from rival pimps and prostitutes, or from abusive clients.

All of these business functions are accepted in other capitalist contexts. Condemnation of the pimp on this account must depend either upon the product being inherently illegal or unethical – such as illicitly extracted human organs or counterfeit medications – or that the working conditions he offers or goods and services he peddles are substandard. In the second (Wikipedia) account, he is a bad capitalist, like a sweatshop operator underpaying workers. If we accept that sex work is work, the first (stereotypical) account is wrong. If it is work, the second idea is acceptable because it both offers recognition of the labour context, and possible strategies for improving sex workers’ lot.

In a third account, the pimp doesn’t participate in the business at all; rather he is the lazy, unemployed, perhaps substance-abusing/dependent, partner of a female sex worker. In this case we need to question why the sex workers’ ‘useless’ partner is delineated from his fellow travellers whose women support him by working as a housemaid or garment worker. Perhaps this ‘pimp’ is a professional cuckold. Interestingly, the pimp as capturer and user of slaves does not feature in the Wikipedia entry, yet it attributes female sex workers with agency and even categorizes pimping as work. The entry, like the concept, is fuzzy on the issue of gender. No matter how and why pimping is bad, it is usually considered a male activity, a function of masculinity linked
to the domination of women. For this reason pimping is gendered, as the language about the male and female manager of prostitutes shows:

Most people who work managing prostitutes are men, but some women work in this capacity as well, though rarely in street prostitution. Women are rarely called pimps, as the word implies male dominance – a woman who manages prostitutes is generally called a mamasan or a madam.¹⁰

There are suggestions that while the flesh-and-blood pimp damages some actual victims, perhaps greater harm is done by the process of protecting potential victims from the notional pimp. The modern ‘trafficker’ is at the same time the organized crime figure, the ‘traditional’ sex venue operator, and may even skate close to being a terrorist. But those jailed for trafficking under a new anti-trafficking law in Cambodia are more likely to be an older woman whose declining ‘career’ in the sex industry has included selling sex for an ever-decreasing price, minding younger sex workers’ children and other work in and around brothels. In this sense, the notional pimp/trafficker may be a diversion from serious consideration of how commercial sex and migration are managed in contexts that include substance use, structural discrimination in labour markets and domestic life, violence, poverty, low wages, corruption, neglect of human rights by states and state-sponsored violence.

Conclusions

So what does all this mean for gender, men and masculinity? What construction and understanding of male sexuality goes with the idea that 80 per cent of women selling sex in the UK are trafficked (that is, live in a state of slavery and abduction)? As I suggested at the beginning of this article, technically this would make rapists of the vast numbers of ordinary working men who buy sex in suburban flats throughout the UK. Where do the enormous numbers of consenting female and male sex workers and female sex business managers fit into this picture of foreign captives and captors? A glance at the language and basic tenets of the modern ‘fight against trafficking’ certainly throws up immediate parallels. It all fits rather nicely with notions of heroes and villains, of women as innocent and vulnerable to exploitation or moral pollution, of ‘real men’ as simple and two-dimensionally straight or bent, though not in any sexually ambiguous sense (heaven forbid!) – in short, as good, bad or simply ugly.

The prostitute must, as if by definition, be female in these constructions. The male and transgender prostitute made a brief appearance in mainstream culture in the first decade of the HIV pandemic, but their reclassification as
MSM has restored the gender-specific meaning to ‘sex worker’. The social position being constructed in relation to an insatiable brute male (hetero-)sexuality demands a vulnerable and feminized tragic victim figure to be saved or forsaken, but – either way – one lacking any significant agency or power. To the extent that she may embody any independent volition and agency, the ‘victim/whore dichotomy’ performs a subtly disciplinary ideology, offering women an ‘out’ through claiming victimhood (against a notional promise of taking the exit to good). Identifiable ‘men’ who sell sex, redefined as MSM, are seen as acting out of free choice or at least choices linked to their homosexuality. So the adult male sex worker is rendered invisible lest his masculinity undermine the notion of the victim prostitute.

Popular narratives around the ‘pimp’ squarely cast him as ‘bad’, dark-skinned, foreign, dangerous and normally embroiled in some terror-narco-trafficking nexus. Here, the concepts of prostitution, trafficking and criminality get effortlessly conflated to frame this ‘wanted man’. Ironically, this ultimate villain for the moral majority is simultaneously elevated and idolized as a symbolic anti-establishment hero by young men in Western cultures and beyond, and especially by boys growing into men marginalized in the scissor movement of exclusions along the sharpest intersections of race and class. The same characteristics which make the ‘badass pimp’ a youth icon – dissidence, deviance, access to and influence over beautiful women – also adorn mainstream narratives in which the pimp symbolizes the oppression of women through a black underclass criminality. This conveniently displaces the oppression of women ‘downstream’ to the socially undesirable, to out-of-control men rapping about ‘bitches and ho’s’. Perception is consequently and simultaneously deflected away from the pervasive normative structure of patriarchal disciplinary ideologies.

Last but not least, in the line-up of the cast: the demonizing narratives of the client – universally assumed to be male – perform a further subtle function in efforts to keep erect these constructs of the heterosexual gender-binary norm. They do so by diagnosing, demonizing and criminalizing men’s purchase of sex as pathological and ugly. Sex is central to constructing gender yet mostly unspoken in the discourses of oppressive gender orders. If not totally unspoken, it is unrecognizably recited in the reverse (rather like subliminal supernatural messages encrypted in the groovy vinyl texture of pop culture). Defining commercial sex as ‘bad sex’ instantaneously brings along hordes of worshippers for whom ‘sex is just bad’, full stop.

These scripts and narratives are broadly anti-sex, opposing sexual diversity, and denying men – as well as their presumed female partners – any positive sexuality, let alone any diverse expressions of it. The dominant narratives of
men and masculinity in sex work contain a pervasive gender-binary anti-sex normativity, which both rests on and reinforces oppressive major patriarchal gender orders (such as the US corporate masculine hegemony or the gendered power structures of world religions), which have fallen into bed with certain confused and corrupt gender ideologies, including some supposed feminist ones. Ironically, such feminists’ espousal of anti-sex ideologies serve to shore up rather than challenge patriarchal orders, because they maintain a rigid gender binary that is central to gender oppression.

The reality is that sex workers (whether female or male) have little to gain from attempts to stop the buying of sex, whether by coercion or ‘education’. Indeed, they have a lot more to lose as the trade gets pushed underground. Those engaged in working with men and masculinities who join the anti-prostitution lobbies of the political right that surged during the years of the Bush administration are doing little to help sex workers in their struggles for rights and safer, healthier working conditions. And yet, to the extent that parts of the field may develop a more affirmative approach to men’s sexuality as well as a more critical approach to the ideal of masculinity itself, important political alliances could well be built.

A shared concern with many men (and women) working on masculinities is that of challenging oppressive forms, norms and expectations of masculinity for men. A shared concern with many feminists is the realization of equal human rights for all women and a related common cause is to challenge oppressive patriarchal power structures of the state. What may constrain the strengthening of such alliances may be the extent to which ideas of gender, femininities and masculinities do or do not hinge on sex (as performance rather than biology) and sexuality. More political relevance and disruptive potential might be catalyzed by critical thinkers on all sides if we were to see the repression of both sex and sexuality as necessary and fundamental to oppressive gendered inequity, and the political economy of sex as central to how the impact of intersections of class- and race-based inequities hits people who buy or sell sex.

Notes

1 In police operation Pentameter 1 (2006), 88 people were found to be trafficked. In Pentameter 2, 167 were discovered, an unstated number of whom were not in the sex industry but in domestic labour (House of Commons, Hansard, 2008).
2 Ms Gourdi Ray, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committeee (DMSC), Kolkata, personal communication.
3 Ambassador Mark P. Lagon, Director, State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, ‘United States Statement on Human Trafficking’ delivered at the UN


See for example <http://www.iast.net/ProstitutionSexTrafficking.htm> (accessed 17 October 2010).

6 The term ‘migrant sex worker’ is another such endangered term. It appears less and less, as it is increasingly replaced by ‘trafficked woman’.


References


Many men, women, boys and girls are exposed, infected and affected by HIV unequally. But the nature of those inequalities is not always as straightforward as analyses that offer a ‘gender perspective’ on the HIV epidemic would lead us to believe. Common interpretations of vulnerability in gender and development discourses and practice tend to reinforce unhelpful essentialisms about men and women, compromising our ability to think clearly about the structural influences on HIV and sexual health. The way in which ‘gender’ comes to be represented is limited to an often stereotypical binary that depicts men as predators and women as victims. Men in all their variety and complexity are almost invisible in these discourses, reduced to being represented as the problem. This chapter looks more closely at the ways in which masculinity is constructed in discourses about vulnerability in relation to HIV, and what might be gained from politicizing the way in which men and masculinities are represented. This politicization is needed to build relevant alliances for challenging specific aspects of patriarchal gender oppression, which have an impact on social justice, human rights and the epidemic alike.

As a middle-aged, Scandinavian, heterosexual, white male, I am conscious of writing this from a global position of privilege. Whilst I regularly try to question issues of patriarchal privilege and responsibilities as well as the costs of gender inequality in my personal life, I have been interested primarily in gender and sexuality in the context of the Global South for over 20 years. I engaged practically with the international response to HIV in the mid-1990s, with a focus on supporting community action on AIDS through civil society organizations. As an actor in the institutions of the international AIDS – and aid – ‘industries’, my main concern has been primarily about what to do, rather than to theorize these issues from an academic perspective. Nevertheless, most practice is underpinned by theory and one of my enduring frustrations can be
posed as a question: why are men either invisible or simply framed as ‘the problem’ in many debates on HIV? Our theories and responses have themselves sometimes been part of the problem. How can we come to understand better the relationship between gendered bodies and their contexts of structural constraints and opportunities?

This chapter starts with reflections on some aspects of past progress and constraints in engaging men in work on HIV. I then take a critical look at the concept of vulnerability itself, followed by some thoughts on threats and rights in accounts of HIV dynamics. I argue that we need not only to move the analysis from narratives about women’s and men’s ‘bodies’ to a structural analysis of people’s HIV-related vulnerability, but also to include a relational analysis of their ‘hazardousness’ which takes better account of HIV’s bi-social dynamics. In doing so, we must also dethrone certain general gender and development stereotypes and identify key intersections of inequity and power dynamics at the margins, between (or beyond) familiar gender and development constructs.

‘Engaging men’ in gender and HIV: progress and limitations

The construction of ‘risk groups’ in North America during the early 1980s crystallized in the naming of ‘the four Hs’ – Homosexuals, Hookers, Heroin addicts and Haitians. In the initial ‘fight against AIDS’ we were warned that we were dealing with ‘social deviants’, bad blood and immoral, dangerous people of African descent (with some implied uncontrollable sexual proclivity). Various contestations around these constructions eventually shifted the focus onto ‘risk behaviours’, but the initial risk groups were essentially redefined by proxy reference to behavioural characteristics, such as ‘men who have sex with men’, injecting drug users or sex workers. Another outcome of the shift to behaviour during the 1980s and early 1990s was AIDS awareness campaigns for general populations, which were based on ‘gender-neutral’ rational choice theories of behaviour of abstract individuals (FHI, 1996). These campaigns sometimes incorporated prevailing gender ideologies in their awareness or behaviour change messages, but in practice they were largely ineffectual in shifting any deeper attitudes or behaviours, other than boosting certain stigmatizing ones.

With the proliferation of gender and HIV work in the context of development in the 1990s, the focus began to shift beyond abstract individuals or even simply risk behaviour. Geographic communities and – typically – heterosexual couples became the unit of analysis, whilst the central framing of the core problem often became ‘vulnerability’ rather than simply
‘risk’ (Edström et al., 2002; Edström, 2010). In the process, a subtly normative narrative about gender often became the basis for explaining a ‘feminization of the epidemic’ and vulnerability to infection as determined strongly by women’s disempowerment and men’s power within heterosexual couples. Many found it difficult to engage men effectively in HIV prevention programmes framed in such narratives, despite progress in involving men in the reproductive health field at the time. For example, Rivers and Aggleton (2002) drew on research from projects with young people in 17 countries and found that young men’s sexual and reproductive health needs were often neglected and that there was considerable opposition to work with young men, as well as insufficient reflection on attitudes and gender ideologies. More broadly, the fact that gender is relational – to other gendered identities as well as contexts – was not being taken seriously enough either in gender work on women’s rights or in much of the masculinities literature (Cornwall and White, 2000).

The growth of research on masculinities in the 1980s and 1990s, and mounting frustration among certain actors in HIV and gender work about the invisibility (or demonization) of men, led to various efforts to address men and masculinities in HIV more systematically. The emergence of the male involvement discourse at the Cairo and Beijing conferences, its related gradual growth in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) work and the World AIDS Day campaign of 2000, emphasizing that ‘men make a difference’, were are all significant milestones in this shift. At a very practical level Stepping Stones (Welbourn, 1995) became a highly influential methodology, used and adapted by many across the world, and work based on participation by both women and men came to be seen as the pathway to transforming realities in sexual and reproductive well-being (Cornwall and Welbourn, 2002).

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance supported many programmes for soldiers, truckers and various male occupational groups, which showed signs of progress, particularly in terms of ‘how to reach’ diverse groups of men and how to work on transforming attitudes and locally specific contextual obstacles or constraints (Sellers et al., 2002; International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2003). Other programmes on ‘men as partners’ in Africa and Latin America focused on male responsibility and challenging machismo in sex and family life (Peacock, 2002). More recent research on a few programmes employing similar transformative group education techniques in Brazil and South Africa have been evaluated more systematically, and often shown to be successful in shifting attitudes and behaviours through peer-group reflection on norms, attitudes and ideologies (Pulerwitz et al., 2006; Jewkes et al., 2007). However,
the shift beyond ‘the personal’ to addressing structural contexts often remains limited.

Less recognized is that some of the more promising experiences with addressing structural contexts come from programmes more closely associated with the ‘old risk groups’. Connell and Messerschmidt point out:

The idea of a hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of homosexual men’s experience with violence and prejudice from straight men. . . . Theorists developed increasingly sophisticated accounts of gay men’s ambivalent relationships to patriarchy and conventional masculinity. (2005: 831)

Programming for gay men and other men who have sex with men has come a long way in both Asia and Latin America, if less so in Africa. Whilst generally kept separate from ‘gender work with men’ by the international AIDS or reproductive health bureaucracies, these developments often challenge binary gender constructs as originating in hetero-normative colonial laws and morally or religiously conservative traditions of social organization.

Gender narratives have failed to incorporate a politicized understanding of and response to the links between men, gender, power and HIV. This is because the way in which men are represented reproduces some of what it is attempting to challenge, leaving little room for thinking about negotiations of power and agency. This failure is also about an abstraction of gender from other relations of power, a lack of a broader structural analysis of privilege and oppression. If one looks more closely at the way in which the gender binary is represented within, and comes to structure these narratives, further issues arise.

Gender ‘di-vision’: a binary divide obscuring a complex and diverse reality

To a large extent much practical work with men on sex and HIV has striven to relate the ‘man problem’ to women within an ideal notion of gender equality. Whilst struggling to relate with critical feminist or queer theoretical analyses of hierarchy, power and inequity, this work has tended to work with and within a constructed and oppressive gender binary. How often do we stop and reflect on the implicit subtexts to the familiar gender dichotomies in HIV, sexual health and development? Some key examples include: men’s promiscuity vs women’s faithfulness; men’s violence vs women’s victimization; or men’s (ir)responsibility vs women’s rights. It is useful to stop and ask: ‘What can such reductions into binary gender divisions do to our analysis?’ The violence these simplistic binaries do in our approach to HIV arises from their occluding our understanding of how intricate structures of masculinity and
gendered inequities translate into diverse material risks or crises for different women and men.

Take, for example, the narrative of men’s promiscuity set against women’s faithfulness. Analyses of Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data from a broad range of African countries put this into question (de Walque, 2006; Mascolini, 2007). Mascolini (2007), for example, finds that in four of 11 countries studied, women were the infected partner in a majority of ‘discordant’ (where only one of the two partners is HIV-infected) couples. The possibility that extramarital sexual activity among women cohabiting with male spouses may be as substantial a source of vulnerability to HIV as male marital infidelity is barely possible to accommodate within existing gender narratives. But what happens if we recognize that multiple sexual relations may be as common to women? Do these women then come to be seen as ‘bad women’? Or as poor women simply ‘pushed’ into multiple relationships with different men? Or could it be that some women are as resourceful, opportunistic, empowered or – indeed – promiscuous as many men? The mismatch between the received wisdoms about what is expected as ‘manly’ or ‘womanly’ and these divergent epidemiological outcomes may fit well with Silberschmidt’s analysis (this volume) of many disenfranchised men’s crisis of masculinity in parts of Africa.

A more contentious issue yet is male sexual violence against women. Men commit far more acts of violence than women, and in some contexts, such as parts of South Africa and in conflict situations such as presently prevail in the Democratic Republic of Congo, there has been a worrying institutionalization of sexual violence against women. But many men are not violent. And many victims of violence are also men. Men are also vulnerable to sexual violence, but overwhelmingly from other men. Yet these experiences of men being on the receiving end of violence find little attention in current discourses. This is arguably because these experiences simply fail to fit with conventional representations of gender-based sexual violence (Dolan, this volume). Whilst it would be misguided to fall into the trap of false equivalence – women are overwhelmingly represented amongst those who experience sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, and it is important not to detract from the urgency of addressing the systemic issues at the root of this – challenging the binary essentialized construction of violence and vulnerability can help us focus on the structural sources of sexual violence as indeed gender-based: but based in the gendered power structures of masculinities and in practices of patriarchy, rather than encoded as essential qualities of our gendered bodies.
Vulnerabilities, threats, masculinities and risk

Binaries have a tendency to reduce analysis to one side of a binary divide. Further, they tend to ‘stick’ almost automatically to other binaries. Just as ‘women’ have remained the focus in gender, ‘vulnerability’ has remained the main focus in development and HIV. Whilst the term ‘vulnerability’ is often used in different and sometimes confounded senses in the literature (Edström, 2007; Bloom et al., 2007), it has come to be associated with both passivity and femininity.\(^2\) It is true that men’s risk of infection or exposure is increasingly recognized as vulnerability, if not as readily as in the case of women. Men’s vulnerabilities to ill-health and care seeking have attracted far less concern than women’s in HIV work, although some has emerged. The idea that a person’s (or group’s) vulnerability is relational to context or structural inequities is not itself controversial.\(^3\) However, with an abstract idea of ‘context relativity’ the notion easily suggests a passive and deterministic understanding of vulnerable people (Scoones et al., 2007). The focus on vulnerability alone in analysis of the gender and HIV nexus misses the significant point that transmission is relational between bodies and takes place in contexts of complex bio-social dynamics. Whilst the idea invites attention to context and structural drivers, it fails to capture intention, agency and dynamics between people as well as how those interactions are limited and shaped by structural contexts.

Vulnerability only exists in the face of a real potential threat, which generates risks. In vulnerability to HIV, that is a threat brought by somebody else; some body. The basic equation is: risk = threat + vulnerability. However, three challenges arise. First, the hazardous party in a relational HIV risk situation is very often unaware of the threat s/he may pose. Second, s/he was necessarily also vulnerable to infection in the first place and probably continues to be vulnerable to re-infection and various negative impacts associated with HIV or AIDS. Finally, we know from experience that labelling individuals (or groups) as threats, or ‘risk groups’, has made effective responses more difficult, as individuals human rights can get compromised with this focus. However, this latter challenge does not mean that we should not attempt to understand the structural influences on people involved at both ends of viral transmission. As with vulnerability, there are internal and personal aspects to the hazardousness of infected partners (such as viral load, mental condition, desires), along with relational and behavioural aspects (such as numbers of sexual partners, practice of dry or anal sex) and structural contributing factors (such as drug taking and sexual cultures, socio-economic inequities, stigma, homophobia, patriarchal oppression). If the structural
drivers of vulnerability are important to the progress of HIV epidemics, the drivers of hazardousness are equally or more so. Or, as both vulnerabilities and hazards are so diverse and opaque for specific individuals, what may matter most are the structures of inequity which give rise to the specifically risky constellations of relationships and specific behaviours.

Although the notion of male vulnerability is becoming more commonplace, the way it is framed often fails to take account of this relationship between structural inequalities and agency, which in turn tends to lead to fairly apolitical approaches to changing men as individuals. The problem with using vulnerability in dealing with men and masculinities in HIV is not so much one of showing that men are also vulnerable, nor that its connotations can emasculate men, but rather that it forces the analysis back to individuals and their bodies at the expense of power relations, structures and dynamics beyond the personal. In doing so, it both reinforces an equation between masculinities and men (or male bodies) and it typically also tends to get used in ‘binary’ terms (even if often on one side of this binary) and fails to focus on issues of power, privilege and accountability.

Getting rights right in politicizing masculinities in HIV work

In the early days of the AIDS response, rights-based approaches to harm reduction evolved with those centrally involved in transmission, such as gay men and sex workers. As the epidemic progressed, rights to HIV treatment and greater involvement of people living with HIV and AIDS took centre stage. With development approaches to women and AIDS evolving in parallel, it is now common to talk of rights-based approaches addressing women's vulnerability to HIV and its impacts. The early focus on the most at-risk groups (essentially the most vulnerable and most hazardous) did not carry over to responses in sub-Saharan Africa, where we have laboured for decades under the misapprehension that these groups were not epidemiologically significant (a colossal assumption increasingly challenged by recent evidence).

Rights talk in relation to gender, sexuality and HIV, meanwhile, gradually slipped into a conveniently gendered separation and a focus on the rights of vulnerable women as being under threat from irresponsible and over-sexed men. Whilst men’s unmet sexual and reproductive health needs have become more recognized in relation to heterosexual relations and fatherhood, men and their SRH needs have only recently been considered ‘in their own right’ and are not even mentioned in the Millennium Development goals (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2003). In many ways the recent dominant rights debates in HIV (both rights to treatment and women’s rights) have become
institutionalized and domesticated within the international HIV and development bureaucracies and acceptable to local governments and global power structures alike, in an era of ‘sexual conservativism’ and skilfully manipulated jingoistic fears over cultural pollution.

This approach suffers from the same epidemiological ignorance and binary view of gender already discussed. In reality, those most vulnerable (to infection) become infected first, irrespective of gender and many amongst them are men (about 50 per cent of all HIV-positive people, globally) and often also marginalized – but, as drug users, gay or bisexual men, male prostitutes or prisoners rather than ‘straight men’ in steady relationships. Amongst women, those who sell sex tend to become affected first and are in many ways most vulnerable, but they are rarely the women in focus in an approach to HIV based on women’s rights. Alternatively, when they are, they tend to get framed as helpless victims of patriarchy in need of rescue.

Human rights challenge systemic features of inequity and hold strong potentials for mobilizing those most affected by structural injustice. This remains the most valuable lesson in the quarter of a century of our living with HIV. Consistently it has been the mobilization of those most directly affected by the onslaught of the epidemic which has led to the most effective responses. This includes the pioneering work of sexual right activists, sex workers rights advocates and HIV positive groups. An incremental realization of rights can spur on mobilization for change, where the agency and resilience of those most affected becomes the driving force. Rights can also be a powerful principle around which diverse groups can coalesce in strategic alliances (Edström, 2010). And yet the kind of superimposition of rights versus responsibilities on a binary divide of women versus men seriously compromises the potential for productive alliances.

The tendency to carve out a special niche for women’s rights as against ‘men’s responsibilities’ inadvertently reinforces the notion of responsibility and power as the ‘natural’ preserve of men, while the corresponding role of women lies in being essentially vulnerable. It fails to address the lived realities of some of the most marginalized and relevant groups in the response to HIV, partly because it tends to duck sexuality and partly because it simply reinforces the heteronormative divide essential for patriarchal oppressive power structures. With the history of gender inequity, patriarchal privileges and disproportionate impact of sexual and reproductive ill health on women, it is not surprising that men’s sexual rights remain difficult for people to conceive of in today’s climate and discourse (Greig, 2006). Nevertheless, experience and perspectives from marginalized groups engaged in responding to HIV can also become an inroad for seeing men and their sexuality – even
in relation to sex work and transactional sex – as human, diverse and potentially positive rather than essentially oppressive and pathologically abusive (Overs, this volume).

It is telling that the issues of sexual violence against gay or bisexual men, lesbians, transgenders or against female sex workers, are typically not considered key issues in debates on gender-based violence, or violence against women. In relation to the role of sexual violence in HIV transmission, these are indeed key issues. Still, the rights of some of the women most central to HIV and often most marginalized in society, women who sell sex, are typically sidelined and the issue silenced in debates on women’s rights.

**Conclusion**

Gender imbalances and injustices are far more diverse, complex and nuanced than prevailing representations of gender in narratives. The question arises: how can we build new alliances and cooperative strategies that can lead to change in our perceptions, in our analysis, in our efforts to transform the world and in ourselves? Progress requires political struggles identifying the right allies with common objectives in challenging hetero-normative gender binaries in institutions and practices of patriarchal oppression, which harm marginalized women and men alike. This demands a focus on inequity and social justice, as well as particular intersections of disadvantage and exclusion.

If HIV and AIDS have a particular potential to contribute to politicizing how men and women address gender inequity, or politicizing masculinities, it is by a broader range of sufficiently critical and progressive women and men engaging with those most affected by the epidemic to date. Will the failures to curb sexual transmission finally spur us to focus more effectively on the role of men and diverse masculinities in prevention? What of masculinities and gender in our responses to HIV treatment and care, HIV-positive people’s adherence to antiretroviral medication, or in psycho-social support? Do our common responses to impact mitigation and social protection for affected families and children reinforce rather than challenge dominant gender constructs of women as carers, nuclear families as the ‘fundamental social building block’ and fathers as ‘absent breadwinners’? Whilst better epidemiology needs to inform us in diverse specific contexts, it is the gender issues of women (and men) who sell sex and those of HIV-affected sexual minorities that hold the key to challenging both our (stereo)typical gender analyses of HIV as well as our fundamental understanding of masculinities, gender and sexuality.
Notes

1 Côte d’Ivoire and Kenya lead the percentage of female discordant infections, at 62 per cent. But even in Lesotho, where female discordant infections were lowest, they stood at 34 per cent. A significant proportion of women’s infections were found to have occurred ten or more years into the marriage.

2 Public health actors emphasize vulnerability ‘to being exposed’ or ‘infected’ (see UNAIDS, 2001; Edström et al., 2002; Bates et al., 2004; Hargreaves and Boler, 2006) while development actors and economists emphasize vulnerability ‘to the potential effects of shocks’ (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002; Gillespie and Loevinsohn, 2003; Morton, 2006).

3 Sensitivity is the embodied/internal end of vulnerability to the impacts, as stressed by several development writers (among them Bohle and Watts, 1993; Devereux, 2001). Susceptibility is the embodied/internal end of vulnerability to exposure (or infection), as opposed to other predispositions, referred to as contextual or structural vulnerabilities (Plummer et al., 2001; Bates et al., 2004; Hargreaves and Boler, 2006).

References


Part Two
Structures
Inequities, Violence, Power
Chapter Seven
Organized Powers
Masculinities, Managers and Violence

Raewyn Connell

Understanding masculinities
The research field and the question of power
Understanding masculinity is not exactly a new question. The making of masculinity in a context of modernization and divided cultural identity in Mexico was already a theme in Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* back in 1950. Powerful insights about masculinities and colonialism in India can be found in Ashis Nandy’s *The Intimate Enemy*, which in turn drew on European psychoanalytic research going back a hundred years. A considerable literature of US social-psychological research using abstracted measures of masculinity/femininity and the ‘male role’ has also existed for decades.

I started research on questions of masculinity in the early 1980s, while working with two groups of colleagues, one researching social inequality in Australian high schools, the other researching theories of gender. Both groups had learnt from feminist and gay liberation insights into power and oppression, so both groups began asking questions about gendered power relations among boys and men (Connell *et al*., 1982; Carrigan *et al*., 1985). Being a transsexual woman, who for much of her life attempted uncertainly to live as a man and whose life partner was a member of the women’s liberation movement, I had additional reason to pay attention to gender. Being an educator, I wanted to help public understanding of gender questions, and apply that knowledge in causes such as AIDS prevention – some of my friends and colleagues died in the epidemic. Being a socialist, I was concerned with the groups who hold power in society and with how power might be challenged.

This work on masculinities as power relations among boys and men, together with a life-history study of Australian masculinities in change, became
part of a new wave of research, which I call the ‘ethnographic moment’ in masculinity research. This work was something of a breakthrough, because it combined the conceptual power of the new gender analysis with sensitive empirical research techniques. Life history interviews, sample surveys, ethnography, institutional research, discourse analysis, and studies of written and visual documents combined, quite rapidly, to build up new pictures of men, boys, and social constructions of masculinity. Soon syntheses of this new knowledge became possible (Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Connell, 1995). As research circulates from more regions of the world, more comprehensive syntheses are appearing, such as the recent *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* (Kimmel et al., 2005).

This chapter addresses a new research field that is opening up, which concerns forms of gender in transnational arenas and the ways they interact with local gender orders. It has become evident we cannot analyse the way masculinities are constructed and enacted in the context of contemporary ‘globalization’ by simply scaling up the understandings of masculinity produced by the ‘ethnographic moment’, the close-focus studies typical of research on masculinities conducted in the Global North in the last three decades. Classical ethnography depended on the existence of a small-scale, tradition-bound, functioning culture. But a colonized society, as Georges Balandier (1955) emphasized, is a society in crisis. And in neo-colonial society, or in a society ravaged by civil war, or by military intervention, or by neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes, or in a mega-city marked by mass poverty and migration, there may be no settled norms to be found (Garcia Canclini, 2001).

If there is no coherent gender order, we have to think in new ways about how men and women improvise their gender arrangements and practices, across what kinds of fissures or gaps, and under what kinds of stresses. Margrethe Silberschmidt’s (2004) thoughtful discussion of male sexuality, violence and HIV/AIDS in East Africa pictures a gender order disrupted by colonialism and its aftermath, in which men commonly believe they should be heads of household but do not usually have the economic resources to do the job. Masculinity is in question at the most existential level, and the responses to this disruption are often those that sharply increase the risk of HIV infection.

There is another side to this. The world of structural adjustment programmes and military interventions is also a world of organized powers. Transnational corporations (TNCs), global capital markets, multinational agencies, superpower security forces, and international media are key features of the world we live in. This newly expanded system of transnational
institutions is gendered – in fact, strongly gendered. Among the evidence: gender-segregated TNC labour forces in workplaces such as export processing zones; the almost total dominance of men at the top levels of TNC management, military control, the arms trade, and international organizations such as the World Bank; the masculinization of capital market trading floors and business media; the sexualization of women in global mass media; the internationalization of the sex trade; the gender segregation of the international sports industries (Hooper, 2001; Acker, 2004).

These institutions need not reproduce exactly the gender patterns that existed anywhere before. There are certainly new large-scale gender divisions of labour (in maquiladoras, transnational mining and timber industries, etcetera). There is some evidence of new patterns of managerial masculinity emerging in transnational business (Connell and Wood, 2005). In a study of the masculine subjectivities competing in the Cochabamba ‘water wars’ in Bolivia, Nina Laurie (2005) emphasizes the incomplete and contestable nature of neo-liberal globalization projects and discourses; new masculine (and feminine) identities are able to appear or old ones are reworked.

I want to focus attention in this chapter on a group of men who are vitally involved in the HIV epidemic, though as far as I know their prevalence rate is quite low: first-world corporate managers and financiers. In doing so, I focus on the gender dimensions of the powerful, but indirect, ways in which those men engaged in global business shape the epidemic and its consequences. I use this to reflect on the implications for thinking about masculinity in an era of globalization.

Corporate masculinity and the epidemic

Anti-retroviral drugs were sold for years at prices that put them out of the reach of millions of people with HIV infection, especially in Africa – the continent with the highest burden of AIDS and the lowest average income. The pricing of drugs involved decisions by rich men that involved the deaths of large numbers of poor people. Of course, that isn't the way the issue was presented in the corporate world or the Western media. It was business as usual in the pharmaceutical industry, which has a well-worn justification for charging high prices for medications – they are needed to fund drug research.

Alongside the pharmaceutical company managers are the managers of banks, finance corporations of other kinds, and the semi-government institutions that represent the ‘banking community’ in international arenas, such as the IMF and the World Bank. From the 1980s to the present, these good folk have placed massive pressure behind the construction of a neo-liberal, market-oriented regime internationally, imposing ‘re-structuring’ on
debtor economies, and driving the integration of markets, and the free movement of capital (but not people), world-wide. In this era the interests of finance capital have taken strategic priority in political decision making. Masculinity researchers, in Latin America especially, have remarked on the gender consequences of neo-liberal economic restructuring (Viveros Vigoya, 2001). There was at the same time heightened unemployment, the end of the integrationist social movements of the previous generation, and the concentration of decision making in a hidden realm of elite politics and management. In such circumstances it has been increasingly difficult for working-class men to realize familiar models of masculinity and fatherhood, or to find recognition in a more-or-less participatory, masculinized public realm. With the simultaneous cutback of social services, increasing numbers of women have had to enter the labour market and find a way to combine motherhood with paid work – with unintended consequences for family power balances.

This dynamic of change seems to be involved with the epidemic, not only in Latin America. The 2006 UNAIDS global report identifies some sites of high prevalence or rapid increase of prevalence, where mass poverty interacts with a gender tradition of masculine authority or entitlement. In regions such as Southern Africa and Melanesia, which the report names in this regard, the crucial issues may have to do not just with the existence of such traditions but specifically with their breakdown, in conditions of dislocation. Silberschmidt (2004: 53) puts it pithily: ‘The social engineering of sex in eastern Africa reflects not so much the power of men but the erosion of this power.’ The resort to force, in the shape of sexual violence or disregard for women’s safety, is probably not the first choice of many men. But it may appear justified as a resort, in the eyes of large numbers of men who feel entitled to women’s services or obedience but whose routes to economic security, community respect and social integration have been cut off.

In powerful but indirect ways, then, the actions of the managers of global business shape the epidemic and its consequences. The established patterns of decision making in corporate capitalism make the pursuit of profit at the expense of human life normal, even admirable. How does this kind of decision making come about? The people involved are not, individually, monsters. We need to understand their way of life, the pressures and incentives they face, the kind of reasoning they do.

An important part of the explanation concerns gender. The top levels of Anglo-American corporate decision making are strongly masculinized; a small number of women get there, but only by ‘managing like a man’ (Wajcman, 1998). What this means is gradually being revealed by research on corporate masculinity. I propose to illustrate this by taking a particular sector of the
vast field of global corporate management, Australian finance capital, as it is seen in a case study from my own current research.

Managerial masculinity

A case study

‘Edward’ is the manager of a financial services company, a significant subsidiary of a very large finance corporation. He is in his late thirties, ambitious, and well positioned to climb to the very top level of corporate management in the next stage of his life. No one case can be fully representative, but Edward is middle-of-the-road in most respects and I think his experience illuminates the world of finance capital very well, from a position in the global periphery.

Edward grew up in comfortable circumstances, his father being a successful professional, and he was sent to an elite, all-boys church school. Here he played a lot of sport, learnt the techniques of study, and was prepared to go to university, where he went into a male-dominated faculty, economics. He thus went through a strongly masculinized upbringing, with a conventional gender division of labour in the family. He has retained his interest in sports, and has a network of male friends, who get together every couple of weeks to ‘go and have beers, and solve the problems of the world’.

Edward was recruited into an Australian merchant bank, which was soon taken over by an aggressively expanding multinational finance company based in the global metropole. He had computer skills, and was fortunately positioned as Australian financial markets were just then being deregulated, following the neo-liberal agenda. Edward devised ways to link computer programming to the new legal structure, and his career blossomed. He moved up to be head of technical services in his company; was head-hunted to another investment firm; was head-hunted again, by the finance corporation for which he now works, which was wanting to expand into Edward’s field of expertise and brought him in to run their operation. At the time of interview he had been four years in this job.

