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Masculinities in global perspective: hegemony, contestation, and changing structures of power

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Abstract The relation between hegemony and masculinity needs reassessment in the light of postcolonial critique. A fully historical understanding of hegemony is required. The violence of colonization set up a double movement, disrupting gender orders and launching new hegemonic projects. This dynamic can be traced in changing forms through the eras of decolonization, postcolonial development, and neoliberal globalization. Specific configurations of masculinity in the contemporary metropole-apparatus can be traced, together with their relations with local power. A gender order is emerging in transnational space and minimal conditions for hegemony within it can be defined. Counter-hegemonic projects among men have multiplied but have limited reach. Hegemony under construction, rather than achieved hegemony, is the key concept.

Keywords Coloniality · Gender · Globalization · Hegemony · Masculinity · Neoliberalism

Thirty years ago in this journal, three Australian authors proposed "a new sociology of masculinity' (Carrigan et al. 1985). They criticized the popular concept of a "male sex role," offering instead a combination of feminist, gay liberation, and psychoanalytic ideas. Their most influential idea was that multiple masculinities existed, that there was hierarchy among them, and that a hegemonic version, at the top of the hierarchy, connected the subordination of women to the subordination of marginalized groups of men. The term "hegemonic masculinity" named a key mechanism sustaining an oppressive society and implied that contesting this mechanism was an important strategy of change.

In the following decades, as research grew alongside public debates about men and masculinity, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was widely used. The concept has played a role in reform agendas and has guided empirical investigations. It has also been vigorously criticized and re-formulated (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

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Questions have been raised about the idea of masculinity, the use of Gramscian ideas in understanding gender relations, the location of the concept in modern or postmodern thought, and the relation of hegemonic masculinity to identity, power, and violence (Howson 2006; Meuser 2010; Zhan 2015; Pascoe and Tristan 2016).

Most of this research and debate has occurred within the global North. It is increasingly recognized that the resulting geopolitics of knowledge is a problem. For a deeper understanding of the issues raised in the debates about hegemonic masculinity, we need to learn not only from Western Europe and North America but also from the majority world. We need, in short, to decolonize the study of masculinities.

In this article, I outline an approach to this task in three steps. I first examine conceptual difficulties about social reproduction and argue for a more consistently historical understanding of hegemony. I then make the approach concrete by analyzing key processes in the formation of masculinities over the last five-hundred years of coloniality and global power. Finally I discuss how a decolonizing approach leads to an understanding of masculinity and hegemony on a world scale today.

This article makes considerable use of documentation and research from the global South. The crucial feature of its method, however, is posing questions from Southern perspectives: about the character and impact of colonization, the postcolonial experience of neoliberal globalization, above all the dynamic that the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has famously called “the coloniality of power.” This requires looking at research in the metropole too, in new perspectives.

Decolonizing the discussion

Modern knowledge production has a global structure (Hountondji 1997). A worldwide division of labor, with its origins in colonial conquest, locates the production of theory in the global metropole and treats the periphery essentially as a data source. Intellectual workers in the periphery normally follow the intellectual authority of the North and seek recognition there. (Our 1985 article “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” was a good example of this pattern.) Over the last two decades, however, there has been a sustained critique of Northern dominance in the social sciences, proposing globally inclusive agendas of theory (Connell 2007; Go 2012; Bhambra 2014; Rosa 2014). The same kind of discussion has developed in gender studies (Bulbeck 1998; Lugones 2007; Connell 2015).

These concerns have recently emerged in research on masculinity. Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart in South Africa (2005) pose the situation of the poorest part of the world’s population as a key issue for masculinity studies. Margaret Jolly (2008, p. 1), introducing research on masculinities in the post-colonial Pacific, emphasises “the crucial importance of colonialism in the construction of indigenous masculinities in both past and present.” Paul Amar (2011), in a critical review of Middle East masculinity studies, vigorously argues for a decolonial perspective. Ford and Lyons (2012), introducing research on masculinities from Southeast Asia, question universalized concepts and emphasize the need for local knowledge.

Kopano Ratele (2013), on the basis of experience in southern Africa, questions the assumption that “traditional” masculinity automatically means patriarchal dominance. The Brasilian scholar Diego Santos Vieira de Jesus (2011) shows how a post-colonial approach to masculinities yields a broad historical framework that throws light on the colonizers and the imperial center as well as the colonized. In a recent article I pointed to the global archive on masculinities and argued for the importance of ideas, as well as data, from the global South (Connell 2014).

The idea of hegemonic masculinity has to be considered in the light of these changes; and the question arises whether the idea of hegemony applies in the colonial world at all. The Indian historian Ranajit Guha, founder of Subaltern Studies, questioned this in an article called “Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography” (1989). The imperial power, he argued, never achieved hegemony in colonial India. The British persuaded themselves that they operated by the rule of law; but this was self-deception, in a colony actually controlled by autocratic decrees and military force. The truth was revealed by the widespread acts of resistance that British rule continually encountered.

Guha did not concern himself much with gender, and his overall view has been contested. Ashis Nandy had already, in his brilliant book The Intimate Enemy (1983), traced a close interplay between the making of masculinities among the Indian colonized and the British colonizers. Nevertheless the problem Guha posed has grown in importance. The basic project of Subaltern Studies was to valorize the historical role of the poor and illiterate, the peasants and the nameless rebels, refusing to read history through the eyes of the powerful.

The problem with the Eurocentrism of global gender discourse is that it projects into gender analysis everywhere the image that the society of the global North holds of itself. Specifically, it presumes coherence and a self-sustaining logic for any gender order. This is implicit in the concepts of “patriarchy,” “sex/gender system,” “gender norms,” “gender regime,” and “heteronormativity.” Eurocentric gender research and policy-making assume that gender has a system-like character, a logical homogeneity and, though it may change, that it does so with continuity in time.

With these assumptions in the background, the concept of hegemony tends to become ahistorical, concerned with the social reproduction of a system. Hence the prevalence, in research on hegemonic masculinity, of ideas of identity formation, socialization, habitus, and the internalization of social norms—which are actually black-box concepts produced by assuming a mechanism of social reproduction (Connell 1983). Hence the familiar slippage between notions of hegemony and notions of domination (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), which are easily blurred when the reproduction of a hierarchical system is assumed.

Research in postcolonial contexts, however, calls exactly these assumptions into question. Historical discontinuity is the core of colonial conquest. Margrethe Silberschmidt (2004), researching HIV transmission in East Africa, rejects the idea that men’s dangerous assertion of sexual privilege reflected the continuity of “traditional” masculinity. She argues that gender violence resulted from the breakdown of traditional gender orders, under the pressures of colonialism and post-colonial economic change.

In a similar vein, when talking about feminist sexuality research in Africa, Jane Bennett (2008, p. 7) observes that mainstream methods textbooks tacitly assume a stable social environment. But a stable environment cannot be assumed for research in postcolonial conditions where “relative chaos, gross economic disparities, displacement, uncertainty and surprise” are the norm not the exception. Discussing the “water wars" in Cochabamba (Bolivia), Nina Laurie (2005) traces the clash of masculinities in this defeated neoliberal privatization attempt. She too makes a strong argument that research in the global South cannot presume a consolidated gender order.

To discard global-North assumptions about social reproduction does not imply that gender concepts such as hegemonic masculinity must be abandoned. Rather, it requires that gender concepts should always be understood historically, as concepts that concern the making and transformation of gender orders through time. Hegemony is a historical possibility, a state of gender relations being struggled for, and struggled against, by different social forces. Since the accomplishment of hegemony is never guaranteed, the most useful way to conceptualize hegemonic masculinity is to treat it as a collective project for realizing gender hierarchy. And that, in the light of the postcolonial critique outlined above, is a process we now have to understand on a world scale.

Hegemony and empire in the history of masculinities

Constitutive violence and the making of colonial societies

Colonialism, as Guha said, involved massive violence. Some conquests destroyed a pre-colonial regime and so established rule over a subject population. The classic case was the invasion led by Cortés in México, smashing the Aztec empire and reducing indigenous men and women to a new kind of serfdom. In other cases, from Hispaniola to Australia, colonizing violence swept over a whole population and directly or indirectly destroyed most of it.

In a powerful argument Amina Mama (1997, p. 48) shows that to understand violence against women in postcolonial Africa we must understand the violence of colonialism; and to understand that, we must start with "gender relations and gender violence at the imperial source." The Christian societies of Europe that launched the global conquests of the last five-hundred years were already patriarchal and organized for war. Until the machine gun and the aeroplane appeared, the only overwhelming weapon they had was the broadside-firing warship. It was their military organization and ruthlessness that enabled conquest on land.

This social technology involved constructions of masculinity. The masculinities of empire were necessarily bound up with the enabling of violence—violence sufficient to overcome the considerable military capabilities of colonized societies. When the colonizers sorted men into categories of "manly" and "effeminate," as they often did (Sinha 1995), it was groups perceived as warriors—Sikh, Pathan, Zulu, Cheyenne—who were admired, though not trusted.