About the time of his first move between companies, Edward married, and he and his wife soon found themselves with three young children. His wife gave up her job when the first child arrived, and has not yet gone back to paid work. Edward believes in companionate marriage and hands-on fathering, but it is plain that his wife keeps the home running. Asked if he does housework, Edward first says ‘I do everything’, but then, embarrassed, admits ‘I am obviously not there during the day.’ Basically,
he does a bit to help his wife, for instance helping with the children's dinner, baths and stories at night ‘if I am around’. He often is not. He works a ten- to twelve-hour day normally, and is often away on business trips. ‘She is a good mum, it is great,’ he says. If she has ‘some sort of career or interest’ that is OK by Edward, but the family does not depend on income from her. On the strength of Edward's earnings, they are able to send the children to expensive private schools, and live in an expensive harbourside suburb.

Edward, then, has reproduced in his own life the breadwinner/housewife model he knew in his parents’ marriage. It is a little modernized, and he feels a little guilty, but not very. Essentially, Edward's wife provides the domestic services that keep him going as a corporate actor, and creates the arena for his enactment of fatherhood. Edward is left free for the practices required of him as a manager – long hours in the workplace, travel, the mental focus on ‘leadership’. He acknowledges having a ‘pretty structured day’, but also thinks he has got ‘a pretty good work/life balance now’, a conscious change from an earlier period of his life when he worked ‘ridiculous hours’. Edward sees this balance as resulting from his own decisions; in a slightly wider perspective, we can see it as produced by his wife, a typical enough example of the way managerial masculinities are produced by women's work.

In the workplace, Edward spends most of his time negotiating with other businessmen and giving ‘guidance’ to his own ‘large team’ of staff – he has about a thousand employees in his company. He comes across as a firm but not excessively authoritarian manager, well equipped with ideas about being ‘people orientated’. He reckons he receives 150 to 200 e-mails a day. He gives attention to his parent company: ‘I spend a lot of time in head office attending meetings, and talking to people, and all that sort of stuff.’ He spends about two months of each year in travelling around Australia, to visit his branches across the country. Every year, also, he tries to attend conferences overseas, especially in the USA, and maintains an international network of fellow executives.

Corporate executives like Edward work in a fishbowl; everything they do is visible to other executives. In one of the finance companies in our study, the professional staff are monitored, in terms of their achievement of defined goals, every morning. If they have not met their objectives, they are counselled on how to ‘recover’ during the next day. Edward’s situation is not so extreme, but the tendency is there. This is a neo-liberal corporation, not a classic bureaucracy; every unit within it is supposed to function like a semi-independent firm, and Edward regards his subordinates as
entrepreneurs running firms, just as he, within the larger corporate structure, runs his. He describes his job as manager as being to give his subordinates 'guidance and direction, in terms of how they’re running their businesses'. Presumably he gets similar guidance and direction on his frequent visits to head office.

With this constant mutual scrutiny, it is not surprising that Edward has an absolutely conventional managerial ideology, and his conversation is full of current management jargon about setting 'strategic directions', ‘prioritizing’, fostering a ‘team dynamic’, and so on. This language comes from US business schools and business magazines, and is curiously mealy-mouthed. It is sometimes difficult to remember that Edward’s actual role is to invest other people’s money for the greatest profit, and that his firm has not millions of dollars, but tens of billions of dollars, to invest. Not surprisingly, Edward describes himself as a ‘believer in the free market theory’ (though he is not an extremist, he also endorses social safety nets), and rejects the fears of those who think opening to the global economy will cost Australian jobs:

I think that that is probably a bit misguided, you know, to worry about sending those sorts of jobs offshore. Think at the end of the day, capital has got to be able to flow freely. And you know, if people have competitive advantage – Australia has got some great competitive advantages, and you know, will prosper.

Edward, we might say, is a citizen of a world of institutionalized transnational business. His firm swims in global capital markets, and he takes this world for granted. He takes care to keep himself up to date, and worries about what is proper to worry about – in his case, environmental problems, which he takes more seriously than most Australian businessmen (he is proud of having a one-car family; but would not support limiting Australia’s mineral exports to China). Edward is entirely contained within this world. Unlike industrial managers (and perhaps unlike financiers of earlier generations) he has no contact with the working classes who produce the wealth he manages.

His managerial world is strongly gendered. ‘Financial services generally is still pretty male-dominated, there is no doubt about that,’ he remarks. Though most of the workforce are women, most of management are men. This is changing, but not fast. Three of Edward’s immediate subordinates are women; one of them manages personnel and one is Edward’s personal assistant, both traditional women’s roles; two of the three work part-time, having young children; Edward refers to them as ‘these girls’. He is sympathetic to the situation of women in the industry but this does not
make him a feminist – he is opposed to discrimination, ‘I am just interested in people that can do the job.’ In theory, he follows a neo-liberal model of gender neutrality, and in practice runs an office with a conventional gender division of labour and slips unnoticing into patronizing language. This is common among our interviewees. Corporate masculinity in the workplace, as well as in the home, is defined by relationships with women’s labour.

Edward is ambitious, without being abrashively so. He wants to become Chief Executive Officer of a major financial corporation, and given globalization, realizes he might have to go abroad to achieve that. His current practice of managerial masculinity seems well adapted to that ambition. With his subordinates he is directive: he describes his own style in meetings:

People would probably say it is fairly authoritarian. . . . I am not always the best listener. . . . Leadership is something that, you know, I think I do reasonably well. . . . I tend to have a pretty clear idea of what I want, and I just need to make sure that it is understood.

But he is no boor, not abrasive like some other managers we have met. Edward knows his job is also to get other people to contribute their ideas, to ‘keep them involved’, to create a ‘team dynamic’.

Things could have gone differently in Edward’s life; he could have followed trajectories constructing different masculinities. In his school and university days he was strongly involved in sports, and he could have made masculine embodiment a more important theme. In his early career, he made a name for himself as a technical expert, developing very complex computer applications in finance. He could have cultivated this expertise – but in that case would not have been able to try for the very top levels of management. He must have been facing this choice about the same time as he got married and began a family. Now, in his usual working day, he simply does not have the time to spend on his computer keeping up with new techniques. Edward has thus become absorbed in the collective practices of mainstream management.

The default settings

The institutionalized pattern of masculinity in the milieu of corporate management involves a focus on competitive achievement and a certain ruthlessness in achieving personal and corporate goals. Working long hours at high pressure is valued, indeed is essential at times (Edward’s time of ‘ridiculous hours’). Personal relationships, culture, community and children are generally hived off into a private, feminized realm of wives, girlfriends
and employed carers. An achievement-focused managerial culture defines business success as the highest good for the society as well as the individual. Edward, like some of his colleagues, supports ‘safety net’ welfare measures for those who can’t compete; other managers show contempt for the ‘losers’ in society and for the welfare state and public institutions generally.

Edward’s story gives an insight into what we might consider the default settings of modern corporate hegemonic masculinity. The institutional pressures to sustain the pursuit of profit, the growth of corporate empires and the constant control of staff are strong. Senior managers live in a fishbowl, as I have mentioned. If the corporation fails to reach its profit targets or sets them too low, its share price drops, the bonuses of the executives plummet, financiers refuse the cheap credit needed for ordinary operations. Managers caught in this spiral are almost certain to be sacked. A manager like Edward (who in this respect is typical) has a family life and sense of successful masculinity dependent on his holding a high-income job. A whole way of life would collapse without it.

And there is nothing, in any case, to suggest that he shouldn’t hold such a job and perform in such a way. The managerial world and its ideology are a closed system, untroubled by significant dissent. Few of the managers we interviewed are actively religious, even if brought up in a church. Perhaps the main force for change at present is environmental consciousness, which Edward certainly shares – but he also shows how that is made consistent with managerialism, so economic expansion can continue.

Violence and change

Masculinity and violence

One of the most troubling, and practically difficult, issues about the HIV epidemic is its connection with violence. That there is a connection between masculinity and violence has been evident for a long time, and recently there have been increasing efforts to understand the connection and do something about it (Breines et al., 2000).

The idea that boys and men are naturally prone to violence, risk taking and coercive sex is widespread in mass media and popular ideology. There is actually no scientific evidence for this belief, and the academic literature supporting it is entirely speculative. No one has discovered the gene for rape, or ever will. The relationship between the human body and the complex social processes of sexuality and gender does not follow such simple determinations.

Though most of the people enacting violence are men, most men are not violent, in the sense that they do not rape, kill, or beat people up. The
differentiation of masculinities is a basic issue here. Yet when violent actions are undertaken by a minority of men, they often draw on gender ideologies or practices that are much more widespread. Coercion in marriage, for instance, is widely legitimated by doctrines of male headship, or the duty of a wife to a husband. Survey research in three states of India suggests that the right of a husband to correct or control a wife is widely accepted among men (Duvvury et al., 2002).

Men and boys are targets of violence, as well as perpetrators. Australian official statistics show men as the main perpetrators of serious assaults but also as about 90 per cent of the victims; men are about 94 per cent of the inmates of Australian prisons (with Indigenous men scandalously overrepresented). A careful recent study in Germany shows a large majority of men, even in that rich and peaceful country, have memories of violent episodes in their childhood and youth, and surprising numbers also in adulthood (Jungnitz et al., 2004).

Men’s habituation to violence, therefore, is likely to be more widespread than women’s. Recruitment to violence may begin early, with the massive social endorsement of forms of sport in which, as the US sociologist Michael Messner (2007) evocatively puts it, ‘bodies are weapons’. In commercial sports broadcasts on television, which have a huge audience among poor men and boys, an exciting spectacle of bodies triumphing over other bodies by force, skill and determination is held up for admiration on a global scale. ‘Action’ movies – that is, glamorizations of violence – are a Hollywood industry, openly targeted at a demographic of boys and young men.

Behind the spectacle is a heavily masculinized institutional apparatus of coercion. This includes the military, the police and prison systems, border control services, the intelligence apparatuses, private security forces (including the US ‘contractors’ in Iraq), and the armaments and related industries with their associated research, manufacturing and marketing workforces. Official military forces alone add up to twenty million around the world. Research on the gender practices and identities associated with military training show a widespread pattern of conservative gender ideology, which will surprise no-one (see, for example, Barrett, 1996 for the United States; Gill, 2000 for Bolivia). In some parts of the world, police and military have been affected by Equal Employment Opportunity rules and the recruitment of women. The effects of this are still marginal in the public sector and almost undetectable in the private sector.

Behind this again is the structural violence of states and economic systems which impose outcomes on poor people that would never be tolerated by the rich. This is a vast field of analysis, and I can only gesture towards it by citing
an admirable recent study of men and health services in Oaxaca, Mexico (Gutmann, 2007). The underfunding of public health services in the current neo-liberal regime, which favours private health services for the affluent, has limited the supply of anti-retroviral treatments to a fraction of the people — mostly men — requiring them. This has produced a ferocious triage in which health workers have to pick winners and losers. Public sexual health clinics in the area are practically hidden.

In the early twentieth century the myth of revolutionary violence at least had the idea of a utopia of equality to follow, including gender equality. In the early twenty-first century this utopia seems practically dead. It is difficult to see the war in the Congo, the civil conflict in Colombia, the struggle in Palestine, or even the resistance to the US occupation of Iraq or to Russian control of Chechnya as leading directly to a just, peaceable and equal society.

Towards systemic change

Given such a milieu, such a gender dynamic, such encapsulation, such ideology, why wouldn’t pharmaceutical managers try to maximize immediate profits from anti-retroviral drugs? Why wouldn’t bankers demand debt servicing ahead of social services in debtor countries? The outcome can be contested. In the case of anti-retroviral drugs, the outcome was eventually challenged by the government of Brazil. And managerial masculinity can change, as it has changed in the past. Edward’s version is certainly different from that of mainstream management fifty years ago. But in the deregulated neo-liberal world of global business today, competitive pressures are not slackening, and there is not much sign of a return to the ethos of class compromise and development aid that existed in the metropolitan ruling class before the 1980s.

This leads us back to the pattern of power in corporate management, the neo-liberal state and inter-state institutions that produces such outcomes on the ground. The corporate world described in my case study of Edward is only part of a larger system. The top echelons of the state, including the military and police, now increasingly resemble the managerial levels of business. The fact that patriarchies are so often restored, or created anew, after revolution or independence has been recognized as a crucial problem for strategies of social change. In the neo-liberal era we face a new wrinkle on this: the creation of market-oriented patriarchies in the aftermath of ‘liberalization’ or ‘transition to democracy’.

The Chilean sociologist Martín Hopenhayn (2001), in a profound meditation on social thought in the neo-liberal era, suggests that a scaling-down of ambitions for social reform, a letting-go of utopian ambitions for
change, may now be unavoidable. As Hopenhayn himself says, we must not lose sight of issues about poverty, and as the argument above suggests, we should not lose sight of the structural sources of violence or the global role of the rich and powerful. Perhaps we do need to focus for the moment on small-scale, achievable changes, as most of the recent practical work on masculinity and violence does (Denborough, 1996; Sideris, 2005; Ravindra et al., 2007). But we should be looking for reforms that might set in motion trends towards systemic change.

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Chapter Eight
What Would Make Men Interested in Gender Equality?

Reflections from East Africa

Margrethe Silberschmidt

Introduction

A central premise of the gender and development discourse since the 1970s has been that the way in which men exercise power over women results in inequities, inequalities, discrimination, and the subordination of women. This has been documented over and over again in thousands of research projects, reports and conferences over the last three decades (cf. Moghadam, 2005). Following this, according to gender advocates, men have been the main beneficiaries of development. This has led to stereotyped notions crystallized in the general notion of men as the problem and women as the victim. Virtually all the main actors in international development subscribe to this basic premise (Correia and Bannon, 2007), although it has so far mainly been reflected in the gender and development discourse. While it is recognized that many men and boys are changing how they view women, this change often goes hand in hand with traditional gender hierarchies and views on gender relations. Consequently, Correia and Bannon argue, it is time for ‘men-streaming’ development. They contend:

The impetus to address men’s gender issues in development is unlikely to come from the gender community. The political capital invested in gender in terms of women and the mistrust and fear over male dominance will likely be too much to overcome. And while interest in men’s issues will continue in specialized areas such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, actions are likely to remain marginal and tentative. Rather, the interest, drive, and energy to address men as men will likely come from the broader-based social development community with its focus on social exclusion and conflict and violence prevention – or even the security sector in its quest to understand the root causes of conflict, violence and terrorism. (2007: 259)
This, however, raises a number of questions. How to men-stream development? How to move men from obstacles to collaborators? In short, how to motivate men for gender justice and broader social change?

This chapter explores the question of what would be needed for this to happen, and what would make men interested in gender justice. It explores a number of questions: are men interested in engaging? If not, what is needed to motivate men? What about gender training and gender-balanced, men-inclusive approaches as suggested by Chant and Guttmann (2000) and many others? Or will men rather be motivated through media campaigns, initiatives addressing men’s needs and creative programmes (mostly in the fields of HIV/AIDS) along with more men-friendly policies as suggested by Barker (2005) and Barker and Ricardo (2005)? If, as argued by Heald (2002) and others, such approaches, campaigns and programmes by international actors address individual behaviour change and are based on moralistic principles – as has been seen in unsuccessful attempts to halt the HIV/AIDS epidemic – what alternatives might be needed? Will the answer be ‘gender mainstreaming funds’ which target men as suggested by Correia and Bannon (2007: 257)?

Based on my own research over the past 25 years in rural and urban East Africa (Silberschmidt, 2001, 2004, 2005), I seriously doubt that poor, frustrated men with no access to income-generating activities, who are not respected by their wives because of lack of financial support, who are blamed for their extramarital activities, and whose self-esteem and masculinity are at stake, would be interested in engaging in the struggle for gender justice and gender equality. This would require profound personal transformation. But what would really interest them is getting access to income-generating activities that would enable them to provide for their families. This requires much more than individual change, or institutional changes for that matter. It is not enough only to address the ‘superstructures’. There is a need to address and stabilize the economic base which, I shall argue along with good old Marx, is a determinant in the last instance. And this is a much bigger and much more difficult issue – one that neither the international and donor community, nor the broader-based social development community, with its focus on social exclusion and conflict and violence prevention, nor even the security sector may be ready to embark on.

Gender equality will create development, it is argued. Gender inequality, it is agreed, is a serious obstacle to sustainable poverty reduction and socio-economic development. But perhaps it is the other way around: the obstacle to gender equality is poverty and lack of socio-economic development. Socio-economic transformation is difficult to achieve. The international donor community focuses increasingly on African women’s economic potential and
considers them the key to ‘development’ as well as gender equality. There is no mention of men’s potential. Or of how to deal with the following: ‘The first prerequisite for being a man is the ability to work and achieve financial independence’ (Correia and Bannon, 2007: 246); that men’s social recognition, and their sense of manhood, suffers when they lack work (Barker and Ricardo, 2005); ‘economically unviable’ husbands feel emasculated and are belittled by their wives (Cornwall, 2003); work and access to income-generating activities give social value and self esteem; and no work and no cash result in lack of social value and no self-esteem – not to mention no sex (Silberschmidt, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007).

While the centrality of men’s income-earning power in constructions of masculinity cannot be emphasized enough, it should not be neglected that most notions of masculinity are closely associated with sexuality, potency, fertility and male honour. Consequently, and as I shall argue below, when men’s income-earning powers are undermined, male sexuality, potency and control over women seem to become central for masculinity. In what follows, I draw on research from different African contexts, and in particular my own findings from East Africa (rural western Kenya, urban Tanzania and urban Uganda) which show the impact of poverty and lack of access to income-generating activities on masculinity and sexuality, and demonstrate that personal transformation, even if it could lead to personal benefits, is not a primary interest among men – whereas socio-economic change and access to income-generating activities is.

Reflections on men, masculinities, and gender in colonial and post-colonial Africa

In order to understand masculinities in Africa, Ouzgane and Morrell (2005) suggest three steps: first, a geopolitical step which does not assume homogeneity or uniformity but in spite of vast differences, diversity and inequality does recognize particular experiences of colonialism and development that have had profound effects on the continent’s people; a second step that involves theories of masculinities, identifies power inequalities among men, and recognizes that all men do not have the same amount of power, opportunities or life trajectories; and a third step that discusses and analyses gender in Africa.

The geopolitical step

Very few attempts have been made to analyse in gendered terms how the legacy of colonization, globalization and race have impacted on men’s lives
and produced complex forms of male identity. As a result of the European
colonization of Africa, men and women were confronted with collapsing
traditional structures, the emergence of new unstable situations, new social
roles, contradicting norms and values, and economic hardship. While
research on women since the 1970s accumulated deep insights into the
implications of socio-economic change, poverty and increasing workloads
for African women, similar insights on men were not documented. In
attempts to make African women’s work visible some analyses slipped into
representing African rural men as not doing very much at all (Whitehead,
2000). Meanwhile, important observations by Boserup (1980) that the change
in women’s work has been less radical than that in men’s work, were never
pursued.

Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, missionaries and labour recruiters were
catalysts for transforming men’s gendered relationships and identities.
Missionaries and colonial administrators worked through churches, schools,
and workplaces, propagating their own ideal of domesticity and men’s place
in households and marriages. As they intervened in politics, religion, legal
systems, agricultural regimes and labour markets, European actors worked to
remake men (and women) in their own (Victorian) image. Both in south-
western Nigeria and in rural Kenya, the gendered ideals implicit in colonial
policies met an equally powerful but very different body of assumptions about
the respective roles of men and women. In Nigeria, women were associated
with trading and men with farming, and both sexes were in control of their
own incomes (Lindsay, 2003). In rural Kenya, women were associated with
farming and men with cattle herding and warfare, and the activities of both
men and women were equally respected (Silberschmidt, 1999). However,
when colonial administrators encouraged cash cropping and labour migration,
this had profound implications for men and women, transforming their
gender roles, identities and relationships.

New opportunities including financial accumulation and wage labour, and
not least the introduction of the breadwinner ideal, created new notions of
dominant masculinity which had to coexist or compete with other notions of
dominant masculinities (Silberschmidt, 1999; Lindsay and Miescher, 2003;
McKittrick, 2003). New values were created and along with them new logics
– meshing with old ones. However, the creation of the male breadwinner by
the colonial powers, with men as financial providers in their families,
overlooked the fact that when men were forced to migrate, when men’s areas
of responsibility were eliminated, women became heads of household. Men’s
changed role or, as was increasingly the case in East Africa, lack of role, had
a strong impact on their masculinity, their sexuality, and on the relations
between genders. While different colonial subjectivities were shaped in the various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, a common feature was that men became less able to control their wives than previously (Silberschmidt, 1999, 2001; Lindsey and Miescher, 2003; Cornwall, 2005). At the same time, new tensions have emerged between normative ideals and men’s abilities to achieve such ideals in the context of increasing economic insecurity.

**Theories of masculinities**

Masculinity is composed of elements, identities and behaviours that are not always coherent. They may be competing, contradictory, and mutually undermining, and may have multiple and ambiguous meanings according to context, culture and time (Connell, 1995). Ideologies of masculinity like those of femininity are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations. While Western gender theories should be handled with great care and perhaps revised in order to understand gender relations and categories of men and masculinity in Africa, all men do have access to what Connell terms the ‘patriarchal dividend’ – the power that being a man gives them to choose and exercise power over women and sometimes over other men as well. Connell’s distinction (*ibid.*) between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities opens up the possibility of examining subordinate masculinities and the ways in which some men may experience stigmatization and marginalization.

While in the West this examination has focused mainly on men stigmatized because of their sexual orientation, in Africa the psychological and economic effects of colonization on men and masculinity have occupied the centre stage. This has revealed that while men are the beneficiaries where gender inequities exist, not all men benefit to the same degree. Indeed, some men do not benefit at all. Many pay heavy costs for the general supremacy of men in a patriarchal gender order and ignore their own vulnerability. Consequently, theories of patriarchy which tend to consign men to stereotypical gender roles (as victimizers and exploiters of women) ignore men as gendered subjects and are neither sensitive nor appropriate tools for analysis. From a feminist point of view, and as mentioned above, the assertion that men are also victims is accused of muting the power of the analysis of women’s oppression. However, as my own research clearly reveals, inequalities between genders work to the disadvantage of both genders, and the status of men and women tend to go together. This fact tends to be obscured in the discussions of gender differences.
Gender in contemporary Africa

Colonialism had gendered implications. It has been perceived as an assault on African masculinity, not only profoundly affecting male status and opportunities, but also relationships between men and women, men and men, and women and women. African women and men, though, were not simply subjects created by colonial gender discourse. They were actively engaged in reconfiguring their own identities. However, the contradictions that emerged during the colonial era in different geographical settings between the realities of women’s contributions to household provisioning and the inability of most men to sustain dependent wives still continue today whether we speak of East, West or Southern Africa. Therefore, defining gender roles and relations in terms of notions of patriarchy, or the different functions that men and women fulfil in response to gender norms and expectations, fails to recognize the complex, constantly changing and negotiated nature of contemporary gender roles and relations.

As my own research reveals, poverty in most rural and urban contexts is massive and has caused economic hardship for both men and women. Rural and urban settings were characterized by the same main features: poverty, social and economic instability, unemployment, lack of access to income, deteriorating sexual and reproductive health – not to mention increasing gender antagonism. The majority of the inhabitants in the urban areas lived in low income/slum areas, in cramped conditions, with little privacy, and inadequate access to basic facilities. Men were expected to be the providers of household needs. However, only a few had regular income, and even if they had, all complained that it was far from enough to support their family. The majority of women referred to themselves as housewives with no income, though most of them were involved in petty trade.

Lack of husbands’ economic support, men and women’s extramarital partners, mistrust, jealousy, conflicts, lack of respect as well as lack of dialogue between men and women were common features. Communication was often through quarrelling, mainly because of men’s lack of economic support. Women repeatedly complained that ‘men do not support their families’, ‘men do not care about their children’, ‘men cannot be trusted’, ‘all men have two heads, when one of them is working the other is switched off’. Men were constantly confronted with their inability to provide for the household, and many men and women agreed that it was legitimate for a wife to refuse to have sex with her husband if he did not provide the household necessities. Many men were also accused of not being able to satisfy their wives sexually. Men were bitter and would in turn argue: ‘Women marry
money – not a person’. Thus, structurally subordinate, women have aggressively responded to the challenges of economic hardship. In this process, they have started to challenge men, their social value, and their position as heads of household. This is a serious threat to a man's honour, reputation and masculinity, and conflicts of interests embedded in gender relations have become more visible.

Although the main axis of patriarchal power is still the subordination of women, material conditions have increasingly undermined the normative order of patriarchy. With a majority of men being left with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities, men's authority has come under threat and so have their identity and sense of self-esteem. For patriarchy does not mean that men have only privileges. Men also have many responsibilities. The key and the irony of the patriarchal system reside precisely in the fact that male authority has a material base while male responsibility is normatively constituted. This has made men's roles and identities increasingly confusing and contradictory, and the tensions that emerged during colonialism between normative ideals and men's abilities to achieve such ideals have intensified in the context of increasing economic insecurity.

However, persisting patriarchal structures and stereotyped notions of gender hide the increasing disempowerment of many men in both rural and urban contexts (Silberschmidt, 2001). Caught between discursive domains that create variant images of masculinity, from responsible provider to insatiable lover, becoming a man is fraught with complications. Accused by wives of being useless and passed over by girlfriends for lacking the economic potency to satisfy them, many men find themselves in a position of diminishing control. With the close link between masculinity and sexuality, male identity and self-esteem seem to have become increasingly linked to sexuality and sexual manifestations – often acted out in violence and sexual aggressiveness. Consequently, multi-partnered/extramarital and casual sexual relations seem to become increasingly fundamental to a process of restoring male self-esteem (Silberschmidt, 2001, 2005). My interviews with both young as well as older men indicate that a man's need for extramarital partners is particularly urgent ‘when a man has lost control over his household and is humiliated by his wife’, and ‘when a man's ego has been hurt’. Then ‘he needs peace on his mind’; ‘he needs to be comforted’. ‘An extramarital partner is like a spare tyre’, men argue. Alcohol consumption has become a major activity and also a major problem. Men increasingly seek psychiatric help. Advertisements by local medical experts or herbalists appear regularly in the local newspapers in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, and offer to assist men not only with problems of depression but also with problems of impotence.
According to Kopytoff (1990), some identities are based on what a person is (existential identity), others are based on what a person does (role-based identity). Some of these identities are negotiable. Others are not. Existentially based identity is composed of features that are intrinsic, or ‘immanent’ in a cultural definition of what it is to be male or female. These features are not negotiable. Existential identity indicates a state of being rather than of doing. It is difficult to renegotiate, relatively immutable, and surrounded by strong sanctions that punish deviant behaviour. In contrast, features of role-based identity may be negotiated and the identities themselves relinquished with no sanctions. Following these distinctions, a man’s identity is closely linked to his (culturally defined) sexuality: it is an immanent (inherent) feature of his existential identity that cannot be negotiated. There seems little doubt that work and access to income-generating activities are fundamental for men’s social value and self-esteem (Silberschmidt, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007; Cornwall 2005; Correia and Bannon 2007). However, in addition, my findings strongly indicate that when men are not able to develop new role-based identities, the need for men to pursue their existential identities seems to have become even more essential to their self-esteem. Following this, Kopytoff’s distinction between role-based and existential identities provides an operational tool that helps clarify why male (often risky) sexuality and sexual activity seem to have become crucial to men who live in unstable economic situations that do not allow them to pursue their role as provider.

While men are accused of being the driving force of the epidemic and, at the same time, the key to bringing a halt to the epidemic (UNAIDS, 2000), it is surprising that they have never been seriously targeted by prevention programmes. The underlying reasons for men as ‘the driving force’ have not been fully understood: namely, that economic instability leading to economic disempowerment of men seems to encourage them to prioritize sexual empowerment, including sexual risk taking, in order to gain self-esteem and confirm that they are ‘real’ men. As a result, sexual achievements and sexual satisfaction – increasingly assisted by potency drugs – have become essential for masculinity and preside over considerations of the dangers of HIV infection. This affects not only men, but also their partners, their families and the entire society. Even successful men with a well-developed role-based identity also need to pursue their existential identity in order to demonstrate their masculinity. In countries with disintegration of the social infrastructure and where income, employment, access to food, and government spending on health services are shrinking, the grounds for HIV/AIDS transmission are created. It is a predictable outcome of an environment of poverty, worsening nutrition, chronic parasite infection, and limited access to medical care. In
such circumstances, people are more susceptible to all infectious diseases (Stillwagon, 2006). While prevention efforts have focused on sexual behaviour patterns and women's ability to negotiate safe sex, this important argument has been neglected.

Conclusion: How to break with ‘business as usual’?

Summing up, emerging studies of men and masculinities contribute a much deeper understanding of how African masculinities, African male bodies, subjectivities, and experiences are constituted in specific historical, cultural and social contexts. They also reveal that African masculinities are not uniform and monolithic. However, it is important to keep in mind that even if men increasingly experience an undermining of their social roles, this does not necessarily undermine existing hegemonic forms of masculinity or power relations. When their material base is eroded, many men resort to other measures to establish their authority. As my research reveals, many men seem to prioritize their existential identity or develop masculinist discourses that reject alternative potentially egalitarian understandings of masculinity (Morrell, 2001: 126). Thus, being sexually aggressive and violent (cf. Strebel et al., 2006) and demonstrating sexual potency may represent a way for men to regain control of women, authority and self-esteem. This runs counter to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. In fact, it constitutes a serious barrier. However, as noted by Connell (1995), neither masculine behaviour nor hegemony are static but constantly subject to challenge.

A few studies do suggest the possible emergence of new, perhaps less violent and less oppressive ways of being masculine, for instance if men's movements can reach out beyond a constituency of men to collaborate with feminist organizations (cf. Connell, 1995). According to Morrell (2005), this is critical in order to establish alliances with women, because the project of gender justice requires a breakdown of solidarity among men which exists across age, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Marches organized in South Africa around AIDS-related issues have attracted sizeable support from men and women, black and white, so there are good reasons to organize and mobilize. However, the lack of popular support for men's movements in South Africa is a major indication of their limitation. In contrast, the organizations that constitute a pro-feminist movement as well as initiatives for both men and women around domestic violence, have attracted men and women as well as financial support. The existence of backlash organizations seems symptomatic of men's discomfort with the process of gender
transformation (Morrell, 2005: 284–5). Outside South Africa, there is even less support or interest in men’s movements, and among the more than 800 men and women that were interviewed during my data collection in Kampala and Dar es Salaam (2004), nobody had ever heard of any men’s movements.

According to Shepard (1996: 14) ‘If men are not educated to recognize the key role of homophobia and misogyny in their own socialization, they will not have the intellectual or emotional resources to confront the social pressures that will inevitably besiege them as they begin to abandon traditional male sexual patterns.’ This argument raises the question of whether men can really be educated or trained (cf. Chant and Guttmann, 2000) to change existing behaviour patterns and abandon existing privileges. Will a high degree of self-reflection and spaces to rehearse new behaviours, and constructing positive lessons out of the experience of having witnessed or carried out violence, promote gender equality, as suggested by Barker and Ricardo (2005)? Or is this outcome more likely to flow from collective activity as an instrument of struggle, where the starting point is taken as the experiences and conditions that are common to particular interest groups and their mutual interests, as suggested by Baylies and Buja (2000)?

To return to the question with which this chapter began: are men really interested in engaging in the struggle for gender justice and broader social change? If not, what is needed to motivate men? My own research suggests that there is first of all a need to strengthen men’s role-based identity. From this point of view, gender equality and broader social as well as economic change should rather be seen in the context of economic growth and global strategies. During the recent international high-level meetings with various donors and African recipients in Copenhagen – the Africa Commission, April 2008, and the Copenhagen Consensus, May 2008 – it was agreed that women constitute the key and the potential in terms of creating economic development in Africa. As women are predominantly employed in the informal sector or occupy low-skill jobs, women need better opportunities. Men’s need for opportunities and men’s potentials were not mentioned. Fifteen million jobs are needed; however, it will be possible to create only eight million new jobs. With women constituting the key in terms of economic development, it can be anticipated that most of the new jobs will be aimed at women – in the name of gender equality. Does this mean that women alone will carry the burden of creating economic development? Is this the way to create gender equality? Moreover, how can men be made to engage in political and social change when the international donor community seems prepared to undertake an economic castration of men? These are really hard questions – to which this author has no answers.
A majority of gender advocates will no doubt argue that the continued priority of women makes sense and that until the disadvantages faced by women and girls are substantially redressed, the needs of men and boys will be of secondary importance. But this is beside the point. The issue is not about transferring benefits or attention from women and girls to boys and men, but about making interventions more meaningful. Women’s well-being cannot improve without addressing men because gender is relational. Furthermore, women are not always the losers and men the winners in gender systems (Silberschmidt, 1999, 2001). Therefore, generalizing about women and men overlooks gender-specific inequities and inequalities, not to mention the issue of class (Cornwall, 2000; Bannon and Correia, 2007).

The approach to poverty alleviation and gender equality described above contradicts and ignores all the arguments and all the research on which this chapter has been based. And even if Correia and Bannon (2007) argue that the issue of men-streaming development has arrived, the international donor community does not seem to agree. On the contrary, business as usual continues. Opportunities for new thinking, new alliances and new possibilities for informing and inspiring a greater engagement by men in the struggle for gender justice and broader social change are being missed.

References


Chapter Nine
Men in/and Gender Equality
A Conversation from South Africa

Robert Morrell and Penny Morrell

The role of men in gender equality politics is now well established, but remains controversial. From the outset, when men and masculinity became subjects of research within gender studies driven by the theoretical, historical and comparative works of Connell (1987, 1995), Hearn (1987), Hearn and Morgan (1990) and Kimmel (1987), concerns have been expressed about the impact this would have on feminist goals, organization and politics. These concerns centre on issues of control (for example, men occupying leadership positions and dominating decision-making processes within NGOs working broadly in the field of gender), routing of resources (away from women and girls) and goals (questioning whether working with men may help to prop up patriarchy). In South Africa, programmes that constructively engage men have also been regarded with suspicion, but on a number of additional grounds. Since the birth of democracy, South African NGOs seeking funding have often had to tailor their work to address ‘gender’ rather than to support women, and this has reduced their ability to work solely with women (Britton, 2006). Black feminists regard gender work with men as problematic because ‘white men dominate constructive men involvement (programmes) and masculinities scholarship and some take their cue from EuroAmerican scholarship unproblematised’ (Matlanyane-Sexwale, 2007: 28).

And yet there is substantial agreement that gender work with men is important. Many NGOs now include men in their work on gender inequality. In South Africa a number of NGOs work specifically with men, including Sonke Gender Justice, Men as Partners and, until they either ceased operation or took another direction, 5in6 and Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT). The importance of working with men in order to make progress towards gender equality is also now acknowledged by South Africa’s Chapter 9 institutions – constitutional bodies which focus on issues
of social justice and include the Commission on Gender Equality – as well as the administrative machinery that mainstreams gender equality within government departments. It is now accepted that HIV rates are unlikely to fall unless one works with men, who generally determine the conditions of sexual intimacy and are thus in the best position to make safe-sex choices. By the same token, it is now widely accepted that since men are generally those who commit acts of violence, it makes sense to work with them in order to combat gender-based violence.

But who should be the beneficiaries of gender equality work? The easiest answer to this question is that all who engage in gender transformation benefit from it. Women obviously benefit from the removal of the obstacles that stand in their way and from changing customs, structures and practices that lock them into subordinate positions. Men benefit because they discover that occupying positions of dominance and exercising power comes at a cost, to themselves as well as to others. Giving up power, or at least sharing or negotiating its exercise, means living a fuller, more equitable life.