In Northern research on "gender-based violence," violence is usually understood as a consequence of gender arrangements, i.e., as a dependent variable. In postcolonial analyses like Mama's, violence is constitutive for gender relations. In an essay in the journal Feminist Africa, Jane Bennett (2010, p. 35) considers homophobic violence. She muses that, seen in the light of Southern experience, the connection between gender and violence changes shape: "gender, as practiced conventionally despite diversity of contexts, is violence."

The double movement of disrupting indigenous gender orders and creating new ones was a fundamental and persisting feature of colonialism. Memory of the disruption is the driving force in one of the most famous postcolonial documents, Chinua Achebe's (1958) great novel about masculinity in West Africa at the time of conquest, Things Fall Apart.

The dis-ordering of gender relations occurred in multiple ways, including rape, which was endemic in conquest and disrupted indigenous kinship and communal relations with the land; forced migrations, up to the huge scale of the Atlantic slave trade; the loss of women's land rights, a feature of colonialism in the Pacific (Stauffer 2004); and the suppression of gender groupings such as the two-souled people of indigenous North America (Williams 1986). Imperial expansion also disrupted gender relations among the colonizers. The early history of the British settlements in Australia is full of debate about sexual anarchy and gender imbalance (Reid 2007). In the 1840s and 1850s there was a celebrated attempt to import a supply of women from England—a distance of twenty-thousand kilometres—to become respectable servants and wives (Kiddle 1992).

The making of colonial societies deeply concerned gender. It required the management of reproductive bodies through relationships that organized sexuality, birth and childrearing, domestic work, and the broad division of labor. Colonial economies required continuing workforces, and colonizing elites required family and inheritance structures.

In trying to stabilize the turbulent situations created by colonizing violence and the resistance of the colonized, the colonizing power brought into play mechanisms that can be seen as the initial hegemonic projects of colonialism. Establishing hegemony was a principal task of missionary religion, as Valentine Mudimbe (1994, p. 140) notes in his powerful analysis of Belgian colonization in the Congo. All over the colonized world, missionary religion concerned itself with imposing a new order on gender relations and especially sexuality.

Hegemony is a matter of institutions as well as beliefs. Where schools were introduced by colonial governments or churches, they were typically gender-segregated. Systems of law regulated indigenous marriage, women's rights, and inheritance. Gender relations were a significant concern in colonial legal codes such as those written by the French for Cambodia (Haque 2012). Colonized men were recruited in considerable numbers into imperial armed forces, especially the British and French. Patriarchal households organized labor forces and allowed white men sexual access to slave and indigenous women (Saffioti 1969).

A spectrum of hegemonic mechanisms also developed among the colonizers. They were sketched in J. O. C. Phillips's (1987) pioneering study of settler-colonial masculinities in New Zealand, and can be seen very clearly in Robert Morrell's (2001) classic study of colonial Natal. Morrell traces the institutionalization of a hegemonic form of masculinity in the schools, military forces, and civil society of the British settlers. It was specifically a harsh and insistent masculinity adapted to the need to dominate a colonized population.

Nothing guaranteed that colonial strategies for hegemony would succeed. Indeed, the project was inherently contradictory. The dynamics of colonialism both created the need and continually disrupted the results achieved. Colonialism disrupted gender order by continuing violence and dispossession; by the turbulence of the global capitalist economy; by continuing resistance, from Tupac Amaru to Abd el-Krim. There is every reason to think gender hegemony in colonial contexts was patchy, contested, and varied greatly from one part of the colonial world to another.

Out of colonialism: hegemonic projects in resistance and development

Raymond Suttner (2005), in an illuminating study of the armed struggle against apartheid in South Africa, notes that colonial and apartheid authorities typically denied the manhood of African men. Indigenous men were treated as children in need of control—"boy" was an everyday term. Resistance by men, not surprisingly, took the shape of an assertion of manhood. The ANC mobilized stories of heroic resistance from the past and young men often interpreted joining the struggle as a form of initiation into manhood.

Such collective masculinity projects are widespread among resistance movements, giving prestige to young men on the front line, such as Palestinian youth in the intifada (Peteet 1994). Post-conflict, this can lead to severe problems, with continuing community violence in South Africa (Xaba 2001), Timor Leste (Myrttinen 2012), and other cases.