The more difficult issue concerns unemployment and poverty. It has often been argued that these affect women more than men. But while women continue to bear heavy domestic, childcare and production responsibilities, in parts of Africa it appears that in terms of paid employment men are doing worse than their female counterparts in the same racial and socio-economic category. The United Nations Economic Commission on Africa (UNECA) reports that the employment picture is ‘bleak’ and it places Southern Africa as having the highest unemployment rate in the region, at 31.6 per cent. Young women in sub-Saharan Africa have a lower unemployment rate (18.4 per cent) than men (23.1 per cent) (UNECA, 2005: 6). In these circumstances, men’s self-esteem is eroded and they frequently embark on self-destructive and anti-social actions. Should these men, as a group, be singled out as the specific objects of gender work in order to assist them to escape their current situation? Is there scope for gender equality initiatives to seek to improve the situation of disadvantaged men?

In this chapter we engage with these debates to ask how men can and should be involved in the politics of, and for, gender equality. As our views are obviously influenced by our routes into the world of gender (and South African) politics as well as our own histories, first a brief word about why we two siblings are writing this together.

Robert is a university-based researcher, focusing on issues of class, race and gender inequality. Penny is a practitioner working in projects that address issues of social justice and socio-economic rights and which include, but do not focus on, gender. Over the last 25 years, as siblings with similar
approaches to politics and issues of social justice, we have had many conversations about politics generally, and gender in particular. Within a broad but clear frame of agreement, we sometimes hold different views or disagree on matters of strategy. By exposing our discussions to public view, we hope to open up and examine ways of looking at the issues – as well as to illustrate the fluctuating and contested nature of ideas about gender. The chapter will start with a brief background by Robert on masculinities in South Africa’s racialized history, after which the issues are investigated by us both.

Masculinities in Southern Africa

In the past decade, the growth of research on men and masculinity in South Africa has begun to give us a sense of the salient historical contours. In 1983, Belinda Bozzioli described the complexity of the social arrangements that characterize South Africa’s various gender regimes as ‘a patchwork of patriarchies’. This description captures the complexity of the country’s gendered landscape, including as it does many different, raced and classed masculinities. For our purposes, a major feature of this patchwork is the various locations of men within the gender order – with primary concerns for race and class that feature prominently in the sociological patterning of masculinities.

For much of the twentieth century the raced and classed nature of colonial power played out in the masculinities of the subcontinent. Indeed, it could be argued that the particularly confrontational nature of South Africa’s history was linked with the specific forms that masculinity took among the country’s white men. Although divided by language, occupation and history, white men were massively advantaged under colonialism and Apartheid. The nation-building project of Apartheid produced unifying gendered connections (common school curriculum, sport, military service, reserved positions in the economy) which gave South Africa’s white men a set of traits that came to be recognized internationally – physically big, hardy, sporty, tough and intolerant (particularly of people of colour, but also of women, homosexuals and those who expressed disagreement). White masculinities were shaped by competition, a pronounced sexual division of labour and a physical hardiness well suited to the rigour of battle, but not the best disposition for the development of respect for others.

While the white population remained fairly divided between Afrikaans and English speakers, the division between black and white people was significantly starker, and the inequalities associated with this division were huge. Although black men were united by Apartheid’s demeaning laws which placed
them as inferior to white people in the racial hierarchy, they were divided on axes of colour (by Apartheid legal demography), ethnicity, language, geographical location (rural/urban), religion, workplace and socio-economic position. This has resulted in a diverse set of black masculinities, particularly when considering all men classified ‘black’ under Apartheid, which would have comprised men who are black African, ‘Indian’ and ‘Coloured’.

Given the different social conditions under which different ‘races’ were forced to live under Apartheid, this discussion will largely focus on black African men. In so doing we will discuss how a more nuanced and disaggregated use of the concept of masculinity offers real options for including particular groups of men in work intended to mitigate gender inequality.

Historically, black African men who lived in the rural areas and supported themselves off the land were much more likely to respect the authority of chiefs, live by a code of respect (*hlonipha*) and build families that were locked into a broader kinship structure. As the capitalist economy spread, African access to land was undermined. This process began in the mid-seventeenth century but accelerated in the nineteenth century when military superiority was used to subjugate and dispossess the subcontinent’s African polities. Dispossession and demands for the payment of taxes forced most African men into wage labour, largely in the gold and diamond mines. This continued under Apartheid, during which the process of racialized land ownership was taken to extremes with Africans forcibly removed and resettled in ‘homelands’ or Bantustans, which collectively occupied only 13 per cent of the country’s land.

Most African men were thus forced into migrant labour, returning perhaps once a year to their rural homes and to the families they were unable to take with them. These families subsisted on remittances from mining wages and on rural agriculture, and were made up primarily of women (who were prohibited from living in ‘white’ cities), children and old people.

As a result, in the migrant labour hostels and townships, men were distant and free from the constraints and support of family for most of their working lives. In addition, South Africa’s racial hierarchy reduced adult African men to the status of ‘boys’. Denied the vote and wages sufficient to support their families, they were also bullied and insulted by petty bureaucrats, policemen and employers, and subjected to arbitrary violence in the streets. As Prime Minister Verwoerd said in the 1950s, Africans were only transient residents in urban areas, destined to be ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ in the service of white people. This alienation from the most basic freedoms – which included the right to sell their labour freely and to access all but a limited range of educational services – prevented men from aspiring to decent incomes and comfortable lifestyles. This provided a fertile environment for
oppositional political organization, as well as various forms of single-sex social groupings including urban gangs of young men and ethnically ordered groupings of older men. Levels of domestic, political and social violence reflected frustrations and tensions associated with the new forms of African society that developed under Apartheid. Within this disrupted context, new urban cultures emerged which found expression in conspicuous consumption, various art forms and homosociality.

It was only in the Bantustans that African men had political rights and could command the respect of others. But these political rights amounted to little in reality. Instead, traditional, patriarchal authority focused on chiefs (izinduna) was preserved and extended to a new nationalist elite that, in time, became dictatorial and, effectively, an ally of the Apartheid regime on which it depended.

There were two obvious effects of these developments. African men grew up feeling inferior to white people and experiencing the injustices of Apartheid (Mathabane, 1998). Deprived of respect, many African men forged masculinities in which respect was gained by violence (in gang contexts, for example), toughness (in work environments) or dominance (over other men, women and children). Within rural settings, however, African masculinities could still draw on value systems rooted in kinship, cattle and the land. But even here, the material basis for mutually supportive, homestead-based gender relations and identities was eroded, and for many these gender formations were the stuff of dreams and aspiration rather than their lived experience.

The denial of rights to black people generally, and Africans specifically, was fertile ground for class- and race-based opposition. Led by the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League from the late 1940s onward, nationalist (and pan-Africanist) resistance drew widespread support, particularly from young African men. As the authoritarian nature of Apartheid rule grew more evident, resistance stiffened. Trade unions and youth organizations drew hundreds of thousands of followers, particularly after the 1976 Soweto student uprising. But despite embracing gender equality goals, the ANC was masculinist in its rhetoric and strategy. During its years of exile the relative importance of race, class and gender in the liberation agenda were constantly debated.

Now the current ruling party, the ANC, has represented people across classes – workers and the unemployed poor, chiefs, as well as skilled personnel who constituted a proto- or aspirant middle class. When the party came to power in 1994 it responded to various calls from within its ranks. But by far its most effective class-based response has been in the realm of creating a black capitalist class through a policy of black economic empowerment. This has resulted in a small class of exceedingly wealthy black people, most of
whom are men, as well as a broader black middle class, particularly in the bureaucracy. While these developments have meant that the binary of wealthy white people and poor black people no longer simply holds, wealth continues to be distributed in strongly racial ways, with the majority of South Africans, who are black, remaining impoverished.

For our purposes, the most important feature of post-Apartheid South Africa is the fact that unemployment remains very high (estimated between 25 per cent and 40 per cent, depending on how unemployment is defined). The numbers of male unemployed rose from 1.7 million in 1995 to 3.7 million in 2003 (36 per cent), when almost five million women were also unemployed. The fortunes of the country’s female poor were, if anything, worse. The female unemployment rate (the percentage of all women who were seeking paid work) rose from 38 per cent in 1995 to 49 per cent in 2003. On the other hand, relatively speaking, women have benefited from new economic policies. From 1995 to 2003, the number of women in employment rose from 3,785,000 to 5,194,000 and their share of the labour force rose from 39.3 to 44.7 per cent (Casale and Posel, 2005: 22).

While the causal factors are complicated and the processes neither linear nor inevitable, poverty feeds a range of behaviours, some of which are anti-social and include patterns of crime and gender-based violence. At the same time, there are many people, including men, who do not engage in anti-social behaviour despite their desperate circumstances – and some who do, though their circumstances are relatively favourable.

Changing masculinities in Southern Africa

Robert: Margrethe Silberschmidt (1992 and this volume) has argued that men in Africa are becoming the weaker sex. She contends that in East Africa women have responded more creatively to changes in the economy, and that some men have abandoned families and given themselves over to lives of quiet desperation filled with alcohol and multiple sexual encounters which heighten their (and their partners’) vulnerability to HIV. In South Africa, it seems to me that there is some cause to think that men, particularly young men who have been educated but have little outlet for their energies, are facing specific challenges that demand gendered attention. Even more marginalized, however, are those older men, who have not accessed much formal education and for whom prospects of gaining purchase on the basic resources of life are increasingly unlikely.

Penny: So you are saying that in a context in which many poor men are no
longer able to sell their labour – or retain their breadwinner status through
some form of income generation – some men are not adapting easily. That
having inherited a set of responsibilities or roles, which are markers of the
successful performance of being a man, the loss of opportunity to produce
these has left them at a loss. As you have said, this applies to some men –
while others are managing to retain their social location by adapting their
means of generating income, even if in the most piecemeal ways, through
ingenious plans to sell services, if not products. Others are continuing to
thrive.

But this also raises a question about why social location needs to be
allocated in these ways. Why are (some) men’s expectations of themselves
relatively narrow? More fundamentally, perhaps, some people may say – so
what? Why should we pay attention to these men at all when many women
have been in extraordinarily vulnerable positions for generations, and have
equally been affected by the impositions of capitalism and the vagaries of
markets of various kinds – in addition to which many women frequently take
on the main responsibilities for parenting?

Perhaps it is exactly women’s histories of frequent exclusion from the
formal labour market – or only casual employment within it – which have
required them to develop a greater diversity of resourcefulness. Subsistence
activities, resource sharing and entrepreneurial initiatives have been stock-in-
trade for many poor households, often headed by women. So how does one
address the needs of men without resorting to some kind of triage? Why not
focus on addressing the poverty of all – why this proposal to focus on men?

Robert: It is quite often observed that men should not be privileged in gender
work, that gender work is primarily about the ‘empowerment’ of women.
Given the ongoing global inequalities that distinguish the gender order, this
is uncontroversial. And there is plenty of evidence to show that attempting
to include men in gender initiatives can sometimes marginalize women,
perpetuate and reinforce masculinist power, and prevent the goal of
advancing women from being achieved. On the other hand, work in the field
of development is beginning to alert us to another phenomenon: men are
beginning to feel excluded from gender work because in reality they often are
excluded (Chant and Guttman, 2002).

Penny: You say that the feelings of exclusion arise from a reality of exclusion
– but I wonder about the mechanisms of exclusion. Spaces and initiatives are
often not offered to people or groups, but have to be forged. In this case it
seems that spaces are beginning to be made – even offered. I can see that the
social dislocation of men who started from a relatively marginal economic position can lead to a kind of torpor – and I am wondering about the conditions in which people galvanize themselves into actions of survival and am curious about the line between those who choose to survive and those who are self-destructive. There is substantial gender work to be done by men which may open up options that are less static and produce a greater set of possibilities. This could include looking at the institutional violence inherent in most of our histories – but which in South Africa has been imposed on men in quite particular ways.

The term ‘gender’ has often been used synonymously with ‘women’ – and moving beyond this one-dimensional frame is the political work that needs to be done. This should not be a contestation over limited ‘gender’ space, so much as an engagement in the re-framing of what gender work looks like. This would entail not simply relegating men to a ‘remedial’ programme, but moving away from the dualities that characterize much gender work into the messiness that includes other factors of power – like class, sexual orientation or rural–urban locations. There is a lot of work to be done – on all historical axes of inequality – and certainly in South Africa there is a constitutional context that would favour initiatives intent on promoting equality and dignity for all.

Robert: I think one way we might make sensible choices when deciding where to do gender equity work in developing contexts, would be to identify the areas in which specific groups of men and women are battling. These could be where statistically men are no longer dominant or advantaged, or where their life prospects have deteriorated. I don’t mean to be making a relativist defence for male privilege here. Rather I am adding a gender dimension to existing socio-economic or racial categories of disadvantage and inequality, which is generally ignored. One example is schooling, where black African, working class boys are now dropping out in larger numbers than girls (Perry and Fleisch, 2006). This is in contrast to a continent-wide pattern in which girls drop out earlier.

Penny: The issue of boys dropping out of school is an example of an issue in its own right. It shouldn’t be seen as suggesting that girls have in some way squeezed them out. We need all young people to be educated and to be able to participate as fully as possible in the economic and social lives of our countries – and to be productive members of families and communities. We cannot ignore the less constructive, anti-social options open to young boys/men which can entail drugs, crime and violence.
So, put crudely, the ascendance of young girls at school resulting from the increasing withdrawal by boys (as opposed to, possibly, an increase in girls per se) is not an achievement in any terms – particularly if we begin to identify which boys are withdrawing and the costs to themselves and society.

**Robert:** The causes of the predicament of boys and men are varied and may be socio-economic. For example, socio-economic factors have a heavier impact on men who take the provider role seriously – though they also weigh heavily on many women breadwinners. While one can't do much about global economic forces at a local level, one can work with men who feel like failures because they can't provide for their families, support them or help them to see their value as carers in family (and other) contexts. In this way, one is contributing to gender equity by changing images of the provider role and of fatherhood, by shifting the gender imbalance in care work, by contributing to domestic help.

In the context of HIV, the role of men in care work, particularly in care of other men, is a significant contribution. For me, this is an excellent example of a proactive, constructive approach to men's work, one that doesn't locate men as 'the problem', which acknowledges that development work can be directed at men, not for its own sake or for their own sake, but because the gender matrix that binds people together binds us all in mutually dependent relations.

**Penny:** So you are proposing a re-understanding/re-organizing of the social order in which men are offered positive options rather than the limited ones of being breadwinner or nothing? Are there examples of this within Africa to draw on, where there is a fluidity of the gendered roles played by men and women which may be feminized in one context but not so in another?

I think, for example, of weeping, which in some countries men do publicly without any difficulty, while in others it is seen as a sign of weakness. In terms of occupation, in some places men sew (as tailors), cook food (as chefs or because it is their role to cook the meat in the family), do hair (as barbers and hairdressers) and care for sick people (as nurses or caregivers – and, sometimes, in their own households). While these are often in the income-generating domain, my sense is that there are examples which move away from the stereotypical essentialist image of ‘man’ as provider to include a range of possibilities.

So the question is how can practices be disembedded from cultural specificity and a wider range of options be made available to men, particularly to those who feel their options are very limited. How can this be put into the
mix of ongoing changing cultures and practices in ways that increase freedoms for men, families and communities?

And then there is the investment by some women in the power that their gendered roles give them. While these are often not seen as sites of power, sometimes they are. For example, being a ‘mother’ can be a very powerful social role within a family and beyond. It can hold significant symbolic authority within some religions or cultures, and material authority over resource allocation and decision making. But it can also play an excluding role in claiming unique expertise in parenting. Likewise it is not unheard of for women doing home-based care work in the context of HIV/AIDS to exclude men from this work on the basis that they are perceived as unable to do it. Fluidity of roles may have some challenges for women too.

Robert: The work of African feminists like Amadiume (1987, 1997) does make this point strongly in the pre-colonial context. She and others (Nnaemeka, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997) have argued that gender categories were much more fluid and this allowed for a more dynamic, egalitarian and less restrictive gender order. The problem has been that capitalism has placed greater emphasis on breadwinning and, in turn, constructions of masculinity have built on this (cf. Cornwall, 2003; Lindsay, 2003).

These constructions can be quite rigid. Men who respond negatively or unenthusiastically to development work or policies that favour women are often held to be engaged in a backlash politics. There can be little question that in some cases men are explicitly engaged, consciously or unconsciously, in an attempt to roll back the gains that women have made. But there is a tendency to lump all men who do not favour an explicit women’s empowerment agenda into this analytical category. The reasons that underpin men’s behaviour are often not examined and unenthusiastic men are simply held to be the bearers of misogyny and opponents of feminism. This response leaves no space to acknowledge the complexity of men’s motivations or to look, for example, for evidence that they are supporting their wives and daughters in material, emotional and social ways, but feel ambivalent about other aspects of a feminist agenda. In other words, the response of men to feminism is read as hostility and the reasons for men not supporting women’s empowerment are not explored.

Penny: So you are suggesting that locating men in a static ‘for’ or ‘against’ position disallows a heterogeneity among men which could see men placed in various positions in relation to feminist projects, rather than ones that are simply supportive or hostile.
The idea of ‘men’s rights’ is sometimes used in a way that implies they are necessarily antipathetic to women’s rights, that there is a winner-takes-all approach that is likely to endanger women’s rights. Some people do indeed mobilize for (some) men’s ‘rights’ in this way. But there is a whole literature on harmonizing of rights which may help in understanding how ‘rights’ get to be balanced so that one set of rights is not sacrificed to another. It seems to be important to think about how to ensure that rights are mutually supportive to the goal of gender equity rather than located in antagonistic positions.

Of course there are strategies premised on women working alone to build their own capacity and I largely support these. But I am often left wondering what happens to the men who, in these instances, are not also engaged in a complementary project. It is not that they should be included in women’s strategies and organizations, but there is a need for processes for men too. Without this, individual men are being expected to work out issues of gender equity without any collective input, challenge or support.

But I do not support instrumentalizing men in the interests of women’s rights. I also do not underestimate the work that may be needed to include men in addressing issues of gender equity, especially given the levels of violence and hostility that exist in some places. That being said, I think it is politically imperative to work with men – in all their diversity – if we are to take gender equity seriously in its fullest sense.

Robert: At the same time, African feminists have often observed that Western feminist values may translate poorly into African contexts, particularly when they proceed from individualist assumptions and ignore communal processes that underpin the making of meaning in many (poor, rural) African contexts. It is not clear to me that gender work with men has begun to consider the implications of this critique and I think it is very important to do so in order to create a more inclusive approach to feminist work with men.

Penny: Yes I agree, although it is not the case that all African feminists support the idea of working with men or believe that they should be part of gender equality work. The task is therefore to problematize this and to move beyond individualized Western feminisms that have little resonance and to find out what work with men – and gender equity – might look like in contexts here, for men and women. The real trick is not to treat ‘culture’ as a static artefact, nor ‘tradition’ as sacred and immutable – while nonetheless working in ways that neither instrumentalize nor patronize.
A place for men in gender equality work?

Robert: One of the obvious limits to engaging men in gender equality work is the commitment men themselves might have to their relatively privileged situation in society. In thinking about how gender equality may be forged, we have not talked about the men who obviously benefit from the current order – the captains of industry, the monied middle classes and those with secure incomes. We have been more concerned to raise the interests of those men for whom the social power usually associated with being a man is not particularly evident and for whom class and race subordination constitute the most powerful elements of their reality.

Men on the margins need special consideration. Their life circumstances are worlds apart from the middle classes and the monied. They are sometimes homeless and often pressed into small houses. They are squeezed out of the job market and have limited access to social welfare. Often the only times they feel powerful and respected are when they actively exercise their patriarchal power over women, children and other men. Because they have so few options and resources available to them – be they material, psychological or symbolic – to make masculinity in gender-equitable ways, they are more susceptible to reproducing existing patterns of patriarchal authority, which require female domesticity, passivity and sexual compliance.

Penny: OK – but our question remains how this social category of men could be considered in the context of gender equality work? Should they be embraced or assisted, or should they be left to sort themselves out? What are the dangers of further marginalizing these men? And if these men are supported in a larger programme of striving for gender equality, what are the costs – and to whom? And what are the benefits – and to whom?

Robert: I do not think there are easy answers, but this does not stop us having to ask this question. What seems clear is that not working with these and other men must jeopardize the attainment of a generally more equitable society. Women cannot be asked to achieve gender equality on their own – nor are we suggesting that this is possible.

One of the major challenges facing South Africa as a country generally, and gender activists in particular, is gender-based violence. We don't really know why men are violent. But we do know that violence is expressed towards other people who are vulnerable – be these other men, women or children – and we know that violence is rife and takes extreme forms in this country. Some of the violence is committed by men for instrumental reasons –
criminal activity may demand the use of violence to obtain a desired end – but I suspect that a lot of violence is an expression of powerlessness and anger in a society often unsympathetic to the condition of the perpetrators.

Social justice seeks to share the world's resources with all people, to give all people the capability to exercise their rights. Such an approach is predicated on a belief that forms of exclusion are not just bad in and of themselves, but produce social ills. To the extent that African (and other groups of) men who are unemployed and marginalized fall into this category, it is really important that ways be found to assist them. It is not just a question of their rights, it is a question of yoking their energies to a campaign for gender equality.

Penny: And what of other men – those who are not as socially marginalized or economically disenfranchised? We have said that not all men abuse the social power that their gender position offers and have made a case for including those who are most vulnerable. But what of those men who are placed to be able to participate more actively in society? Not those grouped at the top, but rather those at the middle level – like school teachers, people who run businesses and workers/employees in secure jobs. These men do have access to gendered social power and many men in this category mobilize this in ways that are not in the interests of an equitable society which includes gender equity.

How could they be included in a project that seeks to promote gender equality without eroding the space occupied by some women (and men) who are less able to assert their own agency in the face of this greater dominance? I think these men can be just as harmful to themselves and others as the men you describe above – and sometimes more so, depending on their social and work locations. I think we ignore working with some of these men at society’s peril. What do you think?

Robert: I think gender equality work should be as inclusive as possible. One shouldn’t be naïve and think that everybody will support the goals of gender equality since many people (men and women) are happy with the world as it is. But a great many are not. I would like to see gender equity work as an integral part of the global challenge to all forms of inequality. As a general and abstract statement there is nothing difficult or controversial about this. The difficulty is in thinking concretely about how to make this happen.

Working around or ignoring people who are actively perpetuating abusive, exploitative and dominating patterns of gender behaviour is to fail to address a major aspect of the challenge of gender transformation. So yes – engaging ‘middle-level’ men is important if we are to shift their sometimes substantial
influence towards greater equity. How this might work deserves focused attention. But there is little doubt that if male teachers, policemen (sic), employers, colleagues, fathers and husbands are not included in a programme oriented towards gender equality, the programme is necessarily incomplete. Regarding men collectively as ‘the enemy’, and excluding them simply on the basis that they will crowd out the space needed for women’s development is to fail the imaginative test of what is to be done. While recognizing the many dangers inherent in this proposal, I – we – are proposing that failing to work with (particularly marginal) men is just as damaging to the goal of equality generally and gender equality in particular.

References


In times past, Uganda’s various security forces were notorious for the use of kandoya, or ‘three-piece’, a particularly brutal torture in which the man’s arms and wrists are tied up so tightly that the shoulders are at times broken for good, leaving any survivor permanently disabled.¹ In this chapter I shall make the case that to live under a state which is highly militarized, which panders both to well-established religions and their more recent evangelical counterparts, and which is over-exposed to neo-colonial inputs from the international (read Western) development and humanitarian industries (including their ‘gender’ components), is something of a conceptual and psychological ‘three-piece’. Analogous to the physical damage done by the kandoya, this triple bind is liable to hinder permanently the personal development of all, whether male or female. I shall also suggest that, in the light of these major political forces, the current tendency to focus work on masculinities on individual behaviour change, without providing the political backing which would reduce the high risks arising from such behaviour change, is very unreasonable.

My transition from considering gender identities and sexuality as a purely personal and private matter to seeing them as central to the way I work has been a gradual one. It really began when a future employer told me after a gruelling one-day interview process that I had the job but would need some gender training – I was judged to be ‘awful’ on the gender score. It went a step further when, after spending a year and a half in what was then a war zone, I was asked to make a presentation on my observations regarding masculinities in northern Uganda. At around the same time I began to provide expert witness reports for lesbian and gay asylum seekers from Uganda. This combination of activities allowed me to begin to make the links between gender norms, identities and sexualities and the role of state, organized religion and the development industry. More recently, as director of a project
working with refugees from throughout the Great Lakes region, I am again confounded by the high levels of sexual violence and exploitation to which our male clients are exposed. While these are not comparable to the levels experienced by the women, they are in some senses more difficult to respond to as dominant norms successfully invisibilize the possibility of male vulnerability, let alone its reality.

Reaching the status quo in Uganda

To understand the current political stranglehold on masculinities in Uganda it is necessary to consider the country’s historical trajectory. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Uganda suffered a dual colonization; the British protectorate, using classical divisionist tactics, sourced its various labour requirements among different ethnic groups. These processes were paralleled to some degree by the Anglicans and the Catholics, who carved out respective regions of the country for themselves, with Catholics predominant in the northern areas, and the Anglicans more prevalent further south.

Following independence in 1962, religion, region and political party were overlaid on each other in a way that closely entwined religion not just with personal but also with political identity, complicated still further by the convergence of ethnic and sub-regional identities. There is no doubt that these complex identities have informed many post-independence conflicts. While the current regime, which seized power in 1986, promised an end to the brutal regimes which had characterized much of the post-independence period up until then, it has enjoyed limited success in this regard: more than 20 armed conflicts have taken place inside Uganda in as many years. The most notorious of these has been the Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda, which has been operational in one incarnation or another since at least 1988 and has been engaged in protracted and as yet inconclusive peace talks since June 2006.

In an earlier study (Dolan, 2002) I attempted to demonstrate how during ongoing conflict such as that in northern Uganda until June 2006, the possibility of multiple, parallel and equivalent masculinities collapses. A hegemonic masculinity is established, with a hierarchy of lesser masculinities below it, and it is to this that men are taught to aspire, despite the impossibility of most of them ever actually realizing it in their personal lives given widespread violence, displacement and impoverishment. This context, which some would describe as structural violence and I myself have discussed as a form of social torture, results in lost generations who have had little or no education, little or no employment or access to income-generating
opportunities, and little or none of the ‘normal’ social satisfactions which are associated with being able to fulfil widely shared gender expectations.

Within this already debilitating context, some of the practices of violence which have characterized the northern Ugandan situation, such as abduction or being forced to kill or be killed, seem intended primarily to break down people’s sense of self in order to make them more malleable and more easily melded into the bigger fighting forces. The rape of women – where the target is both the women who are raped and the men who are traumatized and humiliated by what is happening to their wives/mothers/daughters/sisters/girlfriends whom, contrary to hegemonic models, they are unable to protect – further breaks down the sense of self. One can add to that the men and boys who are themselves raped – to cries of derision and disbelief from other men who have thus far escaped this treatment. The tendency of some interveners to see a reduction in the strength of social norms as a major opportunity to engineer further social change – by targeting women beneficiaries for activities which would traditionally have been the domain of men – heaps further stress on men’s sense of self.2 Because masculinity is defined both relative to femininity and to youth, the consolidation of an unattainable hegemonic norm affects not just adult men, but also women and youth, and contributes substantially to a number of dysfunctional social dynamics such as domestic violence and suicide.

While not all the above pressures on men’s sense of masculinity can be attributed directly to the state, and while it is important to pay due heed to the undermining of men’s sense of self in the colonial period, in northern Uganda at least the Ugandan state severely aggravated the collapse of potential multiple masculinities through its simultaneous practices of militarization and forcible internal displacement. The state also benefited from this process in so far as the male civilian population was more disposed to joining the military in a desperate attempt to recover lost masculinity.3 In this chapter I wish to extend the analysis to Uganda as a whole, and to elaborate the argument regarding the role of political actors in the fabrication and deployment of particular models of masculinity. I want to do this by first highlighting and discussing two recent instances drawn directly from the Ugandan daily press, and then by considering how these relate to mainstream international discourse and practice on gender.

State and Church: an unholy alliance

In July 2007 some 252 Members of Parliament from Uganda’s ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), went on a ‘retreat’ at Kyankwanzi
National Leadership Institute for a number of days. Members of Parliament, including the President’s own wife, were all obliged to wear military fatigues and engage in early morning physical exercises and shooting practice. This very stereotypically masculine model of behaviour, as promoted by the state, was widely publicized in the print media and on various radio talk shows. It was even suggested that NRM MPs should wear military fatigues when visiting their constituencies as this would guarantee their ‘free movement’.

The second incident, some three weeks later, was when a fledgling LGBTI rights organization known as SMUG (Sexual Minorities Uganda, a coalition of four Ugandan LGBTI groups) gained considerable attention by calling a first-ever press conference on 16 August 2007, to launch a media campaign to advocate for their rights. An article in The Daily Monitor, under the headline ‘Homosexuals Demand Acceptance in Society’, described how seven panelists made presentations under a banner which read ‘God created us like this, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI), Let us live in peace’. One presenter stressed the point: ‘Our goal with this media campaign is to reach out to all Ugandans so that people realize we are not something imported from the West’, and another tried to put same-sex relationships in perspective: ‘We have big problems in Africa, but two consenting adults choosing to have a relationship is not one of the big issues.’

This courageous move provoked an outraged response from some sectors of the Church, as well as from the Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Nsaba Buturo. A week after the launch of SMUG’s media campaign, an anti-gay group calling itself the ‘Interfaith Rainbow Coalition Against Homosexuality in Uganda’, organized what was described as ‘the first protest against homosexuality in Uganda’. One of the protesters carried a placard which stated that ‘Uganda is not a dustbin’, and another argued ‘Do not accept their money’. The interview of the week in The Sunday Vision, under the headline ‘Tough Anti-Gay Law Due’, was with Buturo, who argued that the promotion of homosexuality was part of a conspiracy.

These two incidents did two things. First, through the use of a few placards and statements the basic terrain of the argument about same sex practices was mapped out: SMUG’s banner was a direct challenge to the Church, beginning with the statement that ‘God created us’ and continuing with ‘let us live in peace’, a call frequently made by the Christian Churches. The presentations directly confronted the widely held belief that homosexuality is an import from the West, and also questioned the political judgement of those who seek to make a big issue out of same sexuality when they should be dealing with far more pressing political problems. The anti-gay protesters, on the other hand, both sought to appropriate the imagery of the rainbow, which
is famously associated with the pursuit of LGBTI rights, and, in urging people not to accept their money, were referring to the frequently made argument that LGBTI activists in Uganda are not serious and are merely pretending to be sexual minorities in order to be able to attract the donor funding which, it is frequently believed, is being channelled to fledgling groups such as SMUG.

Second, these two incidents effectively demarcated the officially sanctioned parameters of masculinity in Uganda. The NRM MPs, in adopting military fatigues and boot-camp style exercises, asserted the excellence and desirability of a highly militarized masculinity. In fact it was seen as so desirable that it could even be extended from its military origins to include Members of Parliament and biological women. Not only was military uniform used to associate women and parliamentarians with a particular model of masculinity, but by association certain Christian groups arguably also gave their support – after all, the so-called ‘first lady’ is an unabashed born-again Christian with impeccable credentials as a promoter of the Abstinence component of Uganda’s ABC strategy to combat HIV. The message to ordinary civilians was pretty clear.

While the NRM’s well-publicized ‘retreat’ established the acceptable end of the spectrum of masculinities, the Churches’ outraged protest against homosexuality, supported by the Minister for Ethics and Integrity, equally strongly demarcated the other – unacceptable – end. It is quite evident that other points on the potentially broad spectrum of masculinities are unlikely to gain official support, at least not from the current regime.

Two incidents do not on their own constitute an argument. However, when considered alongside an analysis of war-affected communities in northern Uganda, and experience as an expert witness for lesbian and gay Ugandans seeking asylum in the UK, they suggest that, to borrow from the language of statistical analysis, these two incidents are not outliers, but rather represent the mode.

Certainly state-sponsored homophobia has a strong track record in Uganda. In 1998 *The Monitor* newspaper reported that:

A no-nonsense President Yoweri Museveni has promised to let loose the full force of the law upon any public demonstration by a homosexual association in the country. Speaking to the press [he stated that], ‘If you have a rally of 20 homosexuals here, I would disperse it.’

The President’s most notorious homophobic statement was made a year later, in 1999, when he reported that he had ‘told CID (Criminal Investigations Department) to look for homosexuals, lock them up and charge them’. In March 2002, having been given an award in recognition of his campaigns
against AIDS, President Museveni declared at an international conference in Australia, that his country ‘has no homosexuals’.

In the same year, one of the present Minister for Ethics and Integrity’s predecessors was reported to have ‘ordered the police to arrest and prosecute homosexuals’. In April 2009 an MP with ministerial ambitions tabled a motion to develop an anti-homosexuality bill.

Similarly, the Churches have a long history of denunciation of homosexuality. The anti-gay position of the Anglican Church of Uganda (COU) was made clear in 1998 at the Lambeth Conference, where they (along with bishops from Chile, America and Australia) voted against a presentation on the issue of homosexuality and the Church. In 2007 they threatened schism with the Anglican Church over the issue of the ordination of an openly gay bishop in America.

As for the Muslim position, as Charles Onyango-Obbo noted in an article following Museveni’s attack in September 1999:

On this one (gay bashing), unlike the DR Congo military adventure, no opposition politician will dare criticize the President. On Friday, Muslims who have been at odds with Museveni in recent years... found common cause with him on homosexuality. Muslim women staged a protest march against homosexuality and general moral decadence in the country.

The position of the Catholic church was made clear when the Catholic Cardinal Wamala told a press conference on 22 January 2001 that ‘We deserve leaders who will not condone immorality, such as corruption, abortion, homosexuality or any other forms of behaviour which are contrary and offensive to God’s law and our own culture.’ Reporters from Behind The Mask argued that ‘with his statements Cardinal Wamala effectively reopened the anti-gay rhetoric started by Ugandan President Museveni in September 1999’.

When it emerged in April 2000 that a retired Anglican Bishop, Christopher Ssenyonjo, was supporting a Ugandan chapter of the US-based organization Integrity, he was put under investigation by the Church of Uganda. He was subsequently turned down for a lecturing post at the Uganda Christian University as a result of his ‘alleged sympathy for gay activities’. Although he was widely believed to be the chairman of the Ugandan chapter of Integrity, Ssenyonjo wrote that:

I am a counsellor of the gays, not chairman. As I stated in my previous communication, I am heterosexual. However, in my counselling, I was made aware, more than ever, that homosexuals are subjected to a great deal of suffering due to recrimination, rejection, mental and spiritual torture at the hands of the heterosexual majority.
A few days later the Dean of the Province of the Church of Uganda, Dr Nicodemus Okile ‘warned bishops and Christians in Africa against involving themselves in homosexuality and “compromising with the devil”’. He described homosexuality as ‘an inhuman practice which contradicts the teaching of the holy scriptures and African social norms’.21 Ssenyonjo was later banned by Church of Uganda Archbishop, Livingstone Mpalanyi Nkoyoyo, from preaching in any Anglican Church in Uganda,22 and in late September 2001 the Bishop of Kigezi Diocese ‘appealed to members of Parliament to unilaterally condemn homosexuality’.23

**Bringing in the neo-colonialists**

Up to this point I have focused on two incidents involving the state and the Churches as political actors, and I have brought further evidence to bear to argue that these are not isolated incidents but rather examples of systemic practice by both parties. The picture is complicated by a third group of political actors, the international ones. The relationship between these three groupings is a complex, and indeed at times an adversarial one, particularly when the Church and the state resent international actors’ neo-colonialist approaches and interventions. But when it comes to gender issues, the end result of their interactions is broadly speaking more of the same – in short, the hegemonic norms are perpetuated and little space for alternative masculinities emerges.

The development and humanitarian industries, in so far as they address gender at all, continue to be plagued by two fundamental problems. First, while most people now recognize that gender is not a biological given but rather a social construct, far fewer acknowledge that it is also a political construct and weapon, in the fabrication and manipulation of which political actors and forces play a major role.

Second, notwithstanding the rhetorical recognition of the social construction of gender, the majority of gender work or practice, even that which has expanded to include men under the heading of ‘masculinities’, remains underpinned by an essentialist and unreconstructed view of men and women. From this perspective, gender is about addressing women’s problems – of which the biggest is men.

Where interventions work directly with men (mainly young men), the emphasis is therefore generally on changing individual behaviours to reduce levels of interpersonal violence rather than on challenging the social and political forces that shape those behaviours. By sidestepping the importance of political actors and forces in shaping individual and social behaviour, the
emphasis on individual behaviour change as a route to social change ultimately risks being ineffective. The political forces that should be of concern are embodied not just by the state and organized religion, but also, in an era of expanding global governance, by multilateral institutions and their implementing partners, the NGOs of the West/North. Although they should be of concern because they are actively engaged in the construction of particular models of masculinity and associated patriarchal gender relations, little has been said – let alone done – about changing the behaviours of these influential political actors. In fact, in so far as gender work demands that individuals change, but does not support them by working in parallel on addressing the broader political context, it can at times seem to demand huge courage of its ‘beneficiaries’, but little at all from its politically correct proponents.

In general, the mainstream, hegemonic and oversimplified or ‘dumbed down’ gender discourse, as promoted by most humanitarian and developmental NGOs and multilateral institutions, further reduces the prospects of multiple masculinities. There are at least two discernible reasons for this.

First, gender, or more specifically ‘gender as women’, has become part of a much larger contestation between the formerly colonized and their former colonizers, a contestation which is essentially about who controls what in a post-colonial world, whether it be with regard to nationality, culture, religion, sexuality or justice. The fear that donors who seek to engage with LGBTI groups are part of a ‘conspiracy’ is a good example of this.

At a grassroots level, the practice of ‘gender’ by development and humanitarian organizations in places such as northern Uganda has at times resulted in a contest between white female gender officers and black civilian males in which the latter, feeling patronized by the former, turn their backs on whatever their patronizers have to say. In so far as the gender officers are assumed to be the emissaries of white men, gender has thus become a proxy battleground between the formerly colonized and the ‘neo-colonizer’. In this battle, the assertion of a particular ‘non-colonized’ identity becomes more important than the coherence, utility or objective truth of that identity.

The question of homosexuality offers a particularly good example of this tendency. Political actors such as Museveni and his kindred spirits President Mugabe and former Namibian President Sam Njoma seek to pretend that homosexuality is a cultural imposition of white people and therefore fundamentally un-Ugandan/Zimbabwean/Namibian. This is then taken up and reflected in the state-sponsored media, as in the following extract from an editorial in *New Vision* in the run-up to the Anglican Bishops’ Lambeth Conference in 1998:
In many African societies, Ugandan communities inclusive, homosexuality is so abominable that many call for acts of cleansing for those found to have this unnatural sexual orientation. Africa finds homosexuality as abominable as bestiality . . . incest . . . and sex with corpses.24

In the September 1999 speech in which Museveni called for the arrest of homosexuals he was reported as saying that ‘Europeans have their values and cultures not applicable in Africa.’ He cited ‘Homosexuals who are allowed to demonstrate freely in Europe yet homosexuality is abominable in Uganda’.25 In 2001 a former Education Commissioner, Fagil Mandy, ‘has attributed numbers of lesbians and homosexuals in schools today to “penpals abroad”’.26 In a New Vizion article in which a Ugandan lesbian activist was interviewed about her own life, the accompanying photograph was of two white women kissing.27

Despite the objective absurdity of the claim that same-sex attraction is un-African,28 it has considerable political leverage with a domestic audience tired of external actors who do indeed impose all manner of norms and expectations.29 Claims, however spurious, which assert independence from such impositions, are likely to find a receptive audience. Given that sexual minorities are always exactly that (a minority), the claim that homosexuality is ‘un-African’ is a very low-risk populist strategy for politicians such as Museveni, Mugabe and Nujoma. International actors go along with it by failing to effectively challenge this populist position (even when donor support accounted for over 50 per cent of Uganda’s national budget, none of them publicly denounced state-sponsored homophobia). The more thoughtful among them probably fear that any external denunciation of homophobia will simply further confirm what the populists are saying, namely that homosexuality is a Western construct and neo-colonial imposition.

A second reason why the gender discourse has not created more space for multiple masculinities is that it still rests largely on what by now should be recognized as an outdated and simplistic set of assumptions, namely that the only important power relationship which needs addressing is a unidirectional one between (powerful) men and (vulnerable) women. These assumptions are often captured in statements such as ‘the majority of victims are women and children’ and the view that ‘doing gender’ essentially revolves around confronting male violence towards women. Oxfam, for example, argues that 70 per cent of the world’s poorest are women and girl children, and that therefore the focus of gender has to be on women. The macro-logic of this seems self-evident, but so is the fact that adopting such an approach rides roughshod over the rights both of minorities and of significant numbers of economically and politically disempowered men.
In its own mildly perverted and paradoxical way, this set of assumptions, while ostensibly promoting the rights and interests of women, has become in practice an extension of the patriarchal belief that men are strong while women are not just weak, but also infantile. They have somehow managed to fuse political correctness with patriarchal interests to the point where male vulnerability is rarely investigated, let alone publicized or addressed. As a result, not only are women in general kept in a disempowered position of assumed victimhood, but men who are victims are not attended to, for we do not really have any idea of the full extent of male vulnerability – for example to rape.

Practices that are documented and could in principle be taken as indicators of male vulnerability, such as abduction, are quickly reframed as confirmation of the fundamental male proclivity to violence. Even the rape of women, though seen as a weapon of war, is rarely discussed in terms of its effectiveness as an instrument in the traumatization and humiliation of men; certainly there are few interventions if any in this area. Where male vulnerability is confirmed, the institutions are unable to handle it; presented with a victim of male rape in need of protection, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will tell you with an apologetic shrug that it has a programme for women at risk, but none for men. Sorry.

Discussion and conclusions

Masculinity is not just a social construct. It is also a political weapon. Those deploying this political weapon, notably the state and the Churches, are doing so for different reasons but with similar effects, namely a narrowing down of the range of socially and politically acceptable masculinities. The neo-colonial interventions of the development and gender industry have if anything reinforced these tendencies rather than reversing them. The resultant hegemonic masculinity, and the loss of diversity it represents, have considerable detrimental effects on both men and women, youth and children. These effects are felt by the individual, who feels obliged to operate within certain externally determined parameters, as well as by the society that, in putting all its eggs into one basket, creates a number of unnecessary risks for itself.

One example of the detrimental effects of a hegemonic masculinity has long been recognized by gay activists and also by those in the field of HIV. They rightly argue that if they cannot access men who have sex with men, they cannot really address the epidemic.30 The high level of militarization found in places such as northern Uganda offers another example. This not only has considerable implications for the spread of HIV, but also creates
and entrenches a number of structural and psychological rigidities to the
detriment of processes of accountability and subsequent development
projects. At its most basic, hegemonic masculinity has resulted in excessively
high levels of militarization, with no corresponding programmes for
demobilization, disarmament and reintegration with which to address the
skills deficit that such militarization effectively institutionalizes. These in turn
have created an unhealthy civilian–military division that directly impacts on
the capacity of the state to exercise its authority in a non-violent and legitimate
manner. Yet another example would be high levels of suicide amongst men
who cannot attain the masculine norm of marriage, procreation and
protection.

In short, the question of masculinities speaks not just to public health
challenges attached to particular expressions of masculinity, but also to the
even broader question of democracy and good governance in a globalizing
world. As the discussion of the practice of ‘gender’ in the development and
humanitarian industries highlights, through an examination of the contests
over masculinity we also gain insights into contests over the location of post-
colonial power.

Given the power of political actors to intervene in people’s lives, whether
through ‘law enforcement’ (including harassment, arrest and torture, and
compulsory military service) or through generating social pressure (through
stigmatization, for example), interventions which demand changes of their
subjects without tackling the political forces behind their socialization can
seem to be a case of ‘blaming the victims’ of politically driven socialization
processes. There is thus an urgent need for interventions to broaden their
scope so as to focus attention on the political actors who determine the
parameters of socialization.

Notes

1 In recent years, security forces have become better at ensuring that the visible traces of
torture are minimized, concentrating instead on psychological tactics.

2 An example of such interventions would be where cattle restocking exercises give cattle to
women and not to their menfolk, despite the fact that, before the war, cattle would have
been the responsibility of men.

3 It should be noted that by 2004 Uganda had the third largest population of internally
displaced people in the world (over two million), and was pursuing an extraordinary level
of militarization, with over 25,000 men brought under arms in the period mid-2003 to early
2004 alone. The fact that the Ugandan state had to resort to such measures and to such an
excessive show of force, could in turn be linked to its own weakness (lack of ‘masculinity’?)
as a state in the broader international ‘community’.

4 See, for example, coverage in The Daily Monitor, Thursday, 19 July 2007, which includes a
picture of President Museveni and his wife Janet, both wearing army fatigues.

5 *The Daily Monitor*, Friday, 17 August 2007.

6 In early 2008, he also prevented a national film festival from taking place after realizing that one of the films to be shown touched on questions of homosexuality.


8 It should, however, be added that, just as the hegemonic masculinity aspired to in northern Uganda is largely unattainable, so the militarized masculinity paraded by NRM MPs is also strictly out of bounds to ordinary civilians – as *The Daily Monitor* pointed out, the government’s assertion that ‘it was legal for civilian legislators to wear military uniform . . . sharply contradicts the crackdown last year on civilians with military fatigues [during which] many [civilians] were arrested and court-martialled’ (*The Daily Monitor*, 19 July 2007).

9 The Churches’ proactive stance on this issue contrasted dramatically with their deplorable passivity regarding the politically challenging task of contesting state-led militarization and its accompanying abuses.


11 *New Vision*, 27 September 1999. At an international conference held in Gulu, northern Uganda, only a day or two later, I personally witnessed the Prime Minister, Professor Apollo Nsibambi, echoing the President’s sentiments, despite the fact they had nothing to do with the topic of the conference.

12 Associated Press, Coolum, Australia (10 March 2002).


16 <www.mask.co.za> (accessed 16 October 2010).


19 Integrity is an organization representing the interests of gay and lesbian Anglicans.


28 See, for example, Morgan and Wieringa (2005) and also Murray and Roscoe (1998).

29 For example, the intervention of the newly established International Criminal Court in northern Uganda (which incidentally threatens to further disempower already weakened male authority figures), has provoked a backlash from traditionalists and something of a renaissance of traditional justice.

30 While HIV has been creatively used as an entry point into working with sexual minorities, there is something deeply depressing about only being recognized as of importance when you are believed to constitute a public health threat!
References


Chapter Eleven
Local Lives, Global Dialogues
Shifting Discourses of Masculinity in India

Radhika Chopra

The troublesome question of what to do with hegemonic masculinity and men in power remains a fraught issue for feminists, gender studies and anthropologists like myself, who have actively sought to ‘study’ masculinity but always come up against hegemonies that seem to vanquish who we are. So even though gender studies have enabled the emergence of subaltern and subordinate masculinities, the issue of hegemonic masculinity doesn’t go away. The trouble escalates when we take on board the arguments of feminist philosophers who urge us to re-address the idea of autonomy.

Feminist philosophers offer a view of autonomy as relational, anchored in everyday life, oriented toward critical others and realized through the ‘social self’ (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Madhok, 2005). The interlocking of autonomy with everyday life entails an understanding of how men – an intrinsic part of women’s lives – enable, support or prevent women’s expressions of agency, autonomy and empowerment. We need to ask if men can be partners in women’s empowerment and most of all whether some men are already part of supportive structures that sustain empowerment as a durable process (Chopra, 2000). The shift of perspective towards including men means that we must pair ‘relational autonomy’ with another key idea: ‘men as supportive partners’. I think that this coupling enables us to amplify both autonomy and supportive partnership as belonging simultaneously to the domains of the public-political and the familial, and encourages us to view both at once.

There are a few issues we need to keep in mind about the nature and connection between relational autonomy and supportive practices. Both are culturally specific, articulated in specific milieus. Support can be material and ideological, intrinsic to social structure and to everyday practice. Culturally located ideologies and practices shape the multiple subjectivities of men –
as husbands, sons, fathers and brothers in the family domain, or elders, counsellors and ‘social fathers’ of the extended public domain. In South Asia, for example, there is a cultural expectation that sons will support older parents, particularly widowed mothers – an aspect of personal-political practices that ‘men as supportive partners’ agendas need to take on board.

This extends the ‘men as supportive partners’ concept to a whole host of different political and familial contexts and to men’s perceptions of supportive practices. Do life histories of individual men reflect forms of support for women or other men? Does support have a material existence (Chopra, 2003)? Does the enactment of support (even that which is culturally prescribed or expected) provide a frame for men to reflect on crucial issues of gender violence and gender equality? The recent moves that seek to involve men and boys as partners against violence sharpen the need to explore these questions.

I begin from the view that male support has a culturally rooted existence and is not exclusively ‘created’ by policy or programmatic interventions. It’s the starting point to begin looking for ‘supportive men’ who inhabit our social landscape and in the best anthropological tradition interview them about their experiences, intentions, ideas and practices, so that we get a sense of what support looks like from the perspective of men who ‘perform’ support. Here I want to continue some of the concerns I have raised earlier (Chopra, 2007b, 2007c) in arguing that ‘culturally located’ practices of violence and of support need to be mined from existing social structures that shape individual lives. Biographies, coupled with personal experience, are a significant aspect of male supportive practice, reflected in twentieth-century writings on masculinity (Brod, 1987; Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Kaufman, 1987; Pleck, 1981; Seidler, 1989). Confessional critiques by individual men of their own life experiences were a source of knowledge and reflection for others in similar life worlds (Pease, 2000). Such self-aware collective attention to structures of gender, power and hegemony produced collective thinking about men’s need to change and involve themselves in the lives of their partners.

Support as social practice has a lineage and it seems to me we need to harvest its history. It is important to remember, however, that historical memory is selective and ‘facts’ may surface at different moments through the questions that arise in our present, but which ‘open out’ the past towards a different interpretation. Understanding and interpretation are continuous processes that move backward and forward through time and space; it is this movement that enables a past to be reviewed with questions that arise from our present, to understand individual lives both as they were lived in ‘their
time’ and as biographies that inform our present. History and biography afford insights into gender relations constructed across time and enable us to decipher forms of support rooted in present-day culture, politics and personal life. It’s within this frame that I look at biographies and political reflections of male social reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India to think about the intentionality of support. I discuss this in the first part of the chapter.

In the second part of the chapter I move from clarity to ambiguity, to a situation that ‘looks’ like support but where no one talks about their acts as support nor self-reflexively categorizes themselves or other men as ‘supportive partners’. Do we follow the cultural lead and exclude such men from our purview? We could call a halt at the boundaries of cultural agreement, where everyone concurs about what constitutes support, who are (or are not) clearly supportive men, and how to craft relationships with them for the policy objectives of creating partners. Anthropological theory unfortunately doesn’t allow us the sanctuary of agreement. Ethnographies of gender alert us to ‘muted’ structures and ways of being that surface through tangential reference or vague accounts (Ardener, 1975). What are the muted structures and practices of support? How do we understand them as support when those who perform these acts may not think of themselves as ‘doing support’? In the second section, then, I turn from political biographies of male reformers to the narratives of men whose lives are contoured by the domain of the domestic but who are not full members of the domestic spaces they inhabit. I look at the lives of male domestic workers in urban Indian households to understand and extend the discursive field of supportive practices. I argue that we need to let our eyes and our understanding travel together to glean support from cultural terrains that bury supportive practices under routine performances.

**Historicizing support**

The historiography of nineteenth-century Indian social reform movements lends itself to a mapping of male supportive practices (Chopra, 2007a). This is partly because these movements have been well documented, but also because the subject of women’s lives became a central issue for male social reformers of the period. Placing ‘women’s rights’ as part of a critical nationalist agenda, reformers brought the issue into the public-political domain. Feminist historiography has revealed that gender questions were part of larger social and political movements within which the ‘woman’s question’ was one component (Sarkar, 1985; Mani, 1989). So while the
reflections of social reformers are a rich resource for discovering the nascent histories of male supportive practices towards empowerment, we need to understand that they emerged from and were located in broader political agendas.

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) is a name that is associated with the abolition of sati – the immolation of widows on their husband’s funeral pyre. He vigorously refuted the contention that sati was a scriptural injunction. Protesting against dogmatic religiosity, he argued that sati was unacceptable practice and could not be justified within a modern world. His support of Governor General William Bentinck’s official enactment to outlaw the practice was perhaps significant, for Bentinck was uneasy about foreign rulers legislating against custom (Kumar, 1993: 9). Others besides Roy spoke ‘for women’. As part of the Bengal renaissance, men like Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (Kopf, 1969) engaged with new ideas emerging through the Britain–Bengal encounter. Vidyasagar’s Hindu Widow Remarriage Movement (1855–6) legalized such marriages and in 1856 he led another movement against the hyperpolygamy of kulin Brahmans, a marriage practice where pre-pubertal or teenage girls were married to elderly high-caste husbands. Simultaneously, he opposed and argued against polygamy, prevalent in Bengal at the time. While Roy and Vidyasagar paid attention to specific social practices like sati or kulin marriage practices, other social reformers focused on broader issues such as women’s education. Views on education for women were impelled by different motivations. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (which later became the Aligarh Muslim University) was one of the earliest proponents of modern education for Muslims. Following the Revolt of 1857, Khan focused on the political future of Muslims and encouraged the adoption of scientific knowledge and Western styles of education to bolster the community’s position. Education for women was one part of his overall concerns. Beyond the efforts of Sir Syed Khan himself,

the liberal movement he pioneered . . . had far reaching consequences. . . . Sir Syed had many followers who took up the issue of female education with more vigour and clarity . . . advocated girls schools, set up teacher’s training schools, [and] published the first women’s journals. (Amin, 1996: 142)

Among the many who participated in the Mohammedan Educational Conference called by Sir Syed in the 1870s to promote modern education for Muslims were men who sought to reduce restrictions on women’s activities, limit polygyny and ensure women’s rights under Islamic law.

Concern for community inspired another social reformer in western India,
Jyotirao Govindrao Phule (1827–90) of Maharastra, who believed that education for women and the lower castes was the key issue of his time. As a *dalit* of the Mali caste, he profoundly understood the cost of ignorance and the injustice that could be perpetrated by the powerful on the illiterate. He began by educating his wife and subsequently opened a girl's school in 1848. Confronting orthodoxy was often a violent undertaking, and he encountered exclusion, assault and deprivation. Despite threats, his efforts to enroll the children of the untouchable Mahar and Mang caste in schools and educate girls continued throughout his life.

In the nineteenth century, women's education was as much a matter of middle-class modernity as it was of reform. In Bengal, for example, educated wives were valued by an emerging intellectual professional class of men. Brahmo Samaj men advocated rational modernity and initiated the movement for female education.¹ Keshub Chandra Sen, a leading Brahmo intellectual:

lectured on the importance of female education in 1861 and the following year organized a society of men who supported reforms for women. In 1865, the Brahmo Samaj sponsored the first organization where women met for religious instruction, sewing lessons, and the discussion of social issues. (Forbes, 1998: 41)

Historians evaluating the record of reform in the subcontinent have interrogated the intention underlying the agendas of male social reformers, questioning whether the reforms were indeed ‘for women’ or whether women’s issues – *sati daha* or modern education – were a terrain on which dialogues of male power were articulated. Examining the debates around *sati*, Lata Mani (1989) has contested whether the ban was a sign of gendered support. Mani argues that the prohibition by the colonial state constituted a racial discourse in which ‘white’ men saw themselves as members of an enlightened world who needed to rescue and protect ‘brown women’ from the barbaric practices unleashed by ‘brown men’. Within the terms of this debate women were cast as passive victims of an uncivilized culture. Prior to its abolition, the colonial state permitted the execution of *sati*, so long as it remained in accordance with scriptural prescription.

As Mani demonstrates, the recourse by colonial authorities to eliciting views of *pundits* or priestly experts to verify the scriptural legitimacy of *sati* enabled the state to decide how ‘safe’ it was for them to prohibit the practice. Officials of the colonial state were less interested in banning and more concerned about defining an ‘authentic’ as opposed to an ‘inauthentic’ *sati*. They sought to establish whether or not the woman was pregnant, menstruating, or breast-feeding an infant (and so on), in order to comply with the scriptural provisions that delineated a *sahi* as permissible – and therefore,
in colonial terms, ‘legal’ – or not. The considerations about *sati* were therefore ‘not primarily about women but what constituted authentic tradition’ (Mani, 1989: 90) and what could be safely legislated or better left alone as ‘cultural practice’. Women themselves were marginal to these and other debates. Both within the nineteenth-century social reform movements and the later nationalist movement there was an absence of any autonomous women’s movements and women’s voices (Sarkar, 1985) and while male social reformers certainly raised the issue of women’s emancipation, the terms of this discourse were as much about the men and their position *vis-à-vis* the power of the colonial state over their lives as it was ‘about’ women.

Women’s education was part of a larger movement toward modernity and, perhaps with the exception of Jyotirao Phule, most social reformers felt that women needed education to be better companions for Western-educated Indian men. But education should not in any way threaten their core culture. Indeed the ‘inner’ world of women and the domestic were resurrected within nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ideology as sacrosanct. Reformers and Indian nationalists argued that emulating Western modernity was desirable only within a public material context, while ‘retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture’ (Chatterjee, 1989: 238).

The spiritual core lay in the social spaces of the *ghar*, the inner domestic world of women and tradition. Women were cast as symbols and bearers of this traditional essence.

So while on the face of the reformist and nationalist agenda the women’s question loomed large, it’s quite clear from the historiography of this issue that women were present in this discourse only in so far as they served to elucidate a distinction between good and bad modernity. Women were objects in the debates between men, not subjects of their own history.

The analysis of reform points our attention toward the historical specificity of gender relations and the debates that arose around women’s emancipation and their agency. Many male social reformers saw their agenda emerging from and located within larger social, political agendas of modernity and nationalism so that they spoke ‘for’ women rather than appreciating what women themselves wanted to say. This is in no way to denigrate the reform. Rather, it is to point towards the fact that gender relations need to be located within time and space and are not free-floating signifiers of autonomy or liberation.

The championing of women by nineteenth-century male social reformers in India emerged from their encounters with the politics and policies of the colonial state, not by the compulsions of an independent women’s movement. This does not mean that the changes were unimportant; indeed they had a
profound significance for women and their lives. Changes in gendered social practices did emerge from dialogues between a male indigenous elite and the colonial state. Nor should we ignore the hostility and social exclusions that male social reformers suffered because of their views. Nevertheless the intention behind nineteenth-century social reform was rooted in political movements for independence from colonial rule, and women's emancipation was a vocabulary deployed by men to confront the power of the colonial state.

Nineteenth-century reform is a significant historical site in which to explore the issue of supportive partners, even though 'supportive partnerships' was clearly not the vocabulary of reform. Nevertheless, individual biographies located in culturally specific contexts, contoured within social milieus that confront prejudice but also work within the horizons of normative practice and preconception, are undoubtedly important in documenting supportive practices. But key questions remain unanswered if we restrict ourselves to profiling individual biographies oriented toward the public-political. It is necessary to ask if the domestic, familial domain is a political space (not merely as a private sequestered zone) that animates an alternative set of possibilities to map male supportive practices. To properly understand the domestic we need to look at muted 'structures within structures' that exist within the hegemonies of home and domestic practices that reorder both the hegemonic and the subdued.

Servitude, sacrifice and support

In this section I attempt to decipher support extended by a group of men for whom support for women and sustaining the family are often understood as simultaneous – if not the same thing – and for whom every act is a ‘doing’ encapsulated within an understanding of their own marginality. I focus on a group of male domestic workers, though to call them ‘a group’ is a misnomer in some sense, for they work as individuals, live with employer families and make choices without reference to any stable structure like a group. Most find employment through networks that draw on kinship, village and regional connection, but these networks are constantly shifting. What is significant is that as a category they are divested of the markers of masculine identity that construct men as dominant, powerful figures of authority. The social self of the worker, colloquially referred to as naukar (servant) is shorn of these marks of maleness. Instead he embodies the feminine somatic, repudiating maleness, self-consciously differentiating himself from his dominant employers (male and female) by demonstrating subservience.
It is this deliberate negation of the social self that compels attention. For why, after all, would a man become a naukar? And how does he speak of himself and his work history? To become naukar is a condition of a classed public. Distinctions of class are reinforced within the domestic domain through overt and subtle segregations of space, control over time, gendered work performances and linguistic practices. To be a naukar is an act that needs to be framed as an encounter between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. Supportive practices seem to have no place here at all, other than in a chivalric mode of protection by master toward servant, or the performance of gratitude in servitude.

To recognize and restore a sense of the subjective to the naukar self we have to view the man as a bridge between two homes. In his personal kinship unit, he is the provisioning breadwinner; in his employer’s home, he is a caregiver. The ‘forms’ of support in contextualized spaces do not remain segregated but cross back and forth creating conditions that are intrinsic to the processes of gendering.

One of the important aspects of the working histories of these men is that they are almost always migrants in the city. In their narratives it is quite clear that an individual worker’s potential employment depends on kin and community networks that connect the worker to a set of employment situations in urban households. Networks are critical because domestic spaces are not open, so workers will rarely be able to walk in off the street to get employment. An individual worker’s personhood needs to be ‘vouched for’ by others. From the employer’s perspective networks act as a form of surety that guarantee a man’s employability as naukar. Reputation and reliability are key tropes that enable incorporations into household as a domestic servant. Like the veiled woman, the worker’s sense of self is looped out through other people’s ‘tellings’; thus like a woman who can be approached only through others who metaphorically stand before her, a newly arrived male worker is known and fleshed out by others who stand surety for him.

Intrinsic to the worker’s ability to survive in the city, networks act as mirrors of a future foretold. Even before a man leaves to become a naukar his ‘destiny’ is known to village folk. The network leads to naukri (paid employment) inevitably as naukar in an urban household. Everyone knows that the journey along the nodes of these networks is a form of ‘processing’ of a man into a working life, where servitude might be a first step or a lifelong state. What is left deliberately blurred or muted is that the ‘processing’ into servitude entails a loss of masculine selves. The sacrifice of masculinity is elided in the narratives that dwell on conditions of class, lack of skill,
restriction of volition and the need to work. A man is mazbur (coerced/obliged) to work ‘for the sake of the family’. Mazburi – obligation – is simultaneously projected as a condition of class existence as well as the work men must perform to be men. The journey into naukri and servitude might be a future foretold, but it does not remain at the level of non-reflexive movement. It is a self-conscious acceptance of negated masculinity that underscores a man’s sacrifice ‘for family’. It is an ideology that frames breadwinning-as-caregiving, locating the man materially and symbolically at the centre of the reproduction of the household. It is this sense of ‘support’ that we need to excavate to flesh out what it means to be a naukar.

There is no doubt that negations of the masculine self are entailed in becoming a successful naukar, an aspect I have dealt with in detail elsewhere (Chopra, 2006, 2007a). Very briefly, male domestic workers are poised on a knife-edge between stranger and familiar, treated as members of the household only in so far as they are able to perform effeminacy successfully. Their status as one of the family is partial and involves mastering strategies that offset the danger of a stranger-out-of-place. Increasing incorporation is signalled by the performance of new kinds of work (serving morning tea in the bedroom, for example when employers are déshabillé) an endorsement of the emergence of a newly cast, non-masculine person.

In-between status surfaces in a series of domestic routines. Workers may be permitted to watch television with the family, but occupy the edges of the familial space, either sitting on the floor or on the edges of furniture. Food is not eaten together with the family and bathrooms remain out of bounds. Modern urban housing, where shortage of space is a perennial problem, creates a crisis vis-à-vis use of space by servants, particularly bathrooms. Many unstable, illegally built additions to middle-class homes are geared to the needs of domestic workers. The motivation has little to do with humanist intentions of provisioning and housing. It is a way of creating segregated spaces ‘for servants’.

Domestic workers draw their bodies inward through a series of gestures that mute their maleness. Ways of standing with hands folded over the genitals, eyes lowered (nazar ka parda) accompanied by forms of address that signal the authority of the employer and the subordination of the worker are accepted cultural signs that a new body and a new being are emerging from the rough. Mimetically replicating a gestural language of veiling, silence, soft speech tones, economy of speech (awaz ka parda) and a successful adoption of a ‘listening’ posture are read as incorporations into obedience. Extravagant gestures of communication can lead to a loss of employment. Any sign that exaggerates or draws attention to the body is read as a dangerous assertion,
converting the worker from a successful effeminate into a treacherous male stranger.

It is important to outline the substantive and material choices that men make when confronted with uncertainty and unemployment. Any analysis of men and work must therefore focus on work that is ‘unconventional’ and ‘outside’ the accepted division of labour. Male domestic workers recognized and spoke of domestic work as ‘effeminate’ or ‘not male’ within a division of labour framework, but they also had their own take on what domestic work gave them. Bringing their family to the city was an important reason. Workers with young school-going children looked to the city as a means of providing better education. While some spoke of doing domestic work as compulsion (mazboori) others thought of it as a safer form of employment. The uncertainty of work contexts in the informal economy versus the sense of security provided by the regularity of domestic work and the sanctuary of domestic space are cited by workers as reasons for doing domestic work. An employer’s home is viewed as a form of safe housing for individual migrant workers and their families.

For an anthropologist like myself, who grew up in a ‘third world’ but nonetheless wholly class-privileged family where male domestic workers were a daily presence in our lives, everyday interactions between ‘servant’ and ‘sir’ were part of my world. The deference and avoidance relation between my grandfather and the domestic worker, for example, were partial replications of how my aunts-in-law behaved towards elder kin, particularly their fathers-in-law. I can only now begin to decipher this form of gendering of male workers – literally in hindsight. As children, however, we moved seamlessly between thinking of the bhaiya (brother; a euphemistic form of address for the naukar, suggesting fictive kinship but clearly demarcating bonds of blood from ties of hire) as a ‘senior’ kin member toward whom we needed to show linguistic respect by addressing him in the plural honorific. But he was also a playmate who pushed our bikes – we had them, he didn’t – and a brother whom we could order around to fetch water or pack our school lunchboxes.

My analysis therefore comes from personal experience and reflections upon that experience informed and provoked by ‘knowledge’ and politics of gender and class. Such ‘forward-backward’ movements make my anthropological quest a journey into my personal past, but also one that enables me to rethink issues of politicizing gender, masculinity and relations of class within the familial domain. What is clear to me now, though it was part of an accepted ‘normality’ to my childhood self, is that the worker’s family had claims upon my own that replicated the obligation and exchange relations that existed between our extended kin. The mode was certainly
chivalric, signalling the class distinction, but the fact that the claim existed
and had to be met was absolute. Most interesting to me was the way my
younger in-marrying aunts spoke of the ability of the *bhaiya* to provide an
independent home away from home for his wife and children, setting up a
nuclear ‘quarter’ within his employer’s home. There was a tone of envy and
awe when my aunts spoke of this nuclear household as a sanctuary space for
the *naukar*’s wife, away from the authority of her in-laws. Most marked was
the admiration of *naukars* who brought their wives to the city for
gynaecological consultations in city hospitals, taking over the role of mothers-
in-law (who are assigned the task of pre-natal care of pregnant women in
the gendered division of labour). Without overt statement, there was a veiled
comparison of the *naukar* as husband and my own young uncles still under
the thumb of their parents’ authority. The absence of a mother-in-law in the
*naukar*’s household was seen as a form of liberation for this class-differen-
tiated but envied conjugal couple, and the *naukar* was projected as ‘more
male’ and a better ‘provisioner’ for his wife and children. Without over-
emphasizing this aspect it does seem to me that the side-by-side domesticities
were an idiosyncratic site for the circulation of subaltern and dominant
formations of masculinity.

The fact that men do work that flies in the face of male entitlements
requires us to rethink the location and language of supportive practices. How
far is this support nomadic, moving across households? Does the work a man
performs in a household where as *naukar* he is effeminized become
incorporated into his own home? Is it possible to argue that once his
masculinity is restored in his own home, he then does do work categorized as
feminine without fear of loss of a male self? This is clearly an area waiting to
be more fully mapped. In my limited ethnographic field it became clear to
me that some workers, especially those who thought of themselves as
‘modern’, introduced new diets into their home kitchens, metaphorically
turning the tables by cooking new foods, or ‘teaching’ family members to
accept non-traditional foods and ingredients.

Support may not be the term used to describe domestic work even by
those who enact support or those who receive care. Cultural idioms of
sacrifice, obligation, duty, and labour are the more common idioms of
support. These idioms are neither a disguise nor a deflection – they are ways
in which supportive practices find a place in people’s lives, and through
language are afforded recognition and reflection. Understanding supportive
practice must move between the domains of ‘doing’ and the domains of
reflection, between the ‘present’ act of doing and our ‘present’ shaped
by the political questions of men and support.
Is there any aspect of that life history that allows a recouping of a masculine self? Are there ways that we need to ‘see’ the naukar in a light that enables a different understanding of personal debasement as a political act of choice that goes beyond, even subverts, the ‘given’ structures of hegemonic gender difference? An analysis of work performances makes evident the deeper implications that the naukar and his work have for gender relations.

Conclusion

Feminist theorists have argued that agency and human rights have a location in material conditions of life (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000). None of these material conditions are external to the social relations or histories that shape them. Time, space, history and biography generate conditions for agency and concrete supportive practices. It is clear from the nineteenth-century histories of social reform, ethnographies of life worlds, that support does have a material and a non-material aspect. Supportive practices are diverse in terms of the cultural contexts within which they are articulated, but they are deeply transformative. The historiography of the ‘women’s question’ in nineteenth-century reform movements has drawn our attention toward the intentionality that underlay reform – mainly, the recovery of a nation in the face of colonial hegemonies and the power of definition. But in retrospect it is equally clear that the intention to reinscribe the nationalist self was only part of the story of reform; the other was the reform itself. Did reform have a bearing on women’s lives in any material and substantive way? Was it enabling of a sense of empowerment and autonomy? Men spoke against satidaha and pre-pubertal marriage and, precisely because they had the power to be publicly heard and acknowledged, their voices had an ‘effect’ on emancipation. That is a narrative that needs to be told.

I think what comes across in the analysis of nineteenth-century reformers and of life worlds of subaltern naukar men is the focus on the concept of autonomy itself. It seems clear to me that autonomy is not uniform, and nor is it to be understood as such. Cultural and historical locations produce their own ‘version’, if you will, of what autonomy looks like from different perspectives and positions. For male domestic workers, the move into servitude is a loss of autonomous masculinity. Nevertheless, it provides an opportunity to break away from the authority of elder male (and female) relatives and perhaps set up an independent conjugal household, in the process reshaping ‘family life’. Autonomy either for themselves or for their partners is not absolute – it is a matter of small accretions and continuous
negotiations. It is nonetheless materially realized and enacted, and most of all expressive of agency.

The different locations of the political ‘self’ separated by space and time have produced an interrogation of a global concept – autonomy – within the context of local lives. What we label as politicized masculinity has different faces and it is these shifts in the discourse of autonomy, empowerment and the politics of the personal that I have tried to trace. I do however bind time, space and politics within the framework of supportive practices because it does seem to me that the idea orients itself to an elaboration of ‘relational autonomy’ and empowerment.

In talking about themselves and their lives, men did not necessarily think of themselves as ‘doing gender’ even when they elaborated what to our ears and eyes might sound like narratives of support. Supportive practices are therefore more than an ‘alternative’ formation of masculinity. They enable us to engage with men’s lives and expressions of their subjective positions in ways that so far remain unexplored if not invisible. Supportive practices are a political idiom, one which illuminates men’s understanding of who they are and what they think about significant others in their lives.

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Notes

1 The Brahmo Samaj, a social-religious progressive movement in nineteenth-century Bengal, advocated modern social and educational reform within the Hindu community, though primarily restricted to middle-class Bengal.