It is important to note, therefore, the other dimensions of gender in resistance movements. Suttner (2005) carefully documents emotionality, confronting of pain, and desire for the presence of children, dimensions given legitimacy by leaders such as Chris Hani. Very similar conclusions are reached by Ortega and Maria (2012) in an impressive study of militants in Latin American guerrilla movements. These movements had multiple forms of masculinity, a significant place for emotion, and an ideology of social equality that often gave women a prominent role. An oral-history study of gender issues in the Vietnamese wars for independence against the French and Americans is called Even the Women Must Fight (Turner and Hao 1998). Marnia Lazreg (1990, p. 768) says of the Algerian independence struggle that "the very fact that women entered the war willingly was in and of itself a radical break in gender relations."

Yet Lazreg and Maria Mies (1986) have remarked how often national liberation movements mobilized women for struggle, but on gaining independence installed patriarchal regimes. A striking example is the anticolonial rising in Ireland commemorated in W. B. Yeats's famous poem "Easter 1916":

> All changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

Across Dublin, women were in combat in all the insurgent battalions except one. That one was commanded by Eamon de Valera, who sent the women home (Townshend 2005). After independence, with a conservative Catholicism ascendant, women were thoroughly marginalized in Irish public life. After de Valera himself became head of government, he brought in a Constitution that defined woman's place as "within the home" (1937 Constitution, Article 41).

Postcolonial societies have often shown a "shifting terrain of gender relations," as Linden Lewis (2004) puts it in his study of Caribbean masculinity. Fatima Mernissi's pioneering fieldwork on masculinity (1975) found evidence of "sexual anomie" among young men in Morocco and great uncertainty in the transition between generations. In Egypt a couple of decades later, Mai Ghoussoub (2000) found evidence of a great cultural disturbance in gender relations, and "a chaotic quest for a definition of modern masculinity."

Discussing Iran under the neocolonial regime before the Islamic revolution, Al-e Ahmad (1962) described a thin and rootless masculinity among the middle class, "a donkey in a lion's skin."

Not all changes in gender relations, however, were chaotic. Some were driven by the policies of developmental states. In the Turkish successor state to the Ottoman Empire, a military regime under the war hero Mustafa Kemal created a paradigm of secular development in which modernizing the position of women was a central, almost iconic, feature. But military masculinities remained hegemonic, with conscription as a rite of passage into manhood for generations of Turkish men (Sinclair-Webb 2000).

Economic development was another important arena of gender formation. Where steelmaking, machine manufacturing, and large-scale extractive industry were launched, industrial labor provided a central definition of working-class masculinity. Mike Donaldson (1991) showed this for Wollongong in settler-colonial Australia, noting how the gradual destruction of working bodies became part of the enactment of masculinity, demonstrating toughness and endurance. Dunbar Moodie's (1994) study of gold mining in South Africa presents another striking case, with industrial militancy growing while older constructions of masculinity were displaced and family connections with pastoral homelands weakened.

Elite masculinities could change too, as they did in Japan. Starting in the Meiji era, a strong developmental state and a small group of powerful conglomerates, the zaibatsu, launched heavy industry and constructed finance, education, and weapon systems. For a time Japan became an imperial power. It is not surprising that a strongly-marked hegemonic model of masculinity on a national scale was produced, the corporate sarariiman (Ito 1993; Dasgupta 2003). The model was based on stable long-term employment as a manager, a sharp gender division of labor in the home, and a steep hierarchy of authority in the workplace. These conditions eroded in the late twentieth century, accompanied by public debates about salaryman masculinity and greater recognition of diversity (Roberson and Suzuki 2003; Taga et al. 2011).

The social transformations in development, then, involved new waves of gender disordering, and new hegemonic projects. In Turkey and Japan this produced historically original constructions of masculinity that achieved hegemony at the national level. In other situations it seems that a sustainable hegemony was not achieved in the era of decolonization and development, though social dominance for groups of powerful men usually was. Achille Mbembe's famous On the Postcolony (2001) gives a scorching picture of power without hegemony in a postcolonial authoritarian state.

Masculinities in neoliberal development

Since the 1970s, development strategies in the periphery have diverged. Many countries under neoliberal regimes abandoned import replacement industrialization and turned to mining and agriculture to find "comparative advantage" in world markets. Others used low wages as their comparative advantage in manufacturing for export (Connell and Dados 2014). On both pathways, states and ruling classes in the periphery used the removal of social protections and the privatization of public assets to bolster their position in global markets.