2 Interestingly, nineteenth-century reformers were often influenced by an event in their own lives. Some accounts indicate that Rammohun Roy engaged with the issue of sati because he had seen a sister-in-law ‘forced’ to commit the act. Phule’s understanding of his own caste-based vulnerability heightened his awareness of the dangers of illiteracy that women and lower castes endured, becoming prime targets of avaricious priests who persuaded them to conduct rituals for their own ‘spiritual safety’. He began his advocacy for women’s education by first educating his wife.
References


Part Three

Engagements

Changing Masculinities
Chapter Twelve
Gender Regimes Changing Men or Men Changing Gender Regimes?
Challenges for National and Transnational Social Policy, Gender Equality and Organizing with Men

Jeff Hearn

[M]en in different parts of the world are spending vast amounts of money trying to kill each other, whilst a large proportion of the world’s population (mostly, but not exclusively women and children) are allowed to starve to death. . . . Male violence, sexual or otherwise, is not the unusual behaviour of a few ‘odd’ individuals, neither is it an expression of overwhelming biological urges: it is a product of the social world in which we live. (Cowburn et al., 1992)

The notion of policy can easily appear at first as gender-neutral. Yet not only is much policy and policy development constructed by and through assumptions about gender, but also much policy and policy development can be understood as policy on and about gender and gender relations. . . . Gender constructs policy, as policy constructs gender. (Hearn and McKie, 2008)

Recognizing that men are both key actors in gender regimes and a key issue for policy itself, this chapter addresses what might be called the ‘man problem’ in gender regimes and policy development – and in particular the challenges to be met in national and transnational social policy, gender equality and organizing with men. It draws on recent research on men and masculinities across Europe and focuses on how gender regimes can and do change men, and how men can be and are involved in changing gender regimes.¹

Gender regimes changing men: national and transnational

Men and masculinities are set within changing gender regimes, including gendered policy regimes. There have been huge historical changes in masculinities and men’s practices; yet there is also stubborn persistence in some aspects, especially men’s domination of violence and, at the top, management of organizations, business and government. Changing gender relations both
constitute governments and other policy-making institutions, and set tasks for governmental, partnership and third sector agencies – at both national and transnational levels. In this sense, governments and other policy institutions are part of both the problem and the solution.

The nation-state in Europe has often been gendered in the fundamental sense that its ‘making’ has been a project historically led by men and for men, or at least certain classes of men – even when its dominant symbolism invokes a ‘motherland’ that is in turn ‘protected’ by men. It is onto this political base that women’s political participation has been grafted in most, though not all European countries. On the other hand, women’s political rights and participation have been extended, if unevenly, in Europe, with their significant presence in Parliament, government and some professions in some countries. This visibility of women, at least symbolically, re-problematizes and reconfigures the ‘man problem’ – what are men to do in relation to gender equality and feminism (men as political gender subjects); and what is to be done with men in relation to gender equality and feminism (men as political gender objects). These changes in many ways are part of the backcloth to the emergence of gender equality policy as an ongoing feature of the EU social policy agenda and as part of the so-called ‘modern’ social democratic state.

Transnational and European contexts
Global perspectives on men are increasingly significant (Greig et al., 2000; Cleaver, 2002; Pease and Pringle, 2002; Morrell and Swart, 2005). There is a growing policy literature on men in development studies, which examines the impact of globalization processes on men and gender relations (Sweetman, 1997; Cornwall and White, 2000; Chant and Gutmann, 2000; Ruxton, 2004). Key issues include: transnational corporations’ gender-segregated labour forces; almost total dominance of men at top levels of transnational corporate management, military, arms trade and international organizations; masculinization of capital market trading floors and business media; sexualization of women in global mass media; internationalization of the sex trade; gender segregation of international sports industries (from conference presentation by Connell, cited in Esplen and Greig, 2008). Certain dominant versions of masculinities are (re)articulated in the global arena as part of processes by which states are re-formed or realigned.

There is increasing recognition of the central place of men and masculinities in what are usually seen as policy arenas ‘outside’ gender: foreign policy, trade policy, security policy, defence policy, militarism and war. While policy around ‘domestic’ and interpersonal violence is well recognized as part of social policy, this is not so for collective, military violence, which is hived off
and sanctioned as a special case. In effect there are thus key separations within
the social arena with respect to violence. Military activity is one of the most
clearly gendered and salient examples of the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004),
with or without conscription. Militaries are part of the state and organized in
association with political, economic and administrative power in its highest
reaches, including policing, security services, foreign policy, and economic
interests. They are concerned with both national offence and defence. They
are specifically geared to the ability, actual and potential, to inflict violence
and other forms of harm. To address men’s violence necessarily means
addressing militarism. To do otherwise is to place militarism outside of
violence and thus, even if unwittingly, to condone the latter.

The contemporary societal context of law and policy on men in Europe
is often formally framed by the ratification, or not, of various international
agreements, some of which are open to reservations and different
interpretations. These are often supplemented, at the national level, by a
‘(Gender) Equality Act’, a Bureau of Gender Equality between Women and
Men or Equality Office, and various forms of gender mainstreaming. In
considering the broader European context, it is important to recognize
contradictions between, on one hand, contemporary trends towards globaliza-
tion, regionalization and transnationalism and, on the other, the persistence
of the nation-state. Having said that, there are both similarities and differences
in the substantive patterns of national laws and policies. In most cases these
debates on and indeed in the EU have focused on increasing women’s
participation in the public spheres of employment and education, along with
the development of women’s rights in social protection and welfare.
Throughout the development of the EU there have been relatively strong
legal and policy emphases on equality and gender equality. There is, however,
much to be done in order to give explicit attention to the full implications of
achieving gender equality within the European Social Agenda, in terms of
what this means for men and changing men’s practices.

In the EU in many cases policies are gender-mainstreamed, at least in
theory and at the surface level, but policies sensitive to both women and men,
especially the diversity and multiple voices amongst women and men, are less
usual. There is growing recognition of the impact, albeit differential, of the
EU on the heterogeneous gender regimes of member states.

National contexts
In many countries citizenship has been constructed historically as ‘male’, with
concessions, citizenship rights and suffrage afterwards granted to women as
‘add-ons’. However, there is variation in the extent to which this pattern
applies, and in some cases citizenship has taken different gendered forms, with citizenship for the mass of women and men being more closely associated with relatively recent nationalisms for all citizens. The constitutions of many nations in different ways embody formal equality for citizens under the law; and non-discrimination on grounds of sex/gender. Most have a written constitution. Gender-neutral language is generally used in law and policy, though often also for different reasons and within different legal and political traditions. In the case of recent entrants to the EU, considerable efforts have gone into harmonization of law and policy on matters such as non-discrimination and gender equality. Such formal apparatuses may contravene historical tradition and contemporary legal and policy implementation.

The effectiveness of these policy measures, at least in the short term, is in doubt, in view of the lack of gender equality. There is often a gap between the governmental rhetoric and everyday conduct in society, with men and women mostly unaware of discussions about gender equality in the labour market and elsewhere. The problem lies in the realization of these principles in every branch of legislation, social relations and everyday practice. In addition, governmental responsibility for gender equality is frequently delegated to one ministry, or one part thereof, and in some countries there are significant legal and policy variations between different national or regional governments, and between ministries.

In many countries, increasing neo-liberal and market-oriented trends have brought a more individualist approach to gender – with policy implications around, for example, structuring of time, care responsibilities and work–home relations. While there are growing governmental and related discourses on reconciling men’s participation at home with their working lives, there is usually a lack of explicit focus on men in clear policy terms. More specifically, in terms of policy development that has addressed men, simple, perhaps oversimplified, differentiations may be made:

- Nordic nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) that have had both gender equality apparatus, and at least some focused policy development on men, through national committees, since the 1980s (thus prior to Finland’s joining the EU), operating in the context of the membership and work of the Nordic Council of Ministers; this included the ‘Men and gender equality’ programme (1995–2000).
- Established EU member nations (for example, Ireland, Italy, Germany, the UK) – that have developed their ‘equal opportunities’ and ‘gender equality’ policies in the context of the previous EU-15, and with some specific emphasis upon men.
Former Soviet and ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries (for example, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia) in the EU-27 – which in a variety of ways have a recent political history of formal legal equality but without developed human rights, and have developed as part of the accession process their gender equality laws and policies post-transformation, at the formal level, and with very limited specific emphasis on men.

EU candidate countries (Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey), which are now in the process of developing their gender equality laws and policies post-transformation as part of EU accession process, with very limited specific emphasis upon men.

Potential EU candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo), with post-socialist processes at relatively earlier stages.

Isolates (for example, Belarus, Switzerland, Ukraine), where the picture is mixed.

Men changing gender regimes: national and transnational

Men as policy actors

It has been long pointed out in feminist studies (for example, O’Brien, 1981) that men dominate not only particular public situations but also what might be called ‘public thinking’. Policy as a concept is tightly linked with the realm of politics. It is often considered a ‘neutral’, genderless, activity performed mostly by ‘neutral’ men. Thus it is perhaps not so surprising that creating sufficiently gender-conscious policy is very difficult; to do so necessitates becoming more aware of how political systems and the working processes within them are routinely gendered. Conventional notions of the policy process have often presumed a ‘rational’, evidence-informed response to recognized ‘problems’ potentially requiring policy responses – an approach critiqued in a number of ways, not least for its presumptions of a value-free basis to evidence, policy evolution and implementation (Bacchi, 2004a, 2004b).

Much of what men do is not seen as ‘about gender’; it is not seen as making gender relations and gender divisions more or less equal or unequal. Most of their practices, in public and in private – in work, negotiations, persuasion, networking, lobbying, pressurizing and so on – are neither seen nor experienced as gendered. They are done, perceived and felt as (if they were) ‘normal’. They ‘just happen’! And in one sense there is some slightly odd ‘truth’ in this. Producing and reproducing gender inequality, men’s practices are heavily
embedded in existing social, economic and cultural relations – so that, dominant or complicit, they are equated often and easily with what is considered and counts as the ‘normal’, usual, or even official way of doing things and making decisions (Martin, 2001). Men’s practices are ordinary, mundane; women’s are noteworthy, or worse. One way of understanding these male practices is through the notion of homosociality (Lipman-Blumen, 1976): men’s preference for men and men’s company, rather than women and women’s company. Essed (2002) understands this process through the notion of ‘cultural cloning’: the tendency to reproduce more of the same – whether by gender, ethnicity, organizational culture or tradition. Such (heterosexual) homosociality can sometimes go hand in hand with heterosexism and homophobia. This aspect of men’s relations with men needs to be strongly challenged.

Policies on men

A persistent challenge is how to examine law and policy that specifically addresses men, whilst at the same time being aware of the broad range of laws and policies that are not explicitly gendered that are likely to bear on men. In one sense almost all laws and policies can be said to be relevant to men as citizens (or non-citizens, for example, as ‘aliens’). These questions are affected by both deeply embedded historical constructions of citizenship, and more recent reforms around gender and ‘gender equality’.

Focusing on men in developing and analysing policy appears to have become more popular in recent years. In some ways this is not anything special; it is not new; and it is not necessarily, in itself, linked to any radical project of social change and transformation. There have long been state and related policies on men and masculinity, most obviously on conscription, militarism and crime, but also on fatherhood, marriage and education. There has been a long history of clearly gendered policies and laws for some other areas of work, such as religious work and ministry, as well as some forms of manual work, such as mining. Other established policy areas include social assistance, by sex and marital status; and nationality and family statuses and rights, especially fatherhood and ‘husbandhood’. What is newer is the explicit naming of men as men in policy development, whether in relation to gender equality or more generally. Much depends on how developing policies on men and men’s practices is done:

- Are policies on men developed explicitly or implicitly, or are they done in passing?
- Are men seen as gendered or non-gendered?
• Are policies related to feminist and other critical gender research and policy development?
• According to what assumptions about men, women and gender?

Policy debate on gender equality has developed primarily in terms of what women have to gain from greater gender equality. This has become the ‘mainstream’ of gender equality work and thinking. At the same time, men are also involved, positioned and implicated in gender equality policies and practices – as spouses, fathers, other family members, colleagues, trade union members, managers, employers, policy makers, political leaders, civil servants, professionals, civil society advocates, or simply as citizens. Sometimes this has meant some men resisting moves to gender equality or seeing it only as ‘women’s business’. But this situation is slowly changing. Men seem to be becoming slowly and surely more interested in gender equality. According to the Finnish Gender Equality Barometer 2004, almost half of men fully agree that men benefit from increased gender equality (Melkas, 2004). Thus we can ask:

• What part can men play in gender equality?
• What gender equality policies need to be developed for men?
• How can men contribute positively to gender equality?
• How do such questions look for men of different ages, ethnicities, classes?

There are now many transnational organizations that have come to recognize the importance of addressing the place of men in attempts to move towards gender equality. There are also risks and dangers in non-action – in intersections, for example, of various ‘new’ and ‘old’ masculinities, nationalisms, racisms and xenophobias. In 1995 The Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women read:

The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women’s issue. . . . The Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world. (United Nations, 2001)

Since 1995, these issues have been taken forward in the policy discussions of the UN and its various agencies, and in those of other transgovernmental organizations, including the EU. In 2003 the UN’s Division for the Advance-ment of Women, organizing a worldwide online discussion forum and expert
group meeting in Brasilia on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality as part of its preparation for the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, led off with the following comments:

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the role of men in promoting gender equality, in particular as the achievement of gender equality is now clearly seen as a societal responsibility that concerns and should fully engage men as well as women. (Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations, 2003)

There are also key issues around the changing policy context in Europe. Transnational social policy issues include: EU expansion; conditions of application and accession; migration, especially of young men, and its implications for women and men, in countries of both emigration and immigration; sex trade and trafficking, including men as consumers. It is necessary to analyse and change the place of men within the gender structure of governmental and other policy-making organizations. There is a need to develop policy options, best practices and policies on men.

It is likely that this process of considering the implications for men and changing men's practices will intensify in the coming years, albeit from a variety of political interests and motivations. In particular, men's violence towards women and children is receiving more attention from the EU, the Council of Europe and other transnational organizations, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Breines et al., 2000; Ferguson et al., 2004; Edwards and Hearn, 2004). Further transgovernmental interest seems likely to develop.

In recent years many European countries have undertaken some form of initiative focused on supporting men's active participation in promoting gender equality in different spheres of life. However, there is also national variation in the extent to which laws and policies are gender-disaggregated. Relative lack of gendering of law and policy continues in most areas, but exceptions where explicit policy on men has more commonly been developed include:

• men as workers/breadwinners/heads of family and household;
• fatherhood and paternity (including legal rights and obligations of fathers, and paternity leave);
• fatherhood, husband and other family statuses in immigration and nationality;
• gay, queer and transsexual/transgender issues;
• crimes of sexual violence;
• programmes on men who have been violent to women and children;
• conscription;
• men’s health education programmes;
• reproductive technology and reproductive rights.

Many contrasts can be drawn between different national gender regimes. For example, the Nordic and UK experiences differ markedly in terms of explicitly engaging men with the gender equality policy process. The former have been more proactive and optimistic; the latter more reactive and cautious, even pessimistic. The longest continuous national government initiative on men and gender equality is the Finnish Subcommittee on Men’s Issues established in 1988 within the Council for Equality between Women and Men. Focused positive policy development has been slower in the UK. In 2007 the UK government provided limited finance to the Coalition on Men and Boys for a policy report on men and masculinities. However, such governmental institutional and policy-orientated developments can remain somewhat separate from the experiences of individual men who define themselves as feminists or pro-feminists. Importantly, there are clear differences in how ‘men’ have been constituted as gendered subjects as a focused area of public concern and policy action (Ashe, 2007).

Such policy constructions look rather different according to different policy fields. In the Nordic case, men’s involvement in the project of gender equality has often been constructed in terms of men’s relations to children, specifically fatherhood, as part of the reconciliation of ‘work and private life’ – in family/parental/paternity leave policies, including those that were specifically only for fathers. In Nordic countries, where state feminism has been a relatively powerful influence, fathers’ rights issues have been incorporated into gender equality politics as a part of realizing feminist objectives. Promotion of fatherhood has often axiomatically been assumed to be a ‘good thing’, and seen separately from, say, questions of violence and abuse. Hobson and Morgan (2002) suggest Swedish fathers have most legal rights, yet least responsibilities compared to other European countries. In the UK, fatherhood has been seen more as a problem, in terms of lack of fathering and some fathers being too young, irresponsible or not providing cash support. With crime and violence men tend to be constructed as more ‘responsible subjects’. In the UK, men are dealt with in the context of a high and increasing prison population, even though long-term imprisonment for ‘domestic violence’ is rare; in Nordic countries imprisonment levels are much lower, though this is not totally explained by levels of interpersonal violence.
In both countries a focus on men has been foregrounded through men’s anti-violence programmes. Such programmes have gained ground with relative ease, usually without evaluation. Longer-term implications of men’s programmes, including dangers of men taking over the field and diluting feminist orientation, have rarely been addressed.

**Men’s organizing**

The relationship of men to gender equality is not necessarily straightforward or uncontested. There has also been a significant growth of men’s more gender-conscious activities, often in relation to gender equality. There are many reasons why men might be and are interested in gender equality: they range from anti-feminist motivations suggesting gender equality is unnecessary or worse, to pro-feminist attempts to support gender equality and feminism. Gender consciousness does not necessarily mean pro-gender equality; male supremacists are indeed gender-conscious, just as white supremacists are ‘race’-conscious. In between are those forms of men’s politics that see ‘gender equality’ agendas as opportunities to benefit men, without much concern for women. There are also men’s gender-conscious activities that emphasize differences between men, by sexuality, racialization, religion and so on, as the most crucial. But this is only the beginning: as when men say they are interested in gender equality, there may be key differences in what is actually meant. The term, like feminism, can be understood by men in various ways and for various reasons – positions taken include (liberal) reform, (standpoint) resistance, or (deconstructive) rebellion (Lorber, 2005).

The very term ‘men’s movement’ has taken on different meanings over the last thirty years or so (Hearn, 1987, 1993). In the 1970s and early 1980s the term was used to refer to the ‘anti-sexist men’s movement’; in the UK and elsewhere there were major attempts to define the movement as ‘pro-feminist’ and ‘gay-affirmative’. They were influenced by left, anarchist, welfare and green politics, and were a presence at conferences and gatherings, in campaigns and activist groups; their activities included consciousness raising, therapy and ‘support groups’. Since the 1970s there have been various shifting forms of gender-conscious politics by men in relation to gender and feminism, ranging not only from anti-feminist to pro-feminist/anti-sexist, but also across differences such as sexuality or racialization. By the mid-1980s there was a loss of momentum in anti-sexist men’s movements; many men left these activities or tried to bring these issues into more mainstream and professional work. There followed the mythopoetic men’s movement, emphasizing questions of age and generation, and popularized by the media creation of ‘new men’ and then ‘new lads’.
In Europe and elsewhere, men’s rightists and fathers’ rights organizations have grown – some confusingly called the ‘men’s movement’. In various countries there is an uneven development of more composite groups identified as men, such as ‘older pro-feminist men’ or ‘black gay men’. Recently, there has been something of a revival of interest in pro-feminism in some European contexts. Examples include the European Pro-feminist Network; the Ending Gender-based Violence project (Ferguson et al., 2004); Critical Research on Men in Europe; and the International Network for the Radical Critique of Masculinities. In different ways these all recognize men’s privileges and men’s positive relations to feminism.

Conclusion: Strategies for changing men

Seeing or recognizing ‘men’ as a policy area and indeed developing specifically and explicitly men-related policy still seems a relatively rare phenomenon. The ‘man problem’ remains obscure(d), partly because so much policy is about men and yet is not recognized as such, and partly because explicit policy on men is in uneven stages of formulation – sometimes as partly of the gender equality project, sometimes furthering men’s interests. There may be deep-seated contradictions in men’s involvement in gender equality: first, to involve men to increase women’s power in relation to men; and, second, to reassert men’s power or ‘rights’ in relation to women.

Men’s organizing and policy development on and by men need to be contextualized in the larger field of patriarchal social relations – transnational, national, local. At each level there is a continuum from ‘gender-non-conscious’ to ‘gender-conscious’ forms of organizing. Mainstream organizing is typically presented as gender-neutral, however much they mainly remain forms of men’s organizing. Mainstream (or male-stream) governmental and business organizations can be understood as places of men’s organizing – often in effect ‘men’s organizations’, full of unnoticed and unnamed ‘men’s groups’. It is here that women’s demands may often be directed, and where men often respond, predominantly negatively and without thinking of this as ‘men’s responses’.

Despite the rise of gender equality politics and rhetorics, major structural gender inequalities persist. Different traditions of gendered welfare state policy regimes have definite implications for men’s practices, for example in men’s relations to home and work, including different constructions of men as breadwinners. Different men can have complex, even contradictory, relations to gender equality and other forms of equality. Men’s developing relations to gender equality can include: men assisting in the promotion of
women’s greater equality; attention to the gendered disadvantage of certain men, as might include gay men, men with caring responsibilities, men in non-traditional work; men’s rights, fathers’ rights, and anti-women/anti-feminist politics. There is little attention to how men might assist the promotion of gender equality in ways that assist women. Efforts towards gender mainstreaming in law and policy are often, quite understandably, women-oriented; the implications of such policies for men need to be more fully explored, whilst at the same time avoiding anti-women/anti-feminist ‘men only’ tendencies, as sometimes promoted.

The emergence of men as ‘gendered subjects’ and men’s ‘gender consciousness’ has partly been articulated in relation to women’s and feminist struggles, but also partly in relation to other forms of affiliation and organizing, such as racial justice, labour struggles, or gay and queer rights. Spaces and opportunities for pro-feminist, (pro-)queer gender work with men exist within civil society and social movements. Mobilization and politicizing of the social status and social power of ‘men’ and ‘masculinity’ so as to advance a broader justice agenda is necessary. This involves pro-feminist, (pro-)queer strategies in obviously gendered policy areas, such as health and welfare, family, sexuality, education and interpersonal violence. In all these arenas, grassroots organizing, activism and educational work with men and boys, in collaboration with feminist organizing, is necessary.

In pursuing these agendas, intersectional strategies and approaches are important, but remain relatively undeveloped in most law and policy. There are high correlations between poor health and the social disadvantages of class, ethnicity and other inequalities, and addressing these can stimulate men’s positive engagement with gender equality and (pro-)feminism, with critical attention to men’s practices in both social exclusion and inclusion. Another arena for positive intersectional change is the linkage between men as parents and carers and men as violent partners or violent parents, which are generally treated as separate policy issues. An integrated policy approach joining up policy areas is needed, if rarely adopted (Hearn and Pringle, 2006). But strategies for change are needed beyond these policy areas. This means thinking of gender agendas more broadly and, for example, pursuing strategies of gendering the ‘non-gendered’ – in policy fields such as transport, trade, environmental, foreign, security, development and aid. A related approach involves strategies of change with men as leaders and men who are not defined as the problem. For example, there is wide scope for anti-violence intervention directed to non-violent men, as it is the silence of non-violent men that in part maintains men’s violence (Pease, 2008).

Finally, while state social policy has been strongly nation-based and debates
on masculinity have been framed largely in terms of a given society, global and regional transformations are changing the form of the hegemony of men. For example, virtualization processes, through information and communication technologies (ICTs), are means of both reinforcing and contesting hegemony (Hearn and Parkin, 2001). While no specific policy or activism targets or reaches all men, better-informed – and explicitly pro-feminist, gendered – policy on men might assist in moving away from gender domination in and across societies within transnational patriarchies (Hearn, 2008). Transnational organizing and transnational strategies are needed to counter new transnational hegemonies. Differentiations of men suggest multiple trans-patriarchies that are stable, changing, flexible and contested. Questions persist for men as the gendered objects of policy making, and for men as gendered subjects, as activists and policy makers, as well as for the policy-making process itself.

Notes
1 C R O M E : C r i t i c a l  R e s e a r c h  o n  M e n  i n  E u r o p e , <http://www.cromenet.org>, and subsequent work within Sub-network 2, Coordination Action on Human Rights Violations in the EU, Framework 6 Programme, <http://www.caahr.uni-osnabrueck.de/>. I am grateful to Keith Pringle, Heritta Niemi, Linn Egeberg Holmgren and CROME colleagues for their collaboration.
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Chapter Thirteen
Masculinities, Social Exclusion
and Prospects for Change
Reflections from Promundo’s Work in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Gary Barker, Marcos Nascimento, Christine Ricardo, Marianna Olinger
and Marcio Segundo

Masculinities, gender equality and violence in the Cidade Maravilhosa

Promundo was born in 1997 out of frustration with the prevailing discourses about gender equality and efforts to put those discourses into action, practice and policy. On one hand, the call for attention to the gender inequalities and injustices that women and girls face was doing relatively little to engage men and boys in questioning gender privilege. At the same time, there was limited attention to how hegemonic masculinities create vulnerabilities for some groups of men and boys, particularly low-income boys and men in some parts of the world. In the face of the ‘either-or’ communication and advocacy styles that often drive such discourses, we were often regarded with scepticism when suggesting that these issues did not have to compete with each other but could and should be addressed together. Inequitable, violent and dominant forms of masculinities bring ‘costs’ to the lives of girls and women, and to men and boys, in different but ultimately harmful and often measurable ways.

These ideas were born out a specific context – our interactions and work with young people and adults in low-income neighbourhoods in Rio de Janeiro. These areas, known as favelas, are home to about 20 per cent of Rio’s population. Since the 1980s, most favelas have lived in the shadow of ‘comandos’ who traffic in cocaine and marijuana, and engage in armed conflict with rivals over sales and territory. To control or occupy a favela means selling drugs (to residents and others from outside the community), and using the neighbourhood as a place to live, recruit people and hide from the police. It can also mean providing some minimal social benefits to the community, such as funding the local samba school or weekend dances,
or lending money to residents (Barker, 2001, 2005). Since the early 1990s, there has been an ongoing, undeclared (and sometimes declared) war of varying intensity between these gangs, the police and more recently with a third front – militias of off-duty police and firemen who collect protection from communities and have expelled the gangs from a number of favelas, mostly by assassination and intimidation.

This undeclared war is reflected directly in Brazil’s per capita homicide rates, especially homicide rates among young men. In 1999, Ministry of Health data found that 114 in every 100,000 Brazilian men aged 15–29 were being killed with firearms, a rate 4.1 times higher than the (already high) rate for the population as a whole. In Rio de Janeiro, the same statistic climbed to 188 – 6.8 times the homicide risk of the general population. For young men in Rio, the risk of being killed by a firearm is 24 times higher than the risk for young women. In 2001, deaths by firearms represented 65 per cent of mortality among young men, up from 35 per cent in 1983 (Fernandes, 2002). While some of these deaths may be related to causes other than the clashes between comandos, police and militias – such as fights, domestic arguments, and petty theft – a high proportion are unquestionably claimed by this ongoing war.

The impacts of the bullets are also felt in the lives of young men and their families. Brazil currently has nearly 200,000 fewer men than women in the age range 15–29. Brazil’s national census bureau (IBGE) has estimated that by 2050 there will be six million men ‘missing’ from the Brazilian population, mostly as a result of death in traffic accidents and homicide – the vast majority of the latter being gun-related and mostly occurring in low-income, urban areas (Barker, 2005). While we will focus on Rio de Janeiro here, other major urban areas in Brazil such as Brasilia, Recife and Vitoria have homicide rates that are also, by global standards, quite high.

Families in Rio’s favelas (and in similar low-income, urban areas elsewhere) all have stories of the impact of such violence, of how it shapes and influences styles of interaction. Parents frequently live in fear that their sons – who spend more time outside the home than daughters – will become involved in the gangs or caught in the crossfire. Many also live in fear that their daughters will become girlfriends of drug traffickers. In Promundo’s household surveys in several favelas in Rio, we asked parents whether they experienced stress and why. The results provide a telling list of the main causes:

- 59 per cent: lack of money;
- 37 per cent: un-/ underemployment;
31 per cent: community violence;
31 per cent: marital tensions.

In qualitative interviews, it was clear how much these factors interacted. Lack of money and un-/underemployment for men who saw no other recognized social role than being providers was associated with men’s use of violence against female partners, and with high rates of family abandonment. About one third of the households interviewed were female-headed.

Interviews with families also showed how their fear and stress over community violence were related to their use of violence against children. Of the parents surveyed, 35 per cent reported that they had used some form of physical punishment against a child in the last three months, with spanking being the most common form, followed by a beating or whipping. Boys between the ages of 9 and 13 were the most common victims of this violence. Parents believe they need to control their sons and teach them to stay inside and ‘out of trouble’ so that they will not become involved in gangs.

Community violence is also related to men’s use of violence against women. In a household survey that Promundo and Instituto Noos carried out in two low-income and one middle-income community in Rio de Janeiro in 2003 (750 men aged 15–59), 25.4 per cent of men reported having used physical violence with their current or most recent female partner (Promundo and Noos, 2003). Data analysis showed three factors most associated with men’s self-reported use of violence against a female partner: (1) having witnessed violence in the family as a child; (2) having been a victim of physical violence in the home when a child; and (3) having inequitable views about gender.

These data are consistent with other sample surveys on violence against women in Brazil. Household surveys in São Paulo and Recife, carried out as part of the World Health Organization (WHO) multi-country study on violence against women, found that 27–34 per cent of women have experienced physical violence from a male partner, and 10–14 per cent have experienced sexual violence (WHO, 2005). All of these issues must be framed within the broad context of social injustice in Brazil, in which race is an important factor.

The policy environment
Before describing Promundo’s work, a few reflections about the policy environment in Brazil are relevant. The context is complex, with many
organized civil society groups and movements seeking to influence public policy at the municipal, state and federal levels. But some general points can be made. First, Brazil’s public institutions are relatively fragile and there are tremendous disparities in the presence and functioning of the state in different parts of the country. The Cardoso administration used the slogan ‘The Federal Government: Working in All of Brazil’ throughout its eight years in power – that the administration needed to affirm its national presence suggests how weak that presence is in some areas. In vast areas of the Amazon region, for example, it is hardly felt at all, and in low-income urban areas across the country it is mostly absent, or is felt only when police (or federal armed forces) are sent in to quell violence.

On the other hand, there are examples in Brazil of excellence in policy and public implementation, including the national apparatus for supporting labour rights and the National AIDS Programme, which currently provides anti-retroviral medication for up to 90 per cent of the HIV-positive population in the country. There is also Bolsa Familia, a national income support programme providing a conditional cash transfer on a monthly basis, which in 2008 was reaching eleven million low-income households with school-age children nationally.

Brazil also has a progressive constitution with multiple examples of citizen participation (in health, children’s rights, women’s rights), which, on paper at least, guarantees a wide set of rights for citizens. There are, in addition, a number of a vocal and accomplished organized civil society movements, among these being the women’s rights movement that was influential recently in promoting (and securing) improved legislation related to violence against women.

**Promundo’s strategies – Part 1: Mapping, understanding and building on voices of resistance**

Promundo has been working at several levels to promote change. One level focuses on community and individual change. In Rio’s favelas, we initially identified individuals and groups who question some of the prevailing or hegemonic discourses and analysed this research for ‘cracks’ and ‘holes’: inconsistencies, performances of and resistances to traditional views about manhood that offered us entry points for intervention.

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with young and adult men who exhibited such resistances. These young men generally showed a high degree of self-reflection and some awareness of the personal benefits of embracing gender equality and alternative views about manhood; usually, they
were in touch with others who also questioned gender norms. Some had witnessed gender violence, perhaps against a mother or sister. Some had themselves used violence against a female partner — and, experiencing the resulting emotional pain (to themselves and others), had come to oppose or question such violence. Most of these ‘more gender-equitable’ young men, as we have called them, had reflected personally about such issues, but had also found their viewpoints supported by someone else in their social context.

Similarly, interviews with parents about violence against children revealed a small but important minority who openly questioned the use of violence against children. Some of these parents had themselves been victims of physical violence as children and used that experience to question or reflect on their relationships with their own children. These parents in general saw their children as allies in difficult circumstances (living in violent, low-income communities) and as ‘subjects’, not as objects to be acted on.

This formative research provided several direct programme implications: (1) the need to offer young men (and adults) opportunities to interact with gender-equitable role models (and non-violent parents) and voices in their own community setting; and (2) the need to promote more gender-equitable and non-violent attitudes in small group settings and in the greater community. This research also confirmed the need to intervene: (1) at the level of individual attitude and behaviour change, by engaging young and adult men in a critical reflection — following Paulo Freire’s approach — to identify the direct and personal costs of some aspects of traditional versions of masculinity and views that children are ‘objects’ of adult discipline and control; and (2) at the level of social or community norms, including among parents, peer groups, service providers and others who influence individual attitudes and behaviours. The research also provided us with a somewhat obvious starting point: many of these dissenting men and dissenting parents were interested in working with us as community activists and promoters, encouraging other men and parents to dissent and resist discourses that promote or sustain family and community-based violence.

From voices of resistance to integrated strategies to engage young men: the Program H Initiative

Out of this analysis and these varied discourses, Promundo and colleague organizations (Instituto Papai, ECOS and Salud y Genero, mentioned below) created an integrated process called Program H — ‘H’ for homens (men in Portuguese) and hombres (men in Spanish). We created, tested and evaluated a set of interventions promoting a critical dialogue and reflection about gender norms for young men, including questioning men’s use of violence
against women. These interventions build directly on the insights gained from listening to those young men who openly question gender inequalities. While born in Latin America, the programme has since been adapted to local cultures, tested, implemented and modified by project partners in India, Vietnam, the Balkans and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. While there are tremendous cultural differences, this variation in young men’s views about gender norms exists in all these settings.

The Program H partners developed three key components: (1) a field-tested curriculum that includes a manual series and an educational video for promoting attitude and behaviour change among men; (2) community campaigns, led by young people themselves, or promoting changes in community or social norms related to what it means to be a man and promoting gender justice; and (3) a culturally relevant, validated evaluation model (the GEM Scale – Gender-Equitable Men Scale) that seeks to measure the degree to which men believe in a constellation of inequitable versus more equitable norms about manhood.

The initiative was developed, starting in 1999, by four Latin American NGOs with significant experience in working with young men: Instituto Promundo (co-ordinator), ECOS (in São Paulo, Brazil), Instituto Papai (Recife, Brazil) and Salud y Genero (Mexico) with the collaboration of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF, Western Hemisphere Region) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Subsequently, several other organizations joined the process.

The cornerstone of the intervention model consists of group discussions carried out at least sometimes in same-sex group settings, and generally with male facilitators who serve as more gender-equitable role models. Activities include role plays, brainstorming exercises, discussion sessions and individual reflections about how boys and men are socialized, positive and negative aspects of this socialization, and the benefits of changing. First and foremost, the activities focus on creating a safe space in which young men can question traditional views about manhood and critically reflect on gender, gender injustices and gender rigidities – as well as how these link to other social injustices.

The activities were field-tested initially in six settings in Latin America and the Caribbean, and subsequently in two settings in India (Mumbai and Uttar Pradesh), and in Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and the Balkans in collaboration with various partners. This testing confirmed that the workshop process and its core principles work across these diverse settings. Adaptation has focused on adding context-specific examples for discussion and analysis by the young men.
These activities are informed by a belief that young men are not empty vessels for the passive reception of gender or other social norms; rather, they have the capacity to develop their own gender consciousness, or critical attitudes about gender norms. Moreover, they can develop the belief in their own ability to act (self-efficacy) in more gender-equitable or gender-empowered ways than prevalent social norms might generally suggest, and can influence the institutions around them through collective action.

This concept of ‘gender consciousness’, as we use it here, originates from the idea of critical consciousness developed by Paulo Freire. The process of ‘conscientization’, according to Freire, links to the capacity of individuals to reflect on the world and to choose a given course of future action informed by and empowered by that critical reflection. This process of reflecting critically on the history of cultural conditions and class structures that support and frame experiences of gender inequality can help to promote personal growth, political awareness and activism that can create the conditions to change gender role prescriptions.

Developed within this conceptual framework, the activities reinforce each other and make appropriate links between specific activities and themes. The themes included are: (1) sexual and reproductive health; (2) violence and violence prevention (including gender-based violence prevention); (3) reasons and emotions, which focuses on mental health issues arising for young men – particularly communication skills, dialogue, emotional intelligence and substance use; (4) fatherhood and caregiving, which encourages young men to reconsider their roles in caregiving in the family, including caring for children; and (5) HIV/AIDS, including both prevention and caregiving. The manuals are accompanied by a no-words cartoon video, called ‘Once Upon a Boy’, which presents the story of a young man from early childhood through adolescence to early adulthood. The video was developed in workshop processes with young men in diverse settings in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the group educational activities, Promundo worked with several partner organizations (including the private sector partner, SSL International, makers of Durex condoms) to test a ‘lifestyle social marketing’ process for promoting a more gender-equitable lifestyle among young men. This involves working with men themselves to identify their preferred sources of information and cultural outlets in the community and to craft messages – in the form of radio spots, billboards, posters, postcards and dances — to make it ‘cool and hip’ to be a more ‘gender-equitable’ man. This campaign encouraged young men to reflect about how they act as men, and enjoins them to respect their partners, not to use violence against women and to practise safer sex. Several major rap artists were engaged in Brazil to endorse
the campaign – which they have called a ‘campaign against machismo’ — and have presented it during various concerts in Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro.

The campaign was called Hora H, which translates as ‘In the heat of the moment’. The phrase was developed by a group of young men who frequently heard their peers say: ‘Everybody knows you shouldn’t hit your girlfriend, but in the heat of the moment you lose control’. Or, ‘Everybody knows that you should use a condom, but in the heat of the moment . . . .’ Campaign slogans use language from the community and images are of young men from the same communities – acting in ways that support gender equality.

These concepts, initially tested in Brazil, have since been adapted in other settings. In the case of India, for example, a community-based campaign included comic books, street theatre, posters, and a cap and t-shirt (worn by peer promoters) with the campaign slogan, developed by young men, called ‘The Real Man Thinks Right’. The logo shows a young man pointing to his head, as if thinking. One comic book shows a young man questioning another man who repeatedly uses violence against his wife. Campaign slogans reinforce the message that it is possible for men not to use violence against women. For example, one campaign poster reads: ‘Raju [a man] never uses violence against Rakma [a woman]. This happens.’ Pre-testing found that given widespread acceptance of violence against women, we needed to affirm that there are men in the community who do not use such violence. Similarly, another poster reads: ‘When Anju does not want to [have sex], Sandeep does not force her. This is possible!’ Both are followed with the campaign slogan: ‘The Real Man Thinks Right’.

Evaluating impact

From the beginning of the development of Program H, we have sought to measure impact. Specifically, we wanted to know whether men become more gender ‘conscious’ as a result of participating in the group sessions and/or seeing messages from the campaigns. And, we wanted to determine if it was possible to measure their emerging dissent or changes in attitudes. As part of this process, in 2005, Population Council and Instituto Promundo completed a two-year impact evaluation study of the process in Rio de Janeiro. The cornerstone of the evaluation was the GEM – or Gender-Equitable Men – Scale. This scale includes 24 attitude questions related to gender roles in the home and giving care to children; gender roles in sexual relationships; shared responsibility for reproductive health and disease prevention; intimate partner violence; and homosexuality/homophobia/close relationships with other men. Attitude questions or statements included affirmations of traditional gender norms, such as ‘Men are always ready to have sex’; ‘A woman’s most
important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family’; ‘There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten’. They also included affirmations of more gender-equitable views, such as ‘A man and a woman should decide together what type of contraceptive to use’; ‘It is important that a father is present in the lives of his children, even if he is no longer with the mother’.

The scale questions were tested in a community-based, random household survey of 749 men aged 15–60. Baseline testing confirmed that the attitude questions held together, meaning that young men answered in fairly internally consistent ways. That is, a young man who said he tolerated violence against women was also likely to show traditional or male-dominant views on other questions, such as believing that taking care of children was exclusively a woman’s responsibility. Furthermore, men’s attitudes were highly correlated with a number of key behaviours, including self-reported use of violence against women. Their attitudes were also highly correlated to whether they had been arrested (or involved in criminal activity), suggesting yet another link in the locally salient construction of masculinity. The resulting scale was deemed sufficiently reliable (alpha > .80) for use as an evaluation and assessment instrument.

With the GEM Scale validated, we implemented an evaluation study with three different groups of young men ages 14–24 in different (but fairly homogeneous) low-income communities (at baseline n = 780) to compare the impact of different combinations of programmes. In one community, only group educational activities were carried out; in another, group activities were combined with the community campaign. The third community served as a control group, having a delayed intervention. Both in-school and out-of-school youth were included in approximately equal proportions across all sites. Surveys were administered prior to intervention activities, at six months, and after one year. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of young men and their steady sexual partners, to explore the impact of the programme on relationships from the perspective of both members of the couple.

The evaluation found that at the intervention sites a significantly smaller proportion of respondents support traditional gender norms over time (p < .05), while a similar change was not found at the control site. At six months, the majority of gender norms items significantly improved in both intervention sites, with 10 of 17 items improving in one community and 13 of 17 items in another. These positive changes were maintained at the one-year follow-up in both intervention sites. In the control group site, only one of 17 items significantly improved. In addition, at both intervention sites,
reported STI symptoms decreased and condom use at last sex with a primary partner increased in the intervention site where group educational activities were combined with the lifestyle social marketing component; all improvements were statistically significant.

Starting in 2005, Promundo, Population Council and colleagues began similar impact evaluation studies in Mexico (with in-school youth in Queretaro) and in two settings in India (Mumbai and Gorakhpur, a rural area in Uttar Pradesh). Results from the study in India (with a sample size of more than 2,000) found significant changes in attitudes and a major decline in self-reported violence against women; there was no change in the control group in either the urban or the rural setting.

As a result of these positive results, the Program H materials have gradually been taken up into the public sector in several settings. The Program H video (‘Once Upon a Boy’) is being used as an official educational tool in public secondary schools in the state of São Paulo. The Program H manual has been adopted officially by the ministries of health in Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, and is used to varying extents both in health education with young people via the public health system and in schools, as well as with community-based partner organizations affiliated with the ministries of health in all four countries. In India, the National AIDS Commission (NACO) has adopted it as a training curriculum for a national-level youth peer promoter project.

**Remembering that gender is relational**

As an integral part of the Program H process, Promundo and partners have also tested strategies for engaging young women, promoting their empowerment and engaging them in a similar, systematic critical reflection about gender norms. Indeed, while empowerment of young men is important in its own right, our community experience has also confirmed that young women influence young men’s views about manhood in diverse ways. In one telling example, young men in a group session in Brazil said that if they became more sensitive, or gender-equitable, they wondered if they would convince young women in the community to go out with them. Young men argued, and young women in the group confirmed, that young women often like to go out with the ‘bad guys’. Consequently, Promundo and partner organizations developed a group education manual, a no-words cartoon video called ‘Once upon a girl’ and began impact evaluation studies in Brazil and India to look at the combined and separate outcomes of engaging young men alone, young women alone, or engaging both young men and young women.

Acknowledging the role of heteronormative and heterosexist norms in
sustaining hegemonic masculinities, we have also sought to include the theme of sexual diversities in the deconstruction process. In the impact evaluation in Brazil, homophobia was the attitude or topic that showed the least amount of attitude change. Thus, in 2005, Promundo, ECOS, Salud y Género, Papai and the other Program H partners, with support from the Brazilian National AIDS Programme, developed a cartoon video – called ‘Afraid of What?’ – as a complementary educational tool focusing specifically on the issue of homophobia, and targeting mostly heterosexual youth.

Promundo’s strategies – Part 2: From interventions to community and national-level activism

The activities and strategies described so far have been carried out mainly by middle-class professionals – and a few men and women from the communities working with us. How can apparently successful interventions engage with and build on sustainable community activism? While much of the work has focused on building a set of sustainable interventions, we have understood from the beginning that the work must be political. One of our biggest challenges has been just this: how to engage a large enough cohort of community members who feel a sense of ownership of these processes?

One strategy has been the White Ribbon Campaign. Working with partners – including Instituto Papai and others – Promundo has implemented the White Ribbon Campaign in Brazil, providing materials, information and strategies for local campaigns. We have also, with Papai, formed a national network of NGOs called Men for Gender Equality, a joint initiative aiming to engage men in achieving gender equality and moving towards partnership with the women’s rights movement in Brazil. In addition, some of the young men participants of Program H have started their own activism at the community level. But these gradual efforts have not yet led to a large-scale, national, sustainable movement of men working for gender change.

One strategy we are currently testing is to ally our gender justice efforts with youth-led activism. Promundo currently coordinates a three-year, national initiative called JovEMovimento, or Youth in Movement. The objective of the project is to engage youth leaders in Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia and in the landless movement, MST, in the state of Santa Catarina, to promote youth-led activism and advocacy related to violence against youth. A sample survey on forms of violence against youth, carried out by trained young people in their areas, is being used to inform advocacy efforts. Each local partner organization is choosing its own area of violence to focus on. In Recife, youth leaders are focusing on violence against women and
homophobia. In Brasilia, the focus is on bullying and violence within schools. In the MST, youth leaders decided to focus on violence in the home against women and children. In Rio de Janeiro, youth leaders decided to focus on discrimination and structural violence that youth from favelas face in public spaces, schools and the workplace.

In all four settings, the project is focusing on youth political participation. In Rio, the youth leaders are participating in the State Youth Forum, part of a new national youth political participation mechanism created under the Lula administration, and are currently working on a media campaign to question middle-class discrimination against youth from favelas.

Another strategy to expand the scope of our gender justice work is to ally our activities with key partner NGOs in the children’s rights movement in Brazil and to work at the community level to connect gender justice with children’s rights. Promundo is working to evaluate a community effort to reduce violence against children. This initiative, called ‘Children: Subjects of Rights’, uses a similar Freirian approach to Program H in engaging parents in questioning their views about children – that children need to be ‘moulded’ or are merely extensions of themselves – and engaging them in community campaigns and group activities (systematized in training materials and DVDs). An impact evaluation study is currently being finalized to measure the extent to which such activities result in changes in parents’ self-reported use of violence against children.

In addition, Promundo is working with several major civil society groups in leading a national campaign called ‘Don’t Beat, Teach’, to end corporal punishment in Brazil. These efforts are inspired and supported by similar actions that Save the Children-Sweden has led or supported in other countries. Efforts are just beginning for a nation-wide petition to strengthen Brazil’s existing children’s rights legislation to explicitly condemn corporal punishment. These efforts are complimented by a national awareness-raising campaign that started in early 2008.

While it is too early to report on the impact of these activities, the goal is clear – to include gender justice and a questioning of gender inequitable and violent masculinities within other advocacy efforts that have a broader reach and the potential for sustainability.

Promundo’s strategies – Part 3: Policy analysis and specific policy advocacy

In a country of more than 180 million, the public sector – with all its limitations – must be engaged if we are to have large-scale impact. Towards
this end, Promundo and its partners are increasingly trying to have an impact
on public policy and public practice (the way policies and programmes are
implemented in the public sector). One key initiative in this process is a
project called the ‘Men and Gender Equality Policy Project’, a three-year
comparative effort with Chile, Mexico, India, South Africa and Croatia, and
the collaboration of the Norwegian government. The goal is to map and
analyse relevant social, public health and public security policies to understand
the extent to which gender and masculinities are discussed or included, and
to identify ways in which men and masculinities can be taken into account in
such policies.

Activities include: (1) a mapping and analysis of relevant policies; (2) a
qualitative study on men’s perceptions of changing gender norms; and (3) a
representative household survey called International Men and Gender
Equality Survey (IMAGES), based in part on a national household survey
instrument from Norway and a survey on sexual violence carried out by the
Medical Research Council of South Africa, and other survey instruments
developed by Promundo and the International Center for Research on
Women. With this survey instrument, we will interview approximately 1,500
men in each participating country.

As part of the initial policy analysis, we have held discussions with policy
makers that have already led to some change on this issue, such as tabling a
bill in Brazil’s National Congress to provide fathers with 30 days of paid
paternity leave. While this is a relatively small change, it is important that
some leading policy makers have recognized the need to change the social
division of labour, and to engage men in the process, as key aspects of
promoting gender equality. Promundo was asked to analyse and comment
on the bill and is working with its authors on strategies to promote its passage.
Promundo and Papai have also been asked to help the federal government
design and set standards for publicly funded ‘batterer intervention’
programmes. While limited so far, these examples suggest ways that relatively
small-scale practice can contribute to policy debate and policy development,
and to the possibility of taking the issues to a national scale.

**Some final reflections on change and limitations**

Promundo’s interventions and activist efforts are constantly evolving –
learning, sharing insights among programme partners, and adding new
partners and programme components based on evaluation and testing. To
date, we have learned that unravelling and questioning traditional forms of
manhood and rigid views among parents about their children requires (at a
minimum) multiple approaches, including: (1) explicit discussions of manhood/masculinities and parents’ views about children in group education activities; (2) creation of enabling environments in which individual and group-level changes are supported by changes in social norms and institutions; (3) broader alliance building; (4) the incorporation of the multiple needs of young men and parents; and (5) linking a questioning of hegemonic masculinities to the empowerment of young women and to challenging homophobia, and linking gender justice with children's rights. While implementing these multiple components is often difficult to sustain, we have confirmed that, when possible, this multi-pronged approach can lead to verifiable changes in attitudes and behaviours – changes confirmed by young men and their female partners, and by parents.

While we have seen positive results of our focus on voices of dissent, we are convinced that such work is incomplete if it is not accompanied by national-level advocacy efforts. Similarly, we are convinced that our work with groups of parents, men and youth will be limited if these discussions do not raise the question of the broader social inequalities in Brazil. We have become increasingly careful when identifying these voices of resistance not to create false dichotomies of non-violent parents or non-violent men versus violent ones, but rather to identify the variety of positions that exist simultaneously on these issues.

We are aware of the need to forge greater links with women’s rights movements. Such alliances are not always easy – time, funding, institutional egos and jealousies are always present. But such alliances are crucial for our work. We also reflect constantly as an organization about the ‘tipping point’ in engaging men in gender equality and gender justice. While we do not envision a national movement of men, we are convinced that a reflection about men and masculinities and about the costs of hegemonic, non-equitable and violent masculinities needs to be part of public policies, and that this approach can lead to positive changes in the lives of children, women and men. Going back to our reference to Paulo Freire, we see ourselves as promoting ‘gender literacy’ not only among individuals at the community level, but also among a cohort of partner civil society organizations and policy makers. And we believe that this ‘gender literacy’ – and a sustained commitment to gender justice – when combined with a sustained commitment to addressing social inequalities, can lead to real, long-term change.
Notes

1 Instituto Promundo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, <http://www.promundo.org.br/> . The authors would also like to acknowledge the collaboration of Julie Pulerwitz, Valeria Rocha, Vanessa Fonseca, Fabio Verani, Gabriela Aguiar, Isadora Garcia, Ravi Verma and Meg Greene.

2 These additional partners in what is now called the Program H Alliance, are SSL International (UK), World Education (USA), CORO for Literacy (India), Population Council (USA), PATH (USA) and JohnSnowBrasil. Information about Program H, including ordering or obtaining the Program H manuals and videos, can be found at <http://www.promundo.org.br/> (accessed 15 October 2010).

References


The Chinese government commits to realizing gender equality in the constitution, and in several laws promulgated over the past two decades, although implementation has been mixed. In the 1990s, after gender training by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the National Bureau of Statistics started to track gender inequalities. Their latest figures show that women on average earn between 74 and 88 per cent of what men earn, depending on the sector (Department of Population, Social Science and Technology, 2004: 52). Women on average spend four hours a day doing housework, while men spend one and a half (ibid.: 104). And over 57 per cent of women surveyed disagree with the saying: 'It is better for women to marry successfully than to work successfully' (ibid.: 106).

These figures give a glimpse of the inequalities and attitudes which the Chinese women’s movement challenges. The women’s movement is one of the most active sectors in Chinese civil society today. However, as in many other countries, initiatives mobilizing men for gender equality or examining masculinities remain few and far between. Men’s gender identities have been an issue in popular literature and media, but the content is more often about reasserting than critiquing masculinity.

Yet some men do lend support to women’s organizations. The movement against violence against women has recruited well-known male actors to be their poster boys. At a more grassroots level, male lawyers, taxi drivers and doctors have volunteered at shelters for women victims of violence. Occasional discussions of men’s interest in gender equality do take place. There has been some debate among gay men on gender roles, but limited exchange between them and women’s groups.

The first part of this chapter consists of a contextualization of masculinities and feminism in Chinese political and cultural history in the
Communist era and today. The second section presents a conversation between a rare mainland China masculinities activist, Fang Gang, and a feminist activist, Xiaopei He, both based in Beijing. They met to hold the conversation, which they recorded, transcribed and edited to produce the exchange printed here.

**Contextualizing masculinities and feminism in China**

Equality between women and men has been official Chinese government policy since the Communist Party took power in 1949, although in reality the promotion of women’s rights has been ambivalent and the results mixed (Wolf, 1985; Howell, 2002; Xiao, 2004). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), representations of gender and sexuality in the cultural media reflected government positions as all cultural forms were tightly regulated. The only shows which were allowed to be performed were the eight model plays, none of which featured any romance. Women and men in the plot lines were single and equally devoted their ardour to the revolution rather than romantic love. In one of the theatre pieces (The Legend of the Red Lantern), three generations in one family had no ties of sex or even blood. The grandmother was the widow of a martyr, the father was his trainee, and the granddaughter was an orphan of another martyr. In other words, the family was formed on the basis of revolution rather than sexual or blood relations.

After the Cultural Revolution, controls on cultural media were relaxed, and a veritable renaissance emerged in film and literature (Zhong, 2000). A significant feature of this renaissance was a great interest in male subjectivities. An interest in any subjectivities was already a departure from the model theatre pieces of the cultural revolution, which focused on people as part of the revolution with no space for thinking about their own selves. The new literature was hugely refreshing after the didactic and moralistic works that preceded them, and was popular with both female and male readers.

The 1980s literary discussion of male identities started with some pieces by women writers such as Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin, which portrayed their male characters quite negatively. The term ‘Zhenzheng Yangshuai’ (‘the rise of the feminine and the decline of the masculine’) emerged in discussion of their work, and quickly became popular. The term implied a critique of the gender equality policies of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhong, 2000: 5). It also reflected an anxiety about male weakness. Zhong explains this anxiety as deriving both from the vulnerability of male intellectuals in relation to the state, and also from feeling threatened by women’s status and criticism of men in literature. The interest in male subjectivities was posed as an anti-state...
critique. At the same time, the new cultural space was occupied by men, most of the writing was by men, and many of them wrote about men’s search for identity in ways that erased or dominated women (Chow, 1991; Zhong, 2000; Rofel, 2007).

With the lessening of the intrusive control of the official propaganda apparatuses, the cultural and discursive power of the 1980s essentially shifted and belonged to male writers and intellectuals who occupied the centre stage of the cultural scene, before the onslaught of mass culture and consequent decentring of the role of literature and of the writers and critics in the 1990s (Zhong, 2000). The politics of this masculinity gestured toward a devastating critique of the state, but it did so through a partial erasure of women’s agency (Rofel, 2007).

Popular stories represented assertive masculine desire as a more meaningful alternative to state politics but also as the means by which to challenge state power (Hershatter, 1996; Zhong, 2000). Women in these narratives were the objects and the ground for male agency, or they represented the subject-position of victimization that the male author ultimately identified with and occupied (Dai, 1995; Rofel, 2007).

In response to the perception of male weakening, images of strong men became popular – deriving both from outside China, like Sylvester Stallone from the US and Takakura Ken from Japan, and subsequently from within: the Chinese man from the plateau of the Northwest, supposedly rugged and facing the elements, untainted by the decline of the masculine. This was later called the ‘looking for real men literature’ (Zhong, 2000).

One of the narratives expressed in this literature was that pre-reform people’s gender and sexual identities were repressed by the policies of equality and invisibilization of sexuality, and post-reform people were now allowed to express their natural gendered and sexual selves. Rofel describes this as the ‘post-socialist allegory’ that:

[t]ells a story of how Maoist socialism repressed human nature. Because such repression, like all repressions, produces the very obsessions, perversions and fetishisms it hopes to forestall, socialism failed. . . . The allegory is an emancipatory story, holding out the promise that people can unshackle their innate human selves by embracing appropriate gender identities. (2007: 67)

The mid-1980s in China witnessed an explosive search among male writers and film makers for something they discovered they had lost, or, some feared, perhaps never had: masculinity. They attributed their newly found castration to the state. Their desire for hypermasculinity of forthright sexual feelings and a tough, indomitable spirit proved fertile ground on which to mount
their opposition to the state (Rofel, 2007). Rofel argues that the new gender identities are in no way an expression of innate gender, but are instead moulded by the new political, cultural and commercial possibilities of the reform era. Louie (2002) makes a similar case that contemporary masculinities are formed by interplay of globalization, Chinese cultural media, communist imagery and historical archetypes.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, a women’s movement began to emerge (Ping-Chun et al., 2001; Milwertz, 2002). Political opening enabled civil society to be established in China, and women’s organizations were among the first to occupy this space – in part because women’s issues were not seen as expressly political by the state, so this emergence was tolerated. They have organized on the basis of their ‘difference’ as women, in contrast to the previous decades in which women were portrayed as capable of becoming revolutionary soldiers (in *The Red Detachment of Women*, for example, which became one of the eight model plays), and markers of femininity such as make-up and sexy dresses were labelled bourgeois and not tolerated. This ‘difference’, however, is not necessarily seen as innate or natural (Rofel, 2007). And there has been much discussion among Chinese feminists as to how far the new possibilities for femininity and difference are liberating, and how far they are a new site for oppression. Today, a wide range of women’s organizations have been established – centres for women’s studies and gender research in universities, a large network combating domestic violence, women’s hotlines, lesbian discussion groups and hotlines, HIV-positive women’s groups and many others (Feng, 2005; Ding and Lv, 2006).

The explorations of male identity did not lead to any solidarity with the women’s movement in China, or towards a ‘men’s movement’ for gender equality. In a selection of key resources and websites on gender in Chinese (Feng, 2005), only one is targeted at men, ‘Men and Reproductive Health’ (http://www.mrh.org.cn) which focuses on encouraging men to take responsibility for sexual and reproductive health, and was put together by the Male Reproductive Health Committee of the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG), sponsored by USAID. Some international donors have sought to encourage men’s groups, just as they have supported women’s rights organizing. In the mid-1990s the Ford Foundation sponsored a translation of *Our Bodies Ourselves* into Chinese, and also the establishment of a men’s health group planning to write their own men’s version of this publication for the mainland Chinese context. However, the group petered out before accomplishing this goal.

There have been some efforts to encourage men’s participation by women’s rights activists. The Beijing Gender Training Network members felt that the
absence of men among their network rendered their gender trainings less convincing, so made efforts to bring in men, starting with husbands and male friends. However, this did not lead to any men becoming gender trainers. A handful of men do participate in the network’s discussion meetings, and it has organized a few meetings focusing on men – for example, inviting a speaker from the Canadian chapter of the ‘White Ribbon’ organization of men against violence against women.

There has been some interest in gender and male identities among gay activists, but little exchange with the broader gender debates on these issues. Guo Yaqi, Beijing gay activist and founder of ‘The Gender Institute’ explains:

Gender Studies tends to look at equality between women and men, but not diversity issues. Yet, pressures to be a ‘proper man’ or ‘proper woman’ can in themselves be damaging, aside from issues of inequality. Transgender in particular will suffer from this, but not only transgender. Taking into account diversity issues and theorizing homosexualities would strengthen feminist studies in China. Intersex is also an issue, let’s respect their natural sex. Homosexuals don’t have sex differences [from each other] but many have gender differences. We start from homosexual relations which orients our gender perspective. (Interview by Susan Jolly, January 2008)

Although his NGO is called the Gender Institute, Guo Yaqi is only just starting to build links with other organizations working on gender, which are largely women’s organizations. At the suggestion of his main funder, the Ford Foundation, he went to speak at the Yunnan Gender training course where he says his contribution was well received because he had something new and different to say.

In this context, Fang Gang, who contributes to this article in the following ‘conversation’, is one of the rare masculinities activists. His exchange with Beijing feminist activist, He Xiaopei, is presented below.

A conversation between Fang Gang and He Xiaopei

Introducing ourselves

Fang Gang (FG): During the Cultural Revolution my family was labelled as among the ‘Five Black Categories’ (political enemies of the Communist state). My father was tortured and committed suicide when I was three. In my early years of growing up, I was oppressed, bullied and marginalized in society, which made me feel repulsion for power and rebel against it.

Having being in this oppressed position, I feel similar to women who are oppressed by patriarchy. When I read feminist writings, I felt that this was a
destination on my life voyage. I recognized that I am a ‘woman’, a marginalized vulnerable person. Other inequalities are similar to gender inequality, and gender inequality intersects with all other inequalities. I believe that patriarchy is the source of all sorts of inequalities, therefore I easily take a feminist position.

From feminism, I learnt about justice, democracy, intersectionality, and concern for the vulnerable. These are all relevant to my life experiences. I therefore identify myself as a feminist frankly, happily and proudly. It takes courage for a man to declare himself a feminist, but I feel doing so enriches me and makes me stronger.

I first began to be concerned about gender issues through supporting struggles for women’s rights and liberation. I then moved to thinking about how patriarchy oppresses men, and started encouraging men to join movements against patriarchy.

Xiaopei (XP): I’ve been involved in the women’s movement since 1995, the year of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. In the early 1990s, before the UN Conference, a few Chinese and Western women used to gather together to discuss how to translate Western gender terminologies into Chinese, and Chinese concepts into English. However, they soon found the issues went far beyond terminology, rather they were about ideologies, and understandings of patriarchy and inequality. They formed themselves into a feminist study and activist group which adopted the name the ‘East Meet West Feminist Translation Group’ (Ge and Jolly, 2001).

I was not a feminist. But one day my friend took me to the group, and I found myself sitting among those women discussing ‘Why am I a feminist’. I made a confession: I am not, I only came to see what kind of animals feminists are. These women were not annoyed. Instead, they asked me a few questions about my work with the Chinese Health Ministry in relation to gender inequalities. Of course I had no idea, but I was intrigued. So I stayed on and began my journey of becoming a feminist.

One day a man turned up to one of our meetings. This provoked the question: do we want to be a women-only group? Should we allow men to join? It became a hot debate. We moved to a vote, and nearly all of us voted him out, including me. The man left the meeting room, but his words stayed: ‘Women’s liberation is not only women’s business.’ We then became a group by women and for women. We enjoyed the women-only space but soon found our journey was lonely. We wanted our voices to be heard and we realized that gender inequalities should be understood by men too.
Men’s movements in China

XP: Can you tell me about men’s movements in China today?

FG: We don’t really have an organized men’s movement in China. However, there are some emerging elements of a men’s movement. Some men support feminists challenging injustice towards women, such as the White Ribbon movement of men against domestic violence. But this kind of movement pays no attention to men’s oppression by the patriarchal system. Some campaigns emphasize men’s vulnerable position in today’s intensely competitive society, for example through promoting a special day to celebrate and care for men. These seek to lighten men’s burden, but are not concerned about women’s oppression. The men’s group that I initiated in 2005, however, is concerned with patriarchal oppression of both men and women. In 2005, I set up a ‘Men’s Liberation Academic Salon’ in Beijing and organized discussions on themes such as ‘gender politics within families’, ‘gender issues in relationship conflicts’ and ‘I like/dislike the opposite sex’.

People from different backgrounds such as academia and the media joined ‘Men’s Liberation Academic Salon’ for discussions, social investigations, international collaborations and conferences. In this way we communicated men’s perspectives on these issues and promoted men’s liberation to the public. We emphasized that a mature man’s awareness should include a two-fold recognition: patriarchal cultures and systems harm women, so we should support women’s equality; and at the same time the patriarchal culture and system harms men, so we must resist this harm.

How to translate the word ‘feminism’ into Chinese?

XP: You say you are a feminist, and talk a great deal about feminism. I’d like to ask you why you use the term nvxing zhuyi (女性主义), literally female-ism, rather than nvquan zhuyi (女权主义), literally women’s right-ism?

FG: Female-ism nvxing zhuyi (女性主义), or women’s right-ism nvquan zhuyi (女权主义) all come from the English term feminist. But the ‘woman-ism’ translation is more popular in China, as in China ‘rights’ and ‘human rights’ can be considered politically sensitive. If you talk about ‘women’s rights’, people might imagine a fearless woman fighting against men for power. But ‘woman-ism’ gives a gentler feeling. Woman-ism is less scary for both men and women than women’s right-ism. Personally I think the translation of women’s right-ism has nothing wrong in it, but I personally like to use woman-ism as a strategic choice to encourage people to listen.
XP: I have a problem with using woman-ism, as it does not express our intent to fight against gender inequality, instead it just implies a claim to femininity or being a woman. However, in feminist circles, many of us do use both translations depending on the occasion and who we talk to. Some just state their argument without mentioning any version of the word ‘feminism’. This is also a strategy to avoiding alienating people.

**Feminist views on men’s movements**

FG: Chinese feminists are diverse and divided on men’s participation. Most of them criticize ‘men’s day’ and ‘caring for men’, believing these to be in themselves patriarchal. There is debate over the men’s salon which I organized. Some feminists think patriarchy oppresses both women and men, so women’s liberation should attack patriarchal systems rather than men themselves. Some say the men’s movement is an ally to the feminist movement and can promote gender equality. But these feminists do not always support me openly. On the contrary, I hear many critiques, such as that men benefit from the culture and system, so how can I say that they are at the same time being oppressed? Speaking about men’s oppression is a kind of pitying oneself, escaping responsibilities. If men are oppressed, are men victims or beneficiaries? And so on, so forth. There is a denial that patriarchal cultures and systems can oppress both men and women at the same time.

Many feminists believe that at this moment in time women still bear the brunt of gender inequality, and it is too early to discuss a men’s movement, talking about ‘caring for men’ would lead men to forsake their responsibilities while seizing advantages. Care is a social resource which should be provided to vulnerable groups rather than men who are privileged. They worry that a men’s movement would not seek to transform unequal gender systems, but instead will provide an outpouring of men’s depression at their burden in life, at the same time as they continue to enjoy men’s privilege.

XP: I feel this debate has only paid attention to gender relationships, ignoring other power dynamics such as class, race, age and sexual orientation. Men are not a homogeneous group. Men who are illiterate, low-class, living in poverty, homosexual, ethnic minorities, young or elderly, do not necessarily gain from the power and privilege that patriarchy can provide. They can be even more disadvantaged in society than some women.

A study by Qinghua University finds that in rural China elderly widowers’ lives are far more difficult than those of widows. The patriarchal system
means women are trained to do the housework, so men become less capable at cooking and washing. This means they are less able to look after themselves, and less welcome to live in an extended family with their adult children. Our culture also encourages men to hide their feelings, so widowers lack the ability to socialize. The study shows that rural widowers eat worse, suffer more from malnutrition, wear shabbier clothes, and are lonelier than their female counterparts.

Gay men also face particular obstacles. They do not see themselves fitting into heterosexual gender norms and being macho. Some may feel that they are not ‘men’, although this does not necessarily mean they challenge gender oppression or support the women’s movement. Neither does it mean they are necessarily aware of women’s vulnerabilities. But still they have a different relationship to patriarchal norms. If feminists could recognize not only gender issues, but also other power relations, the war against inequalities could attract both women and men.

Men and women working together to challenge patriarchal norms

FG: Patriarchy constructs men as ‘superior’ to women, and also produces a set of norms for men – for example, being strong, dominant, dealing with pressure, spending time away from family and children. These oppress and constrain men, who will be considered ‘not man enough’ if they fail to live up to these norms. At the same time, when men make an effort to practise these norms, they end up oppressing women.

The model of men as strong and unyielding requires men to be macho during sex, inscribes men as sex machines, undermines men’s dignity and right to self-determination, and also sets up an expectation that they will be aggressive and uncaring in their sexual relations with women.

Domestic violence is in fact a performance of these norms. Men who conduct domestic violence have a deep fear of ‘not being men’. They show their male power through hurting women. We should of course punish this kind of man, but if we just stop at punishment, rather than examining and overthrowing the culture which causes it, then we will never succeed in eliminating domestic violence. We need to educate men who commit domestic violence to explore the subconscious reasons, and to realize violence harms both women, their families and themselves.

Only by challenging patriarchal norms could men liberate themselves and avoid harming women. When men are liberated from gender stereotypes, some goals of women’s liberation could be achieved faster. For example, in family relations, men’s awareness and liberation could enable men to spend
more time with their families, do more housework, reject domestic violence, and treat women equally.

I believe women and men should be united in fighting patriarchy.

XP: Indeed, I’ve seen lesbians and gay men united against heterosexual marriage norms, which also derive from the patriarchal system, and pressurize both lesbians and gay men. Gays and lesbians sometimes negotiate marriages with each other for convenience as one of the strategies for coping with pressures from family and society. There are also moves to seek to legalize same-sex marriage in China, with lesbian women and gay men walking the streets in Beijing, Kunming, Chongqing, Jinan, Hangzhou and Guiyang, collecting signatures from the general public on supporting same-sex marriage, for several years now. One member of the People’s Congress signed in support and proposed the bill to the Congress. However, none of the other 2,900 members have supported this initiative. So same-sex marriage rights remain a long way away!

Another case that I observe is the anti-DV (domestic violence) movement in China, where both women and men are mobilized. Nearly every province has anti-DV projects, with many men – from provincial governments, from villages – all passionately joining the battle. While visiting shelters as part of a consultancy for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), I saw many male volunteers such as lawyers, taxi drivers and doctors.

Ma Li, a young man and head of Xuzhou domestic violence shelter, told me that domestic violence is not only a women’s issue, but also a men’s and social issue. He has succeeded in putting his thoughts into action, and mobilized different social forces to do advocacy work and to provide services for domestic violence victims. He has mobilized several male volunteers. With the help of volunteers he organized a photo exhibition on the high street. He convinced male graduate students in medical schools to wear white ribbons and sing anti-DV songs at a public event. He also coordinated male lawyers to provide counselling and legal advice to victims of domestic violence. The Ministry of Civil Affairs is considering promoting the ‘Xuzhou model’ to the whole country, which means setting up women’s shelters in every province, and making efforts to combat domestic violence a government responsibility (Leowinata et al., 2007).

After the Women’s Conference in 1995, when domestic violence became a more public concern in China, a group of feminist activists initiated an anti-DV network. The group is now well established with a membership of both men and women, individuals and organizations from over ten provinces. Their professions range across law, social work, medicine, journalism, psychology
and academia, and they include government officials. The network is now an NGO with the principle of ‘uniting all the forces that could be united’, and making allies with any women’s organizations, NGOs, and government organizations committed to fighting domestic violence. With support from the network, new legislation against domestic violence has been adopted in China. One of the members of the network, a famous actor in an anti-DV soap opera, Wang Xuebing says: ‘I hope many more men could join the White Ribbon movement. Be a real man! Take the responsibility to eliminate domestic violence!’ (Ding and Lv, 2006).

From the same-sex marriage advocacy and White Ribbon movement in China we can see that men can be allies in battling patriarchy. Not only socially marginalized gay men, but also mainstream officials, lawmakers, police, and academics can sometimes be won over to the movement against patriarchy.

References


Chapter Fifteen

Women’s Empowerment

What Do Men Have to Do with It?

Andrea Cornwall, Henry Armas and Mbuyiselo Botha

This article draws on a dialogue between Henry Armas, a Peruvian human rights lawyer and sexual rights activist working with the HIV/AIDS Section in the Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office of UNICEF, Mbuyiselo Botha, leader of the South African Men’s Forum (SAMFo), and Andrea Cornwall, Director of the Pathways of Women’s Empowerment research programme. The dialogue, convened by the Pathways programme and chaired by Samia Rahim from BRAC University, Bangladesh, took place at the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) Conference in South Africa in November 2009, and explores what men have to do with women’s empowerment.

Samia Rahim: Andrea, what’s to be gained by feminists from engaging with men and masculinity?

Andrea Cornwall: For me, the value of feminist engagement with questions of masculinity is that it helps us get beyond the limiting binaries that we find so much in gender and development work – the kind of thinking that sets up women as victims and men as the problem and that says that men are powerful and women are powerless. I don’t think feminism benefits from this kind of thinking. It is very limiting for our alliances and activism. It fails to allow us to see how patriarchal social arrangements disadvantage men as well as women. And it stops us seeing how relations between those who are of the same gender, relations among men and among women – everyday social relations, familial relations, relations in workplace, relations in the street, relations within society – are also power relations. By bringing a feminist focus on power into debates about masculinity we can help to engage with people working on men and masculinities to think more about power and about
privilege. We can challenge some of that ‘involving men’ and the ‘and men’ discourse which does not necessarily engage sufficiently with structural questions of power. And lastly, I don’t believe that social change in favour of a fairer world is actually possible if we continue to construct half of the human race as a problem and fail to find a productive way of engaging them, for everyone’s benefit.

Samia Rahim: Henry and Mbuyiselo, if men and boys are privileged by existing gender hierarchies, where is the incentive for men to work towards gender equality?

Henry Armas: Beyond the typical arguments about the privileges of men, heteronormativity and patriarchy create negative effects for men, like for example violence, to have the legal or social obligation to go to war, or being exposed to dangerous activities due to tradition or social norms. The violence of men against men is reflected in the rate of deaths due to violence among men. But there is not only the incentive of addressing the negative effects of patriarchy on men. There are also positive effects of feminism on men who have redefined their own masculinities. Gender approaches have helped many men to redefine their own experiences and notions and their interaction with patriarchy. I will talk to you about some personal examples with my friends, colleagues and family. For example, I have a homophobic and macho relative. I saw the process of his isolation in the family; this would not have happened some years ago. And it’s also happening in the workplace. Of course there is a lot of homophobia; of course there is still a lot of patriarchy. However, I have to say that every time we can see more reactions and comments of people – men and women – saying ‘Hey, that macho comment is not funny,’ or ‘What a weird comment.’

Mbuyiselo Botha: I am from South Africa. I come from a liberation struggle. I saw my parents get shot in the 1980s. The ANC has taught us that freedom is for all of us – when you are free and the majority of citizens are not free, you have not complete and full freedom. I have a material interest in the work I do. I am raising two young girls. Within their liberation lies my own liberation. As long as the majority of the world’s population are still oppressed, so am I oppressed. And I take it from what happened in South Africa, white people would never be free as long as the majority of its people are oppressed. Therefore, it is for me to situate it and contextualize it to say that there is interest as men in doing the work we do, in liberating other men. Let me nail my colours on the mast. I don’t do this for any reason other than for self-
interest. And if you asked me this morning what is my self-interest, I would say to create an environment where my two girls will live and know that every time in South Africa when they walk in through the gate they don’t have to look over their shoulder. They don’t have to think twice about going out into the night because no one would be able to look at them as sub-human beings. I therefore say that it is up to me as a man 50 years old living in South Africa to ensure that this work gets successful because of one result. I will never claim total freedom if the citizens of this country are not free.

Samia Rahim: Andrea, what are your frustrations with the way the feminist movement engages with men currently? What changes are needed in the men and masculinities discourse?

Andrea Cornwall: I think it is worth looking back. I got involved with issues of masculinity in the late 1980s, inspired by the work of people like R. W. Connell and Arthur Brittan. I found this very exciting. A lot of my feminist colleagues thought this is all a real waste of time. This is a diversion of our energy. If you are going to study something, study what’s going on with women. Don’t waste time with men, or on men. There was a lot of opposition. But I found at the time that the kind of theorizing that was going on in relation to issues of masculinity was much more sophisticated than what I was hearing in feminist debates, about power, about identity, about a lot of things.

As things moved on, I found that men did not seem to be at all active or even at all bothered about the kind of issues of equality that feminists were concerned about. I became quite disillusioned. I didn’t see men arguing for equal pay for men and women. I didn’t see men demanding greater political representation for women. I didn’t see men getting particularly agitated about men not doing an equal share of housework or childcare, or addressing other issues around unpaid reproductive work. At the same time that the men and masculinities discourse focused on the intimate – on men as partners, on men’s sexuality and on men and violence – it did not go beyond this to address the personal investments men might have in taking advantage of the privileges that they got from society. I felt very frustrated with that as well.

And then something happened that shifted me further away from working on these issues. We had a launch at IDS of a publication that looked critically at the gender agenda. The room was completely full. There must have been about 70–80 people there. There were five men. And the men spent the entire meeting saying why are there no men writing for this collection? Why were there not more men invited to this meeting in the first place? And the women
who had come for a debate about where the gender agenda was going and what might be done were really frustrated. It was like a microcosm of the frustrations I had heard from feminist colleagues, and there it was, men colonizing the space of this debate. All that complaining about why didn’t we invite men. We had tried. We had really tried. Why was it our responsibility to try so hard? Where were the men? Why weren’t they responding to our invitations? Why weren’t they recruiting other men to get involved in these debates?

So I disengaged. I walked out of that room and said to a feminist colleague, who had been critical of me engaging with masculinity issues, you know, you were absolutely right. But I found that after a couple of years what those frustrations did to me was make me say, hang on a sec, I either say, enough, this is not something I want to engage in, or I go back into it and say, where are these concerns about structural issues? Where are the political elements of this work? Where are the connections we can make politically with the men who we do feel it is important to work with as allies? Where are the opportunities and entry points to re-politicize what has become a very depoliticized debate? So I went back into the debate. In re-engaging, I was able to channel some of my frustrations into thinking about some of these questions around structure, around power, around privilege. At the same time I got engaged on work around women’s empowerment through a DFID funded research programme consortium, which is called ‘Pathways of Women’s Empowerment’. All those old frustrations with essentialisms got me again. And the questioning: if we are talking about women’s empowerment, what do men have to do with it?

I think all these frustrations have animated me. They’ve given me energy to work with these issues. I see that energy amongst others in this field, and I think this is the energy we need to move things.

Samia Rahim: Henry, what do you think is needed in order to bring about a transformation in institutions that reinforce and reproduce oppressive gender hierarchies and ideologies?

Henry Armas: When I was working for the NGO GRUPAL, in Peru, before I joined UNICEF, one of the things that we did was something called Schools for Citizenship, working with school students in poor neighbourhoods, youngsters around 12–16 years old. One of the things that always appeared in our workshops was their concerns about sexuality, but also about personal experiences – how they live with their own identities, their own concerns as youngsters. They did not know what labels they could use to name these
concerns. I realized that many of these concerns could fit under the label of 'gender'. We tried to include additional sessions and opportunities to have peer-to-peer conversations about these issues. However, we realized that some gender labels could be threatening for male youngsters at the beginning.

Then, one of the things that helped us to talk about gender, to talk about feminism, was democracy. When we started to talk about democratizing gender relations, things started to work. Then we could use some methodologies that were used by feminists; for example, we used an exercise called 'the flower power' to reflect on the multiple dimensions of exclusion. They discovered that their problems were not only related to the facts that they were young boys living in a poor area, without water or sanitation. Their problems as young males were interrelated with the particular problems of women who had to deal with gender-based discrimination. Their sisters, mothers, neighbours or teachers were women. In many cases, the breadwinners in their homes, the persons who were supposed to provide protection and education in their lives, were also women. If these women are discriminated against in society, these young males are affected too. To talk about democracy created a path, created a bridge, created an opportunity for reflection on how discrimination against a particular group in society may affect other groups. This element could be used to enable a different approach to working with men on gender issues.

On the other hand, work needs to be done on policy frameworks. Having worked as a lawyer helping people who could not afford to pay legal fees for alimony cases, one of the things that got my attention in the Peruvian law were the norms that reproduced roles for men. Some of them keep this vision of fathers as cash machines (while women are sources of affection), especially when couples are divorced or separated. The law tends to punish men even with the possibility of not visiting their kids if they evaded payment of their alimony. Men are regarded as money providers, but it was not allowed for men to be affection providers for children if they didn't accomplish their first role. To what extent do our norms, our family law, our different policies reflect this particular construction of what is a man? I think that we have to pay attention to these policies because they reflect and reproduce these practices.

Finally, the third element I consider important refers to everyday practices. These little jokes that people tend to say in the office, in the workplace, in our universities, these little comments. Well, I’m going to say this again: somebody has to stand up and say, ‘Hey, that’s not funny,’ ‘Hey, why do you say that?’ and just question that idea or embarrass this person, and so create the opportunity at least to discuss things which are taken for granted. I do think that it is important to have this battle, this micro battle, in everyday practices. I do
believe in the butterfly effect – that these little changes can lead to other changes because I have experienced it in my own environment with my friends in Peru, with my colleagues abroad. These little battles can make a difference.

**Samia Rahim:** Mbuyiselo – in your work in the national context in South Africa, can you share with us what are the challenges you faced in establishing and working to establish more equitable gender relations?

**Mbuyiselo Botha:** The work we do at the Men’s Centre, the issues that exist, it’s not just about them and us. The issue extends from men because there is a perception that power is going away. There is a perception that my manhood has been challenged. Our programme at SAMFo is called ‘One Man Can’, which exists to say it is possible to have an equitable society. Also to allay the fears that power is going away, and as a result I need to reclaim this power. And to ask questions such as ‘What makes real men? Is it your physique? Are you just a physical human being as a man? Or are there other important things that would make you a man?’ And in the South African context you have a situation where traditional leaders, religious leaders say this is not our way of doing things. One of the pastors at the Rema Church, where I go, came up to me and said, ‘Mbuyiselo, what you do at the Men’s Forum, you do at SAMFo, what you do, these things are not applicable here. We are guided by the Bible. We are guided by what the scriptures say – man is the head and you are influenced by this secular type of thinking, you are confused and you are eccentric in your approach. In the African context, these things don’t apply or exist.’ Which is a lie! There is no African character from Cape to Cairo that can authenticate any behaviour which is un-African. This is the genesis of what the work is all about, and we argue about these barriers, to say that as traditional leaders, as church men, you have got boys who you really want to fold your arms around and raise them in this flawed type of thinking. And when you begin to personalize it, what do you say when your daughter comes back and says – I am a lesbian? Would you keep quiet? Or when you wake up tomorrow and you read in the *Sowetan* [newspaper] that in Soweto two lesbians have been killed for no other reason than their sexual orientation. Are you going to keep quiet? We are men today. What will happen when these things happen in your home? For these barriers are not insurmountable. These barriers can be overcome. For one simple reason, that there is something in it for us as men.

**Samia Rahim:** I want to end by posing a final question to our three speakers, and that is, what strategies are needed to build synergies between the women’s
movement and engaging men in working for equitable gender relations and social justice?

Andrea Cornwall: For me, there are three things. As a researcher, I believe we need much more research on the actual everyday experiences of women and men. We need to do this so that we can challenge gender myths that position women as powerless and men as powerful. I think they limit our thinking and they limit the images men are given of themselves to identify with. Look at the mainstream women's empowerment discourse. Think about micro-credit and conditional cash transfer programmes. The message there is that men are irresponsible. There is no point in giving money to men. They cannot provide for their children and families. Women are more responsible – 'women are the weapon against poverty', one of the agencies said. Women become the motors of the economy, women are the ones who will make development happen. Where does that leave men? What message does that give men? Think about messages around men and violence. Men are violent. Women have to be protected from men's violence. What message does that give men? Men are portrayed as brutes. Or they are represented as shadowy figures. We can't really see who they are because we cannot distinguish in that discourse any men that we actually know. We cannot see the men around us, the men who are part of our everyday lives, our friends, our allies in our struggles. We have to get away from that – it is not helping us. And we especially need to get away from it for young men, for our sons. Think about the messages boys are getting about what it is to be a man. And what might they feel about themselves if they were represented differently?

My second point is that I think it can be unproductive to label issues as women's issues. A lot of the issues of unfairness that we're dealing with are really everybody's issues. What we need is to work from there, from the things that men as well as women see as wrong and that they'd like to see changed, rather than from some kind of shared identity, as women. Not by showing I am a woman, therefore it is a woman's issue and look, men, there may be a little place for you here. Not by 'inviting men in'. Not by 'involving men'. A lot of this discourse is very patronizing. Actually this is not the way to go about things. It is about working together as human beings to tackle things that are unfair – the things that as human beings we find wrong – and trying to put them right.

What have men got to do with women's empowerment? They can be allies in our struggle. They can give us their solidarity. But there's also a lot of work they can do for themselves. They can work to get men to vote differently. They can work to get men in political office to hold other men to account for
voting against gender-progressive or gender-equal legislation. They can do a lot more to hold people to account in their workplaces, in the streets, by urging their employers to value and promote women more, by refusing promotion if they see women around them are not being promoted. By being really aware of their privileges and making this explicit and apparent at every point they can by naming them. And I think that this is so important. It is about challenging and changing behaviour that people take for granted. There has been a lot of fantastic work on alternative ways of being a man in sexual relationships and in relation to violence. Let’s take that a bit further. Let’s take it into the workplace. Let’s take it into streets. Let’s take it into political institutions and value and make visible alternative ways of being a man in Parliament, alternative ways of being a man in a factory. Men have a huge responsibility for making that change happen. Women can be their allies and work in solidarity with them. But we cannot do all their work for them. They need themselves to take responsibility and be accountable.

And I think the thing here is about making the exercise of male prerogative and patriarchal power something that is socially unacceptable. It is not something that just needs laws or policies. It is about bringing this into our everyday lives. Like Henry, I believe that small acts can add up to big change. I think that if each of us began to practise many small acts, together we’d make those changes that we want to see happen.

Henry Armas: I would like to go back to the points I made before. First, I think I already mentioned what we have to fight these little battles on an everyday basis. Second, the importance of democracy: it is crucial to embrace a democratic discourse as a powerful tool that helps us to live with diversity in society. Finally, I would like to say that it is important to build bridges. Everybody’s talking about civil society. Everybody’s talking about social movements strengthening. Let’s create spaces for participation. I do think that feminism has given us great lessons about how to do this, and how to fight against exclusion, how to claim rights. And I do think that this powerful contribution of feminism has to be widely acknowledged, and that implies to develop those bridges. The personal is political – yes, the personal is political but not only for feminism. Having spaces for engaging with and for getting together with others who are just as discriminated against as you are is a powerful tool to create political awareness. I think that ‘the personal is political’ is one of the biggest lessons from feminism for humankind.

Mbuyiselo Botha: I think for me working with the women’s movement is political. For those under it, it is for us as men to acknowledge the pain that
women continue to suffer. We cannot be blind to the reality of how I continue in my own home, how I continue to benefit from patriarchy. I mean, one day, I will come back home and my daughter will say to my wife ‘You know, Mama, from today I will ask Papa to actually wash his socks.’ For me, it was symbolic. It is important to work with the women’s movement, and also to begin to listen, to hear as men. There is a big problem with men in that we would want to lead and in doing so we would want to recreate those nefarious forms of patriarchy. So it’s important to be led because it’s important also to humble ourselves and say: these complaints and this anger, they are not displaced. There is a history to that. And it is important to acknowledge them, and not acknowledge them behind closed doors but publicly. It is very important, the experiences for us to understand, to listen, to appreciate, to acknowledge but also verbalize them and mobilize other men. Once we have done this work as men we find it practical, a way in which women can say this is our struggle, we want you as allies but we would take the lead, not in a symbolic sense – practically! The training we do, the workshops we do in the churches, in the movement, in the universities – these are small but important steps.
Chapter Sixteen

‘Swimming Against the Tide is Easier as a Shoal’

Changing Masculinities in Nicaragua — a Community-Based Approach

Patrick Welsh

Changing masculinities requires deep personal engagement with culturally entrenched conceptions and practices that, as men, we learn in our families and communities and that instil within us a false sense of superiority and indestructibility. It entails the critical analysis of what it means to be men, individually and collectively, the deconstruction of socially acquired patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour, and the discovery of new ways of being men that are rooted in principles of human rights and gender justice.

As an activist for social change in Nicaragua, my work as a popular educator over the last 16 years has enabled me to collaborate with several national and international NGOs dedicated to the development of participatory methodologies for carrying out gender training with men on the issue of masculinities. This has included promoting men’s reflection processes on their self-perceptions, as a means to change conceptions of power and the use of violence in interpersonal relations with women and other men. It has also involved critical analysis of how heteronormativity in general, and homophobia in particular, mould and perpetuate patriarchal masculinities. Nearly all of this work has focused on personal processes of transformation, which, though embedded in strategies for integral human development, have not immediately led to men’s wider engagement in changing the political processes and structures that continue to shape patriarchal masculinities. They do constitute, however, the foundation upon which men’s political mobilization for gender equity can materialize.

In this chapter, I describe a number of initiatives promoted by Nicaraguan organizations since the Sandinista revolution to challenge and change patriarchal masculinities, as well as some lessons learned and challenges for the future in relation to mobilizing men against gender-based violence and for gender equity.
The emergence of ‘men against violence’ in Managua

The Sandinista revolution heralded many gains for Nicaraguan women, including greater access to education, health, powerful positions in state institutions, new ways of participating in their own communities, and the inclusion of equality in the constitution. But the revolution did not adopt a feminist agenda aiming at gender equity, and on the whole Sandinista institutions retained their patriarchal character and were dominated by men at all levels. Dissatisfied with that situation, many feminist activists and sympathizers within the Sandinista revolution began to set up groups and collectives in different parts of Nicaragua, in some cases breaking away from the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE, the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women), the state-controlled Sandinista women’s organization. These laid the foundations for an autonomous women’s movement. Immediately after the 1990 elections, many women’s NGOs and collectives were consolidated and new ones were founded. They began to develop programmes and strategies focused on women’s gender interests and needs.

The electoral defeat of the Sandinista government in 1990 provoked dramatic social and economic changes as Nicaraguans experienced the effects of structural adjustment, hailed by the newly elected right-wing government as the only economic path for Nicaragua. By 1996, unemployment stood at a staggering 51.1 per cent, and many Nicaraguan men were in the midst of a major collective ‘identity crisis’. Unemployment, however, was not the sole cause of men’s ‘crisis’. During the 1980s men at many levels in Nicaraguan society had experienced a ‘special’ sense of belonging and self-importance. As members of the armed forces, the FSLN\(^1\) or other organizations, men wielded power – military, political, social, economic, interpersonal – and revelled in it. The Sandinista revolution had as its ultimate goal the establishment of a just society (at least in theory) and men were the self-proclaimed protagonists of that endeavour. A popular Nicaraguan song of that era proclaimed men as ‘Warriors of Love’, sacrificing themselves and using their power to save Nicaragua from capitalist imperialism and create a new society.

In 1990, however, the revolution came to an abrupt end and many men saw their power rapidly diminish, replaced by disappointment and disillusion. Unemployment and poverty mocked the dream of social justice they had fought for and neo-liberal economic policies offered little chance of prosperity. By the mid-1990s, for many, disillusionment had turned into anger, frustration and cynicism.
Throughout the 1990s, many Nicaraguan men ‘chose’ to emigrate (legally or illegally) in search of work and new opportunities in Costa Rica or the United States. Those who stayed behind had few internal resources or external networks to cope with the ‘crisis’. The dictates of traditional masculinity inhibited many men from publicly or privately recognizing the extent of their sense of loss, futility and anger. To do so would be to admit weakness and defeat and thus invite criticism and ostracism. Ill-equipped to cope with emotional problems, thousands of men turned to traditional male methods of dealing with crisis: increased alcohol consumption and violence.

For a minority of men, however, dealing with this crisis meant opening themselves up to the possibility of new roles and responsibilities, especially within the family. Out of necessity, some men began to increase their participation in domestic work while their partners or mothers sought paid employment, mostly in the growing informal sector. For many, this required a reappraisal of attitudes and values associated with traditional male and female identities, and the beginning of a redefinition of their understanding of masculinity.

One of the major gains of the Sandinista revolution was the capacity that many women and men acquired for critical analysis. In the early 1990s, some socially conscious and committed men began to link domestic work and other issues such as equal opportunities, gender violence, and sexual or reproductive health to human rights, social justice and integrated human development, initiating a process of reflection and analysis of their own masculinity.

In 1993, the Managua-based Grupo de Hombres Contra la Violencia (GHCV, Group of Men against Violence) was formed. Promoted by a small group of feminists and spearheaded by a handful of young men working within newly formed NGOs, the GHCV became a platform for processes of personal change and political organization and action by men at a time when the Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV, Nicaraguan Women’s Network Against Violence) was emerging as an autonomous, civil society voice in defence of women’s rights and gender equity.

Initially, the GHCV’s major concern was how to contribute to the reduction and elimination of men’s violence against women. It quickly became apparent, however, that the focus of attention could not solely be on ‘other men’ in need of help to relinquish their violent behaviour. This was certainly a need, but the GHCV also became a focus for men willing to enter into processes of critical self-reflection and analysis, each member responsible for unravelling the violence in his own life in all its dimensions and manifestations, and thus discovering its relation to the social construction of masculinity. In
this way the GHCV oscillated between being a self-help reflection group, a provider of services for other men (such as training and counselling) and a platform for political activism.

At first, some women’s organizations looked on suspiciously, doubting that men could or would want to change. Others feared that men might easily assimilate the discourse of ‘a new masculinity’ without any real change in attitudes and behaviour. There were also concerns related to how work with men would be financed at a time when women’s needs were so great. Many women, however, welcomed the gesture and, willing to give the GHCV the benefit of the doubt, urged more men to get involved. Also, the shift from a Women in Development (WID) to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach that focuses the struggle for gender equity on challenging and changing power structures and power relations between women and men opened up possibilities for involving men in positive ways in gender issues.

Nicaraguan civil society, gender and masculinities

The early 1990s in Nicaragua also saw the emergence of a vibrant civil society as many Sandinistas, now ousted from power, set up new NGOs in an attempt to defend the gains of the revolution. At this time two feminist NGOs, CANTERA and Puntos de Encuentro, began to develop innovative programmes around ‘masculinities’ aimed at challenging and changing men’s patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour. Their primary motivation for doing so was in response to the need expressed by women engaged in processes of personal and collective empowerment at a grassroots level to ‘do something with the men’, recognizing that if men did not also change, their own processes of transformation and personal growth would be severely limited.

CANTERA, masculinities and popular education

The first of these, the ‘Centro para Comunicación y Educación Popular’ or Centre for Popular Communications and Education (CANTERA), began to offer training courses in 1994 for men working in NGOs at a local, national and international level. Building on lessons learned from their own and other organizations’ experience in the development of feminist popular education, CANTERA evolved a methodology to enable men to analyse, collectively and critically, the social construction of masculinity in Nicaragua, and to articulate proposals for changes in their own attitudes, values and behaviour.

By the end of the 1990s, around 300 men had taken part directly in CANTERA’s training programmes and many of them had gone on to develop similar courses with men in their own organizations and
communities. In 1998, the Centre carried out an impact study to assess if any significant changes had resulted. Both men (participants in the courses) and women (wives/partners, mothers, daughters, colleagues and others) were consulted on the following issues: self-perception, use of violence, consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, sexual responsibility, conjugal responsibility, quality of conjugal relationship, paternal responsibility, participation in domestic activities, quality of human relations in the workplace, discrimination, solidarity with women, solidarity with gays and lesbians, and the quality of human relations in the community.

The men who took part in the study unanimously affirmed that the courses had served as a catalyst for change in their lives and this was broadly confirmed by the women. In general, men and women tended to agree that there had been changes in the way that men perceive the meaning of their maleness. There had been greater participation in domestic work, greater solidarity towards women, improved relations in the workplace and reduction in discriminatory practices. In some categories, women observed greater change than the men themselves claimed, such as in paternal responsibility, solidarity with gays and lesbians, and improved relations within the community. In other areas, men felt there had been greater change than was observed by the women. They talked of less use of violence, sexual responsibility, improved relations with their partner and greater conjugal responsibility.

In relation to the use of violence in conjugal relationships, the study looked in particular at those men who admitted using violence against their partners before taking part in the training courses and who continued to do so afterwards, revealing tendencies to reduce both the number of acts of violence and their severity. In relation to psychological violence there was an aggregate reduction of 36 per cent in the reported number of times that these men admitted to the use of specific types of psychological/emotional violence. In the case of physical violence there was an aggregate reduction of 56 per cent.

Puntos de Encuentro, masculinities and public awareness raising

In the mid-1990s Puntos de Encuentro, (‘Meeting Places’ or ‘Common Ground’ in English) carried out a pioneering piece of research on men, masculinities and violence entitled ‘Nadando contra la Corriente’ (‘Swimming against the Tide’). This study became the basis for a nation-wide multimedia campaign, translated as ‘Violence against Women: a Disaster That Men CAN Avoid’, aimed at men living in areas most heavily affected by Hurricane
Mitch, which had devastated large areas of Nicaragua at the end of 1998. The campaign was built on the premise, supported by studies in other countries, that gender-based violence, especially within families, rises in the aftermath of major natural disasters. The campaign ran for several months and included prime-time television and radio spots, the distribution of posters, leaflets, calendars and baseball caps, and the organization of workshops and seminars for men on the prevention of gender-based violence.

In a participatory evaluation of the campaign carried out a year later, three out of five men knew about the campaign and almost all had seen the TV spots or heard the radio jingles. Those who were aware of the campaign were more likely to say that they can avoid violence against women and that violence affects the development of their community.

Puntos de Encuentro continues to incorporate the masculinities issue into all areas of its work, especially in the production of TV and radio sitcoms and training processes with adolescents and youth.

Promotion of a ‘critical mass’

Whilst promoting masculinities from different perspectives and disciplines, the work of CANTERA and Puntos de Encuentro shared a common vision and purpose: the dissemination of the idea that men can be different and the creation of a ‘critical mass’ of men consciously questioning machismo and seeking alternative ways of being men in society. Both the popular education methodology used by CANTERA and Puntos de Encuentro’s public awareness strategies are deeply rooted in feminist thought and action, focusing on the need to challenge and change power structures and relations. Whilst gender equity was the central axis around which these programmes were developed, they also incorporated the critical analysis of other systems of power such as ageism, homophobia and racism.

By the end of the 1990s, a significant number of NGOs in Nicaragua, at a local and national level, had begun to incorporate ‘masculinities’ into their work on gender, especially in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and, to a lesser degree, in defence of sexual and reproductive rights, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, after Cairo and Beijing, some government institutions like the Ministry of Health, the National Police Force and the Nicaraguan Army ran training courses for men on issues related to gender and masculinities, with the support of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other international development organizations such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ, German Society for Technical Cooperation).
For those at the forefront of these pioneering initiatives, however, it was clear that greater follow-up and accompaniment was needed urgently to ensure the consolidation of individual men's change processes and efforts to organize locally, as well as to achieve modifications in social norms and influence in public policy. The programmes of individual NGOs in general were not in a position to guarantee systematic follow-up, due to other institutional commitments and insufficient human and material resources.

Getting organized: the emergence of the Association of Men against Violence

By the beginning of the new millennium, the scene was set for the emergence of the Asociación de Hombres Contra la Violencia (AHCV, Association of Men against Violence). During the second national rally of men against violence in 1999, a public debate was held on ‘Men’s role in the prevention of GBV’. Representatives of the Nicaraguan Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV, discussed above) challenged the men present to take a more public stance in the prevention of GBV, suggesting that processes of personal change, whilst important, were not enough in themselves, and encouraging the men to ‘get organized’ and be ‘more political’. As a result, the AHCV was legally constituted in May 2000 in a general assembly that registered 70 members (60 men and 10 women).

Between the national rally in June 1999 and the AHCV’s foundation in May 2000, the Managua-based Group of Men against Violence (GHCV, discussed above) coordinated a participatory process of reflection and analysis to discern what type of organization to set up – content, focus, purpose and strategic objectives – opting eventually for a membership association to facilitate the democratic participation of men and women from different parts of the country and from a diversity of backgrounds. The AHCV broadly aims for the reduction and elimination of violence used by men against women and children and developed two strategic objectives in support of this. These focus on men’s sensitization and awareness raising on issues of gender equity, masculinity, power and gender-based violence, as well as on changing patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour assimilated by men as part of their individual and collective male gender identity.

To advance these objectives, the AHCV developed a Community Intervention Strategy that builds on the experiences of the Managua GHCV, CANTERA and Puntos de Encuentro in the 1990s. Realizing that individual change processes in themselves are insufficient to transform institutionalized patriarchal structures and norms, the community intervention strategy
constitutes an integrated approach that encompasses training for men, awareness raising at a community level (training and public campaigns), the organization of groups and networks of men against violence at local and national levels, and the active engagement of men in political issues (advocacy and lobbying). At the beginning of each year the AHCV selects new communities in which to implement this strategy. Priority is given to communities where a local women’s group or organization already exists – and has been carrying out work with women on gender issues – with whom an alliance can be formed.

Local steering committees are set up in coordination with the AHCV technical team. Each of these is responsible for planning, guiding and organizing all of the activities that are carried out in the community throughout the year. It selects a young man from the community who will be a local promoter, working side by side with an AHCV facilitator/trainer in the planning, execution and evaluation of the training workshops and other educational and awareness-raising activities. The steering committee organizes an open recreational-cultural activity (usually an open-air event) to launch the programme of events. The steering committee introduces members of the AHCV from Managua and other parts of the country, and informs the community of the activities planned for the coming year.

The centre-piece of the strategy is the training programme for men, which consists of ten one-day workshops that are organized in accordance with local conditions and the work, school, family and community commitments of the participants. The workshops are usually organized once every two weeks over a period of five to six months and are attended by 20 to 25 men who are encouraged to take part in as many of the workshops as possible. Adolescents and young men are targeted in particular. The training programme is a learning process that recognizes the need to link thematic content and methodological and pedagogical tools in a logical and coherent way. The first workshop, for example, focuses on ensuring that participants know the difference between sex and gender, and understand how gender identities are socially constructed. This is the basis for the rest of the process that looks at different issues and how they are affected by gender.4

In addition to the training programme for men, a variety of other activities are also carried out in order to engage the whole community and not focus solely on the men who participate in the training workshops. This ensures that other members of the community, especially women, have information about the training the men are receiving and spaces to share and reflect on the same issues. For example, short documentaries and/or feature films are
projected in cine forums in public places to promote debate and reflection on issues such as violence, sexuality and human rights. Community celebrations to mark important dates are also organized by the steering committee and are often linked to the lobbying of local authorities on specific issues such as GBV, HIV and aids, sexual and reproductive health, sexual abuse, and commercial sexual exploitation of children. AHCV runs an ongoing public awareness campaign every year at local and national levels, within the framework and spirit of the White Ribbon Campaign, on a specific issue related to masculinities and violence. In schools and churches, the AHCV gives short interactive talks on machismo, violence and sexuality, designed to pass on information and promote critical awareness. It is convinced that dismantling machismo on a personal and collective level enables individual men to recognize patriarchal attitudes and values, unravel myths related to men’s sexuality that lead to risky sexual behaviour, and internalize the need for safe sexual practices that are responsible and based upon mutual respect, self-care and care of others. 

In 2004, the AHCV and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR, now known as Progressio) developed and published *Hombres de Verdad o la Verdad sobre los Hombres* (True Men, or the Truth about Men) a training manual used as a follow-up tool to organize and consolidate groups of men against violence in different parts of the country. Members of the groups may also participate in existing local committees and platforms to influence local decision makers and public policy design and implementation, particularly in relation to women’s rights, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. Local groups affiliate to the National Network of Men against Violence and more recently to regional and youth networks that are emerging.

To draw the community intervention strategy to a close, the steering committee organizes a cultural-recreational activity to report back to the community on the activities carried out, as well as achievements and difficulties confronted. Often, men who take part in the training workshops give personal testimonies and other community members, especially women, are invited to talk openly about the impacts of the activities. This closing activity is also used to announce the organization of a local group of men against violence and to reflect on the future role of this group and its relation to the AHCV.

**Popular education: a methodology for unlearning machismo**

The AHCV uses a popular education methodology to implement the training processes included in the community intervention strategy. In Latin
America educación popular, rooted in the work of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, entails a class analysis of society, and has been widely used to enable poor and marginalized sectors of society to achieve awareness of the roots of their oppression, _concientización_, and collectively develop strategies to overcome political, social and economic oppression. Applied to gender oppression, _educación popular_ has been adapted by Latin American feminists to promote processes of _concientización_ and empowerment amongst women with the aim of achieving their personal, social, economic and political emancipation.

When used to promote processes of awareness raising and gender training with men, the guiding principles of this methodology are that men's own reality and life experience is the starting point for reflection and analysis. Individual and collective processes of reflection and analysis are promoted through the use of participatory, interactive and dynamic techniques. Participants identify their own patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour, and make concrete proposals to change them.

_Unlearning machismo_

In the application of this methodology, men are not taught about gender, masculinity or violence in a traditional way. Rather, they are nurtured into processes of critical analysis of the social and cultural processes that they live through in the different periods of their personal development (infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth and adulthood). Major emphasis is placed on recalling personal experiences; reflected upon, these can be reinterpreted and seen in a different light. Men slowly begin to discover the existence in society of a patriarchal model of masculinity towards which all men are pushed from early infancy, and to which all must aspire. The realization that each individual man is moulded in the image of this paradigmatic ‘super macho’ enables participants to discover the social, learned nature of their own individual masculine identity and arrive at the conclusion that unlearning machismo is not only possible but also necessary and beneficial, for women and for men.

It is not enough for men only to acquire new knowledge on gender and masculinities. First and foremost, they have to delve into the realms of their own subjectivity and uncover the layers of myths, prejudices and discriminatory concepts and practices that mask their inner selves and negate authenticity. By exposing culturally accepted norms of traditional masculinity as harmful and destructive, and rejecting them, new concepts, attitudes and values can be internalized and changes in behaviour nurtured. Unlearning machismo involves externalizing feelings, emotions and fears, and cannot be reduced to an intellectual, rational exercise.
Popular education methodology as applied to work with men on gender and masculinities challenges stereotypes and prejudices and gives particular importance to the articulation and expression of feelings, fears, sentiments and aspirations. Awareness of these subjective realities is in itself knowledge, is recognized as such and is valued. It is also a source of ‘power’, which for men willing to unlearn machismo means the relinquishing of the learned mechanisms and structures used to dominate, exploit and control other people, especially women. In essence, unlearning machismo is the conscious and systematic stripping down of the internal and external manifestations of patriarchal power and the assimilation of new attributes and values: tenderness, affection, compassion, cooperation, communication.

In educational terms, one of the major implications of this type of learning is that each participant sets his own agenda, since the (un)learning process itself is intrinsically related to personal history and the extent to which the paradigm of hegemonic masculinity has been incorporated into individual identity. The training course represents the beginning of a new journey for each man, one that will be dictated to a major degree by the past experiences that have moulded his particular vision of himself and his world. One man’s starting point may entail the realization that violence is a psychological phenomenon as well as a physical one. Thus he may discover that the control he wields over his partner’s social mobility constitutes the violation of basic rights and is an act of violence. Another man may come to terms for the first time with learned homophobic attitudes and conduct, and begin to take measures to eradicate discriminative practices towards gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites. The predominant principle is that each man must take responsibility for his own process of critical analysis and subsequent transformation, a task that demands honesty and sincerity, and a large amount of courage.

Whilst the term ‘unlearning machismo’ may fail to capture the richness of the methodology and the positive aspects of the training processes and their results, it is rooted in the notion that patriarchy is socially constructed. As such, men’s patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour can be disarticulated and replaced by ethical alternatives inspired by the principles of human rights and gender equity. Unlearning machismo also entails consciously avoiding the term ‘empowerment’ in relation to processes of awareness raising and change that men embark upon, in recognition of its specific significance in describing women’s processes. For men, unlearning machismo implies the rejection of power as a means to dominate, control and exploit women and other men, and the search for other power dynamics in human relationships that prioritize mutual cooperation and communication. However, men do
experience a real sense of empowerment in the process of unlearning machismo that is for many truly liberating. The social permission that men give themselves, and each other, to develop dimensions of their beings, hitherto censored for men by society, enables new emotions to be uncovered and experienced, and new forms of self-expression to emerge that humanize masculinity in an emancipating way for men.

**From the personal to the political: reflections and concerns**

The AHCV is a pro-feminist organization whose primary concern is to dismantle the patriarchal ideologies and practises that facilitate men's systematic oppression, control, dominance and subordination of women (and of some men over others). As such, the work carried out by the AHCV is fundamentally political. However, over the years, the AHCV/GHCV's involvement in overtly political issues, especially at a national level, has mainly been in support of the lobbying and advocacy initiatives of the women's movement.

To date, however, no formal political agreement or alliance exists at a national level between the AHCV and the RMCV, or with other expressions of the women's movement — and, indeed, some women remain cautious and critical of men's involvement in gender issues. There is, however, an implicit understanding that the AHCV will actively support women's public and political agenda; informal contacts and personal friendships ensure that this does take place. At the same time, not all men who have participated in the training processes offered by the AHCV opt to take an overtly political and public stance. However, the existence of a growing network of organized groups (around 35 in 26 different local government areas) means that, at relatively short notice, men can be mobilized to take part in important events and activities of a political nature — most of which take place in Managua. For logistical and economical reasons, it is usually men who live in or near Managua who participate.

AHCV is aware of the need to develop a more proactive political agenda of its own, as well as supporting the women's movement, and discussions are currently under way on a range of potential initiatives. These include formalizing and consolidating a permanent alliance with the women's movement; proactive monitoring of legislation, public policy and plans relating to AHCV's mission; developing training initiatives to work with men in political power, in the police and in the judiciary; participation in government working parties and committees on programme design; and engagement with civil society to design, apply and monitor local development plans.
In the development of training and awareness-raising programmes with men to unlearn machismo, whether at a grassroots level, with professionals or with men in positions of political power, it is imperative to focus on the personal. Patriarchal political ideologies and structures can only be transformed when men in positions of power begin to influence decision making and policy implementation from the standpoint of an unequivocal commitment to gender justice. They cannot do this if they have not first been able to look critically at their own masculinity and understand the historical, cultural and social processes and structures that determine the ways that they themselves think, feel and act. The belief that popular education methodology can only be adopted with people who have had limited access to scholastic education is a myth. Popular education is a tool to stimulate critical analysis and thinking, which, when applied to socially learned attitudes, values and behaviour related to hegemonic masculinity, facilitates its deconstruction and the subsequent construction of new, equitable ways of being men.

The experience of many members of the AHCV in relation to traditional political structures and spaces historically dominated by men (such as political parties, churches, and trade unions) has been one of gradual withdrawal and self-marginalization. In many ways it is easier to operate and socialize in progressive civil society and feminist circles than participate in organizations that continue to be permeated with patriarchal values, practices and power relations. For some it is a conscious choice not to be exposed to the constant sexist, misogynist and homophobic atmosphere that prevails within those structures and spaces. For others, there exists a real fear of being sucked back into that destructive and demoralizing macho world, where pro-feminist ideas and practices are anathema, and a constant source of ridicule and derision. For most of us it is probably a mixture of both.

However, if the fundamental structure of patriarchal society and its institutions is to be challenged and changed, it is imperative that those of us who have already begun to ‘swim against the tide’ in our homes, workplaces and communities, also start to influence, in some real way, the patriarchal organizational cultures of the ‘political’ institutions we have abandoned. It is our responsibility to nurture in ourselves and in other men the development of personal and collective strategies for our future political participation built upon principles of solidarity and justice and an unequivocal commitment to gender equity. Swimming against the tide is easier as a shoal.
References


Notes

1 FSLN: Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional or in English the Sandinsta Front for National Liberation, now a political party and back in power since 2007.
2 The Nicaraguan population in Costa Rica is around 450,000 and cash remittances from the estimated 150,000 Nicaraguans living in the United States of America are Nicaragua’s primary source of income.
3 CANTERA continues to promote training courses for men in masculinities and popular education that have also been an important resource for organizations from other countries in Central America and beyond.
4 Typical issues covered are the sexual division of work; the use of power; types of discrimination and violence, their causes and consequences; sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights; and responsible fatherhood.
5 In recent years these have included physical and psychological violence, and, most recently, a campaign linking gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. The slogan of that campaign was ‘If you know that condoms save lives, why don’t you use them? . . . Knowing and not using is also violence’.
6 Welsh and Múñoz, 2004.
7 The manual includes 30 themes for group reflection organized under five major topics: unlearning machismo; masculinities, power and violence; sexuality; responsible fatherhood; and interpersonal communication.
8 An illustrative anecdote: at the time of writing, outside the office of the AMAV in Managua there hangs a six-metre banner denouncing the criminalization of abortion for medical reasons—an overtly political statement. At the beginning of October 2007 a shot from an air-rifle fired from a passing pick-up truck cracked the front window of the office reception area. Fortunately, no one was injured. The truck was occupied by a group of young men who shouted offensive homophobic obscenities. The incident was reported to the police but no progress was made. On previous occasions other passers-by, mostly men, on seeing the banner, have harassed and verbally abused members of the AHCV.
Changing gender orders

The gender order is changing. Structural changes in the global economy as a result of neo-liberalism have ‘undercut once and for all state-organized capitalism’s ideal of the family wage’ (Fraser, 2009: 8), with profound implications for understandings and practices of gender. As Connell (2005: 11) observes: ‘In third-world cities there has been a de-institutionalization of economic life that has left very large numbers of young men in precarious conditions.’ For men who, in Ellen Willis’s words (1999), have ‘tended to conflate . . . achievement in the world of paid work with proving their manhood’, the consequences have been severe.

This changing political economy of gender is affecting gender relations inside and outside of the home, as women participate more actively in the waged economy, public life and the political process. The implications of such changes are being registered both within men’s lived experience of gender and through its ideological expression in public discourse on masculinity. There is much talk of men’s crisis of masculinity. As has been noted, ‘Some of this discussion is fanciful, and some is a way of avoiding issues of gender equality; but some of it refers to genuine changes and difficulties in the lives of men and boys’ (UNDAW, 2008a: 8).

The masculine anxieties provoked by these ‘changes and difficulties’ extend beyond the ‘lives of men and boys’, however. Changes in the gender order as a result of challenges to the androcentric division of labour are not only undermining men’s masculine identities predicated on the subordination of women. They also threaten the patriarchal foundations of current arrangements of political and economic power. As Fraser explains, second-wave feminism understood the broader significance of the gender division of labour and helped to uncover
the deep-structural connections between women’s responsibility for the lion’s share of unpaid caregiving, their subordination in marriage and personal life, the gender segmentation of labour markets, men’s domination of the political system, and the androcentrism of welfare provision, industrial policy and development schemes. (Fraser, 2009: 5)

It is unsurprising, then, that changes to the political economy of gender are provoking anxiety among those who have benefited most from these ‘deep-structural connections’. Such changes have the potential to destabilize a fundamental tenet of patriarchal ideology, whose masculine/feminine binary serves to naturalize social inequalities. The ideological work done by this gender binary in helping to secure consent to hierarchical social relations made it clear that

feminism appeared as part of a broader emancipatory project, in which struggles against gender injustices were necessarily linked to struggles against racism, imperialism, homophobia and class domination, all of which required transformation of the deep structures of capitalist society. (Fraser, 2009: 6)

Hegemony has a masculine appearance; power and authority remain deeply masculinized. It is this masculinity of hegemony that changes in the gender order threaten to undermine. This chapter will explore the states of anxiety engendered by this threat, taking particular interest in the ways in which contemporary formations of economic and political power are managing their anxiety in the face of the changing political economy of gender. It will argue that the evolution of the ‘men and masculinities’ field, in work on issues of violence and sexual health, must be understood not only in the context of, but also as complicit with, these crisis management efforts of anxious states. The challenge of resisting this complicity remains, as yet, largely unacknowledged within the field. This chapter delineates key features of this complicity and the possibilities of resistance. It argues that such resistance requires more critical self-reflection within the field about both the political subjectivity of the category ‘men’ that it calls into being and the locations and formations within which it engages men in work on masculinities.

Anxious states of masculinity

Neo-liberalism has brought unprecedented numbers of women into the waged economy, putting the androcentrism of the male breadwinner model under severe strain. Kabeer (2007: 12) notes that: ‘The rise in female labour force participation has often been in the context of stagnant and even declining rates of male labour force participation’, meaning that ‘women have
emerged as the flexible labour force par excellence for the highly competitive labour intensive sectors of the global economy’.

This is not a simple story of neo-liberalism being the engine of women’s economic empowerment. Indeed, neo-liberalism’s impact on women through its undermining of the welfare state, public education, health service delivery and public sector employment make it one of the greatest determinants of continuing gender inequality.

Yet research on the entry of younger unmarried women into paid work generally finds that this has meant a greater sense of autonomy in their lives (Kabeer, 2007). If the situation for married women remains more mixed, ‘[s]tatistics from different regions of the world, both developed and developing, all testify to major shifts in patterns of marriage, motherhood and family life’ (Kabeer, 2007: 51–2). Writing of the North American context, Willis is clear that

women's increased economic independence and personal and sexual freedom have transformed the institution of marriage and eroded male dominance in everyday relations between the sexes. Where once men who were wounded in their work-based masculinity might have found some compensation in their dominance at home, now they are likely to feel unmanned in both public and private spheres. (Willis, 1999)

The changing political economy of gender is also affecting gender relations outside of the home, as a result of women's greater participation in public life, the political process and collective struggle. The extent of these changes in the gender order clearly varies according to differences in economy, culture and history. But there is a way in which this sense of men being 'unmanned' by a changing gender order has a cultural currency and ideological saliency that transcends the specifics of very differing societies. As a result, conversations about the problems that men are having with their manhood have become a feature of both policy and popular discourses in many countries. Dowsett highlights the heterogeneity of problems named within these discourses, including

men's falling fertility rates; increasing impotency; the flight from women; more turning gay; enhanced morbidity and mortality rates in relation to various diseases; higher rates of accident in the workplace and in motor vehicles; a proclivity for domestic and sexual violence; overindulgence in drugs and alcohol; and increasing problems among young men in relation to alienation and suicide. (Dowsett, 2005: 3)

The common thread that links the items on this laundry list is the understanding of these difficulties in men's lives as a function of a problematic
masculinity. If the changing gender order has been read, in part, as a narrative of women's progress, then this narrative is increasingly shadowed by anxiety about masculine crisis. Feminist concern with the problem of men is now, in this apparently post-feminist age, also a conversation about the problems of men. Whether it be in relation to poor educational attainment, low health service usage, high rates of HIV and other STIs, or disproportionate involvement in violence and crime, boys and men are being identified as themselves 'prisoners of patriarchy', whose harmful norms of masculinity distort and damage male lives at the same time as oppressing women and girls. In this thesis, the crisis of masculinity is both a problem of men adhering too rigidly to a pathological masculine culture (too much masculinity, if you will) and a problem of being unable to adhere closely enough to their prescribed masculine roles, as a result of political and economic change (in other words, too little masculinity). Either way, gender has become a problem for men.

Neo-liberalism and the uses of masculinity

Because this analysis has become central to the efforts of the 'men and masculinities' field to engage men in work for greater gender equality, it is worth exploring its political implications, and in particular its relationship to the anxieties generated by the changes in the gender order described above. When situated in relation to the links between the histories of feminism and neo-liberalism, this discourse of harmful norms of masculinity can be seen to have played a role in managing such anxieties, and the threats posed to hegemonic arrangements of political and economic power by the changing political economy of gender.

If the massive entry of women into the waged workforce has helped to undermine the androcentric division of productive and reproductive labour that was a central target of second-wave feminism, the result has not been a genuine liberation for women. Rather, the replacement of the family wage with the new 'norm of the two-earner family' has produced lower wage levels, greater job insecurity, and falling living standards for many. Fraser notes 'a steep rise in the number of hours worked per household, exacerbation of the double shift – now often a triple or quadruple shift – and a rise in female-headed households' (2009: 8).

Neo-liberal ideology, in Fraser's view, has finessed this 'sow's ear into a silk purse by elaborating a new romance of female advancement and gender justice' (ibid), a romance whose politics has shifted increasingly further away from a materialist analysis of gender injustice. Her analysis of the history of this shift is worth quoting at length:
Neoliberalism’s rise coincided with a major alteration in the political culture of capitalist societies. In this period, claims for justice were increasingly couched as claims for the recognition of identity and difference. With this shift ‘from redistribution to recognition’ came powerful pressures to transform second-wave feminism into a variant of identity politics. A progressive variant, to be sure, but one that tended nevertheless to overextend the critique of culture, while downplaying the critique of political economy. (Fraser, 2009)

It is significant, then, that the anxieties about masculinity produced by a changing gender order have usually been couched in terms of a critique of culture and not political economy. Unwittingly, the emphases within the ‘men and masculinities’ field on critiquing cultural norms of masculinity as the problem to be addressed, and on engaging individual men as the primary agents and sites of change, have buttressed this neo-liberal ideological turn. Even as the Gender and Development (GAD) framework sought to resist and insist on women’s material subordination, the effort to include men within the framework has worked in the opposite direction (White, 2000).

Downplaying the critique of the political economy suited the architects of the new political economy. So it should come as no surprise that the male responsibility paradigm, an early instance of the ‘men and masculinities’ field being put to work, should be ushered on to the world stage by the then president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn. In his speech to the 1995 Beijing Conference, he called on participants to focus on not just the liberation of women, but also the liberation of men – in their thinking, attitudes, and willingness to take a fairer share of the responsibilities and workloads that women carry on their shoulders. To bring about real improvement in the quality of women’s lives, men must change. And action must begin at home. (1995: 3, cited in Bedford, 2007)

The ‘romance of female advancement’ is here made dependent on a complementary romance of male domestic responsibility. Such romances serve to mask the true nature of the crisis of social reproduction engendered by neo-liberalism’s embrace of women’s waged productive labour and concurrent attack on welfarist social spending. This is not to argue that there are no irresponsible men. Nor is it to say that men do not need to share the responsibility of domestic labour more equally with women; in so many societies, they clearly do. But the effect of locating the household as the site for the response to the crisis of social reproduction has been to ‘render individual poor men culpable for a range of development outcomes better explained – and resolved – at the suprahousehold level’ (Bedford, 2007: 303).

With the focus on the reactionary politics of fathers’ rights groups, the covert conservatism of this male responsibility paradigm has been neglected.
Its concern with the cultures of masculinity that prevent men’s responsible parenting and partnering has been used to displace attention from institutional responsibilities in relation to social reproduction. The effect of this has been to domesticate discussion (‘action must begin at home’) of how best to address the societal challenge of balancing the labour of production with social reproduction. And in taking up the call for more work with men on the problems their masculinity is posing to their domestic responsibilities, Bedford argues, ‘feminists are running the risk that their interventions are complicit in the neo-liberal retreat from social provisioning’ (2007: 303). To challenge this retreat, it is essential to articulate the issue of men’s domestic responsibilities in terms of political economy and not simply in problematic cultures of masculinity. In this respect, a way forward has been shown by recent work on men and the care economy, with its discussion of the structural factors determining the inequitable distribution of care labour (UNDAW, 2008b).

**Domesticating violence**

A similar domestication can be seen in the ways in which masculinities work with men has been enlisted in efforts to explain and address the violence of the gender order, with similar implications for complicity with hegemonic arrangements of political and economic power. One of the clearest successes of second-wave feminism was its challenge to the gendered demarcation of private from public space, and its opening up of men’s violence against women within the private sphere to public scrutiny and judicial sanction. The emergence of the domestic violence movement in countries of the anglophone Global North, and of organizing around gender-based violence in the Global South, changed public perceptions of, and state responses to, patriarchal violence in the home. They did so by challenging the belief that such violence was a private matter, insisting rather that it was part of a broader system of male violence that infused political, economic and social institutions.

Yet success in challenging the violence of domestic patriarchy came at the cost of this broader systemic analysis. In looking to the state to take action on violence in the domestic sphere and to provide justice for its survivors, it became difficult to maintain a focus on the violence of the state itself, and on the ways in which state violence is bound up with oppressive gender orders. Not only is the state defined by its monopoly of legitimate violence, but that violence has long been deeply gendered, in both its iconography and institutional apparatus. The observations of Banerjee et al. on the state in South Asia can be applied more broadly:
The state in South Asia emerges quite literally as the primary regulator of the means of violence. Its investment in the mechanism and language of war, in structures of inequality, in the glorification of military cultures, and nuclearization only reinforces violence, and gendered violence in particular. (Banerjee et al., 2004: 128)

Work with men on the connections between gender and violence, as it has grown over the last two decades in the form of both intervention and prevention programmes, has been slow to make the links between the personal violence of men and the political violence of the state. Indeed, in its emphasis on violence as a learned behaviour that results from harmful norms of masculinity, arguably the ‘men and masculinities’ field has served to undermine efforts to make these links by framing violence in terms of culture and not politics, socialization not oppression. As a result, the field has contributed to a domestication of the ways in which the gendered violence of the social order is understood and addressed.

This is significant, not least because of the relationship between such violence and the anxious masculinities provoked by neo-liberalism. One response to the sense of being ‘unmanned’ by changes in the political economy of gender has been a ‘sharp re-masculinization of political rhetoric and a turn to the use of force as a primary instrument in policy’ (Connell, 2005: 1816). The War on Terror is exemplary in this regard. The racism of this imperial war has been much discussed, yet its gender politics less noticed. But, as Puar makes clear,

The depictions of masculinity most rapidly disseminated and globalized at this historical juncture are terrorist masculinities: failed and perverse, these emasculated bodies always have femininity as their reference point of malfunction, and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body – homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease. (Puar, 2007: xxiii)

The iconography of the War on Terror, from the queering of the Islamic terrorist to the virilizing of the US War President, make clear that one of its functions is to reaffirm the authority of white, Christian, heteronormative masculinity. Indeed, one can read the last 30 years of US political and cultural life as, in part, about this effort to recuperate a secure masculinity from the crisis in white, patriarchal authority provoked by the gains of the women’s, gay and civil rights movements.

Ideologies of a male-dominated order continue to be actively modernized and renewed in response to anxiety over sexual and social change, both through the social conservatism of religious fundamentalism (Christian, Hindu or Islamic) and the patriarchal narratives of militant nationalism. From
Ahmadinejad to Zuma, there is a resurgence of masculinist populism within otherwise differing political cultures that is concerned with curing the pathologies of ‘failed and perverse’ masculinities. The domestication of male violence in the form of ‘enlightened’ state policy on domestic violence not only coexists with this re-masculinization of political life but in some ways provides cover for it.

To break this cover implies a need for the ‘men and masculinities’ field to resist the domestication of male violence and confront more clearly the institutionalized violence of the state. The emphasis given to masculinity as an explanatory framework for male violence has tended to mystify rather than clarify the relationship between violence and power. Framing violence in terms of the problems men are having with ‘their’ masculinity leaves unspoken the politics of violence, not least in terms of addressing the connections between the violence of individual men and the violence of the institutions that shape the societies in which those men live. In so doing, it locates the change that is needed within individual male bodies, their behaviours and the norms that are purported to determine them, suggesting that promoting a healthier masculinity for men is the way to end such violence rather than challenging male supremacy and its ramifications in related systems of oppression. Holding men accountable for their violent behaviour is, of course, essential. But such accountability needs to be understood and practised in relation to the imperative to hold powerful institutions accountable for their structuring of violence within social relations.

It is essential for organizations within the ‘men and masculinities’ field to be holding the state accountable for its responses to men’s interpersonal violence, as Men’s Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW) in India is doing with regard to government’s failure to adequately fund the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (MASVAW, 2009). But it is also critical to be challenging the violence of the state itself. Refusing complicity with the state’s presentation of itself as ‘benign’ requires that organizations within the field address the institutional as well as interpersonal dimensions of violence and the links between them.

This will involve partnering with those who have come to recognize the limitations, contradictions even, of relying on oppressive state institutions to end men’s violence. For the many places where the struggle remains one of engaging the state to act on men’s violence, through law and policy, this view may not seem relevant. But as former political prisoner and anti-prison activist Angela Davis asked at the landmark conference “The Color of Violence against Women”, held in California: ‘Can a state that is thoroughly infused with racism, male dominance, class bias, and homophobia, and that constructs
itself in and through violence, act to minimize violence in the lives of women? (2000).

As the former Board President of Men Overcoming Violence (MOVE) in San Francisco, I saw a men’s anti-violence organization with a 20-year history torn apart by the contradictions of doing violence prevention work in communities targeted by state violence, at the same time as serving as the coerced counselling component of the state’s response to domestic violence and being dependent on the state’s financial support. For Davis, coming to terms with such contradictions means that:

We need to develop an approach that relies on political mobilization rather than legal remedies or social service delivery. We need to fight for temporary and long-term solutions to violence and simultaneously think about and link global capitalism, global colonialism, racism, and patriarchy – all the forces that shape violence against women of colour. (Davis, 2000)

Masculinities at the intersections

What would it look like for masculinities work with men to contribute to such a political mobilization? To begin with, it would be work that was interested in the ways in which men learn, practice and produce notions and norms of masculinity within circuits of power energized not simply by gender. Paul Willis’s groundbreaking ethnography of working-class teenage boys in an industrial town in the UK (1981), and the rich seam of research and academic enquiry that it opened up, has yet to be adequately mined by ‘men and masculinities’ work. The study highlighted the young men’s active and self-conscious cultivation of a ‘traditional’ working-class masculinity as a form of resistance to being labelled failures in the context of the middle-class aspirational values of school. Their gender practice became a source of class dignity that, in its rejection of education, only served to reproduce capitalist relations by ensuring working-class kids stayed in working-class jobs.

Understanding the interplay of identity and inequality in men’s lives, related to gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexuality and other markers of difference and axes of oppression, is critical. It is in this interplay that workings of hegemony can be discerned in the range of masculine identifications and representations that collectively help to reproduce elite rule. Challenging this masculinity of hegemony is a key task facing the ‘men and masculinities’ field. But this will require a clearer analysis of, and response to, the material and the ideological links between global capitalism, neo-colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy than has hitherto been characteristic of the field.
And if this sounds abstract, a good way to get more grounded is to follow the money, as it were. Men’s experience of themselves as men, as gendered beings in a gender order that subordinates the feminine to the masculine, is also about their locations and trajectories within social hierarchies more broadly. Masculinity is never just about gender, and within the terms of the masculine/feminine binary that organizes so much of our worlds, it is always about power. The working-class boys of Paul Willis’s ethnography, the white male settlers in Morrell’s (2001) South African historical survey, the young men of colour in Byron Hurt’s documentary on masculinity and hip hop culture in the USA, and the stone butches and female-to-male transgenders discussed by Halberstam (1998), are all enacting masculinities in relation to the social hierarchies of class, race, gender and sexuality, historically formed and institutionally maintained, in which they are located.

But the ‘norms of masculinity’ framework, so dominant within ‘men and masculinities’ work, offers little grip on the relationship between the body-reflexive practices of masculinity (Connell, 1995) and the circuits of power within which bodies and practices come into being. This framework tends to confuse rather than clarify the relations of power. Its emphasis on masculinity as the scripts men are expected to follow and the roles men are expected to play means that

relations between the sexes [are] anaesthetized as differences between roles, as if it so happens that his role is to be assertive and hers to be submissive. That thinking power is impossible in this framework is clear if we try to employ the language of role in a situation where power is impossible to ignore. Do we understand imperialism as a result of colonized and colonizer following a ‘black role’ and a ‘white role’? (McMahon, 1999: 167)

The importance of ‘thinking power’ in relation to masculinities is apparent not simply because gender identities, representations and practices are constituted by the forces structuring social, economic and political power. It is also because the construction and reproduction of dominant and subaltern masculinities have long played a central role in the ideological work needed to preserve social, economic and political inequalities. The racial and sexual have been mutually imbricated in differing embodiments of masculinity, and in particular the production of the masculine ‘other’ against whom hegemony secures itself. European colonialism and the settler societies of the ‘new world’ imposed their rule ‘through a very gendered exercise of racial power’ (Canessa, 2008: 41). As McClintock emphasizes, one of Fanon’s key insights was that the ‘dynamics of colonial power are fundamentally, though not solely, the dynamics of gender’ (1997: 97). These dynamics involve ‘a colonial
discourse of sexuality that appropriates masculinity as the exclusive prerogative of white male colonizers while relegating black male sexuality to the culturally abjected, pathologized space of femininity, degeneracy, and castration’ (Fuss, 1995: 154–5).

This emasculation of the colonized often coexisted with fearful depictions of the subaltern male’s sexual depravity and rapaciousness. In related fashion, portrayal of the ‘failed and perverse’ masculinities of the contemporary Islamic (always male) terrorist draws on an Orientalist version of Muslim male sexuality, in which, as Puar comments: ‘Muslim masculinity is simultaneously pathologically excessive yet repressive, perverse yet homophobic, virile yet emasculated, monstrous yet flaccid’ (2007: xxv).

The black male as sexual predator was a familiar trope in the racist imaginary of white, slave-holding societies, a fear used by elites to forge a racial pact with poor whites. As Wiegman notes,

Rape was not simply a crime against all women but a vehicle for criminalizing black men... In the figure of the black male rapist, which proliferated as a popular icon after the Civil War, the contestation between patriarchal and white supremacist social formations is simultaneously made legible and managed. (2001: 366n)

Such fear can still be mobilized for political ends, as the infamous use of the Willie Horton political advertisement by George H. W. Bush during his 1988 presidential race makes clear. Similarly, the anxiety about the ‘dangerous classes’ clustering in the newly industrializing towns and cities of nineteenth-century England, centring on the figure of the violent working-class male, finds contemporary echoes. As Ros Coward observed with regard to depictions of young men’s violence in the UK media,

Anti-male rhetoric is sharpest around the most vulnerable members of society – poor, unemployed, young men. The media and politicians often describe disenfranchised young men in quasi-bestial terms – yobs, louts and scum. (Coward, 1999, cited in Heartfield, 2002)

These interconnected codings of masculinity in terms of class, race and sexuality as well as gender have long served the interests of social, economic and political elites. Furthermore, when the power of these elites has been threatened by the struggles of oppressed communities, masculinity has also proved a useful means of disrupting their solidarity by ‘reaffirming men’s difference from women’ and repressing ‘those hierarchical differences among men that might expose the race, class, and heterosexist elitism that organizes social power arrangements’ (Wiegman, 2001: 367n).

If one of the tasks of political mobilization urged by Davis is to ensure the
exposure of the ‘race, class, and heterosexist elitism that organizes social power arrangements’, then a key contribution the ‘men and masculinities’ field can make is to name and address these uses of masculinity within the workings of hegemony. In turn, this contribution will depend on a more explicit questioning of the political subjectivity being invoked for this constituency for change, ‘men’ that is, whom the field addresses. What is it that masculinities work with men wants, politically?

While such work has been critical in articulating a gender subjectivity for men, it is equally essential that such a subjectivity be reflective of the ‘hierarchical differences among men’. This is more than simply using the plural ‘masculinities’, with its unhelpful conflation of different ways of being a man with men’s differing locations within hierarchies of power. It is the latter that must be attended to in any political mobilization of men to challenge an unjust gender order. For, as Connell makes clear, these locations materially affect men’s experience of the gender order:

> Class, race, national, regional, and generational differences cross-cut the category ‘men’, spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men. (Connell, 2005: 1809)

The challenge for the ‘men and masculinities’ field is to forge a constituency among men for social change that is organized around the interplay of privilege and oppression in men’s lives; around the interests they share with women and people of other genders in their communities, as a result of their common experience of ‘racism, imperialism, homophobia and class domination’, as well as the interests they share with all men in overturning the patriarchy that harms as well as privileges them. This would be a constituency whose political subjectivity is premised on the conviction that the struggle for gender justice is necessarily about social justice.

Understanding the linked nature of struggles against oppression insists on different kinds of gender work with men than the ‘men and masculinities’ field has hitherto embraced. Beyond the focus on changing individual men’s attitudes and behaviours in their personal lives, this would be work, for example, that mobilized men, in their leadership roles within labour unions and community-based organizations, to challenge the discrimination and violence that deny women their economic rights, especially working-class women and women from ethnic minorities. This would be work with men within political parties and government bureaucracies that focused on men’s roles as allies of women in their struggle for full political rights, and that held
political leaders to account in relationship to this struggle, as Sonke Gender Justice has done in winning its case against Julius Malema, head of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), in South Africa’s Equality Court for his sexist and homophobic public statements (Keehn, 2009).

Given the linked nature of struggles against oppression, community struggles for racial, economic and environmental justice, and social justice movements and spaces more generally, are important locations for masculinities work with men on male power and privilege. This would be work concerned with supporting such organizations and movements to address gender injustice as part of their campaigns as well as to confront issues of male power and privilege as they show up in their internal processes and dynamics – something the Challenging Male Supremacy Project has sought to do with male political activists in New York City (Maccani et al., 2010).

While the ‘men and masculinities’ field has done much to deepen and expand work with men on gender-based violence, this work is rarely understood or implemented as a form of community building. Yet for many communities, fractured by the depredations of neo-liberalism, male violence, in Segal’s words, is the ‘barbarism of private life reflecting back the increased barbarism of public life, as contemporary capitalism continues to chisel out its hierarchies along the familiar grooves of class, race and gender’ (1997: 271).

A community-building orientation in gender-based violence work with men would involve developing processes that hold men accountable for their violence in the context of seeking to build stronger communities in the face of this ‘barbarism of public life’. This would be work that went beyond educating men about masculinities to focus on strengthening men’s connection with their communities; addressing the harm men’s violence does to their communities; leveraging the relationships that men care about to hold them accountable for their violence; reconnecting men with the traditions and practices of their communities that promote equality and dignity for all; and forging greater solidarity between men, women and people of other gender identities to resist the oppression that they face in common. In turn, this implies a need to locate and support this politically conscious masculinities work within political formations and community associations that are working within oppressed communities.

This work will not be possible unless men’s own experiences of sexual and gender-based violence, whether as children or adults, is dealt with more explicitly. Men’s violence against other men and boys is frequently manifested in gendered terms, as feminizing the victim, most explicitly in the case of
sexual violence. Little is known, and even less is said, about the full extent of men’s experience of such gender-based violence, but the indications are that it is grossly under-reported. It is clear, though, that race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and age position men very differently in relation to their experience of violence based on the hierarchical logic of the gender binary, not least in terms of their exposure to institutionalized violence in prisons and detention centres, as well as residential schools and health facilities.

There is an understandable concern that talk of men’s experience of gender-based violence is at best a distraction from, and at worst a challenge to, the continuing struggle by women to have the violence done to them by men recognized and addressed. Yet the analysis offered above is explicitly not about paralleling let alone equating men’s and women’s experiences of gender-based violence. Rather, it is to argue that this violence is based in a gender order that is shot through with other hierarchies of power, and that men’s differing locations within such hierarchies have an impact on their exposure to such violence. Developing the tools and resources to work with men on the trauma they have experienced as a result of violence must be an important part of mobilizing them to end the violence.

At the same time, it is important that masculinities work should address the workings of male privilege more explicitly. In its effort to enlist men in the struggle for gender equality, the field has gone out of its way to stress the harms that masculinity does to men. Yet, in doing so, it has risked underplaying the extent to which men continue to be politically, economically and socially privileged by current gender orders, albeit in ways that are shaped by race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and age. Unless such privileges are acknowledged and addressed, it will not be possible to build powerful alliances for gender justice between men, women and people of other gender identities.

The political subjectivity that masculinities work can seek to build with men relies, in part, on a clear analysis of and accountability for male privilege. Men’s own experiences of violence and oppression must be used as a way of addressing rather than avoiding the continuing significance of male privilege and power in the workings of hegemony. The joint statement issued by Critical Resistance and INCITE! (Women of Colour Against Violence) on ‘Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex’ is instructive on this point, urging

all men in social justice movements to take particular responsibility to address and organize around gender violence in their communities as a primary strategy for addressing violence and colonialism. We challenge men to address how their own histories of victimization have hindered their ability to establish gender justice in their communities. (Critical Resistance–INCITE!, 2001)
Unsettling heteronormativity

Changing the meaning of masculinity for men has been the predominant project of the ‘men and masculinities’ field, but the political limitations of this desire have become evident over recent years. The effort to redefine a new masculinity for men has unwittingly contributed to re-securing the hegemony of political and economic elites, made anxious by changes in the gender order. Investing hope in ‘kinder, gentler expressions of masculinity’ as a way to bring about changes in the social order has proved illusory. This is not only because it has domesticated the challenge of social change and distracted attention from the structural changes in political and economic power that are needed. Equally, the project of a new masculinity for men remains deeply tied to the heteronormative gender binary, and thus to a central foundation of current hegemonies. Much of the field remains focused on changing men’s gender practices and politics through redefining norms of masculinity. But as Kosofsky-Sedgwick (1995: 12) emphasizes, ‘when something is about masculinity, it is not always “about men”’. Given this, she makes clear the need to ‘[d]rive a wedge in, early and often and if possible conclusively, between the two topics, masculinity and men, whose relation to one another it is so difficult not to presume’.

But that is just what the prevailing discourses of violence and masculinity do: presume a necessary alignment between men and masculinity rather than put their relation to one another into question. And if the heteronormative gender binary rests on the binding of masculinity to men and femininity to women, then it is heterosexuality that provides the adhesive. In the gender discourse that informs the ‘men and masculinities’ field, it is men’s heterosexual desire for women that secures their masculine identification with other men. Patriarchal heterosexuality ‘rests on the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men’ (Kosofsky-Sedgwick, 1985: 26, cited in Wiegman, 2001). As already noted, women’s increasing entry into waged work and public space has threatened the masculine bonds cemented by the androcentric organization of labour. At the same time, the increasing visibility of gay and queer political struggles further challenges the hetero-masculine identifications on which current hegemonies rest.

Thus, the gender insecurities of anxious states are also sexual insecurities. In part, this instability is linked to ‘women’s sexual agency and erotic autonomy’ which ‘have always been troublesome for the state’ by posing ‘a challenge to the ideology of an originary nuclear heterosexual family that perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society’.
At the same time, this ‘originary nuclear heterosexual family’ is threatened by the erotic autonomy of those who choose to have sex with people of the same gender. The fear of this threat is evident in the prevalence of homophobic legislation and policy the world over, and the linking of threats to the established economic and political order with sexual ‘deviance’. Yet, the heterosexist assumptions that characterize much of the ‘men and masculinities’ field preclude it from analysing, let alone addressing, the links between heteronormativity and oppressive gender orders. In general, the men and masculinities field still takes the heterosexual male as its subject. Where efforts to include gay men have been made, they have usually been understood in terms of reaching out to gay/queer constituencies ‘out there’ rather than embracing a multiplicity of gender and sexual identities and practices within the domain of ‘men and masculinities’ itself.

To seize the possibilities for radical political change inherent within a changing gender order, and its threats to the masculinity of hegemony, the goal must be to deepen the gender insecurities of anxious states, especially as they coalesce around the figure of the masculine. This would be work that was interested in the political uses of cultural constructions of gender, in the ways in which discourses of masculinity and femininity secure consent to oppressive formations of power by naturalizing hierarchies and mystifying structures of power. When it comes to the masculine, this would be work that sought ambiguity not authenticity, complexity not conformity. Above all, this would be work that created enough space between men and masculinity in which to organize around the shared political interests of people of all genders in specific communities targeted by intersecting forms of oppression.

References


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(To come.)