Neoliberalism almost everywhere has been introduced by male elites, who have rolled back institutional protections and cultural gains by women, while promoting women's labor force participation and a notionally de-gendered ideology of individual advancement. Gender segregation and gendered exploitation flourish in new forms in the factories of the "south China miracle," the maquilas of the Mexican borderlands, the huge expatriate workforce of the oil industry in the Persian Gulf states, and among migrant domestic workers such as the baomu of capitalist China (Yan 2008).

Neoliberalism has had contradictory effects for masculinity formation. For large numbers of men, "structural adjustment" meant unemployment or casualization. Mara Viveros (2001) notes the impact across Latin America, especially the growing difficulty for working-class men in sustaining a breadwinner model of masculinity. South Africa has a similar experience (Hunter 2004), where the transition from apartheid to neoliberalism led to the collapse of secondary industry, with mass unemployment and an increasingly desperate situation for young Black men.

On the other hand, as neoliberal regimes concentrated the profits of development, they created conditions for the growth of entrepreneurial masculinities. The most spectacular examples are in China and India, where elite businessmen now control fortunes comparable to the great fortunes in the US/European metropole. Neoliberal development is also producing masculinized business elites in smaller countries such as Vietnam. In Kimberly Hoang's (2014) vivid study in Ho Chi Minh City, we see how the hierarchy of wealth and status among businessmen is displayed by socializing in high-end drinking and sex venues.

Yet the money and power of these new elites may not easily translate into achieved hegemony. Writing from post-communist Serbia, Marina Blagojevic (2013) notes how the pressures of the neoliberal era divide masculinities in the eastern European "semi-periphery." The dismantling of the state-centered economy, and dependence on Western Europe, threatened men who were bearers of old forms of hegemonic masculinity. Others, who have marketable assets or skills, position themselves in the neoliberal economy and attempt to develop an international-style entrepreneurial masculinity. This split between hegemonic projects is not easily resolved locally.

Neoliberal development may also create, unexpectedly, local conditions for more egalitarian gender relations rather than more hierarchical ones. The violent neoliberal turn in Chile, for instance, created an export fruit industry that drew many women for the first time into wage-earning labor, and eroded patriarchal relations in rural families (Tinsman 2000).

Neoliberal development strategies in the periphery depend on the growth of global markets, global finance, and global communications. The consequence has been the creation of new social arenas in transnational rather than local space. These are powerfully gendered, though in new ways. Transnational manufacturing involves, as Juanita Elias (2008) has shown, a structure of relations between the professionalized masculinities of global corporate managements, local patriarchies in state and factory management, and gender-divided, often feminized, local workforces.

In such a context, the process of constructing masculinity takes new shapes. Huerta Rojas (2006) provides a notable example from his ethnography of a motor plant in México: the corporatization of football, and professional football's global role as a link between popular masculinities and the ethos of neoliberalism. The link is made in the training of bodies and the televised spectacle of embodied sport, both helping to naturalize a sharp social division between men and women. Huerta sees in corporate football a mechanism for the international circulation of a generic hegemonic masculinity. That has yet to be confirmed; but his argument certainly dramatizes the world scale on which hegemony in gender relations is now pursued.

Global hegemony & contestation today

The offshore metropole and masculinity

The growth of European empire in past centuries depended on certain social conditions in the metropole: strong states organized for sustained warfare; ideologies of supremacy, first religious and then racial; population growth able to sustain a flow of bodies to the colonies; and a mercantile capitalism searching for unlimited profits. I will call the complex of institutions and cultural patterns and practices that enabled metropolitan societies to sustain empire the metropole-apparatus. The historical continuity of the metropole-apparatus underlies the coloniality of power and its persistence in the postcolonial world.

In the neoliberal era of globalization, the metropole-apparatus has, to a certain extent, broken free from the territorial states where it was originally based. The capacity to exercise global power is still connected to the wealth of Europe and North America and the military power of the United States. But metropolitan power increasingly operates offshore, through transnational institutions and spaces of a historically new kind: transnational corporations; global markets (especially finance markets, symbolized by the 24-hour operation of stock exchanges); international electronic media, including television and the Internet; and an international state, including both the United Nations complex and the linked-up military, intelligence, and security apparatuses of NATO and other alliances.

The gender research in the metropole most relevant to understanding the contemporary metropole-apparatus concerns managerial masculinities. There is persuasive empirical work documenting power-oriented gender practices in both states and companies (Mulholland 1996; Wajcman 1999). Michael Roper's (1994) excellent history of managerial masculinities in British engineering firms traced changes in a local hegemonic masculinity, as managers' concerns shifted from the workforce and the production process to a neoliberal focus on finance and short-term profit. Richard Collier's (2010) careful study of corporate lawyers in Britain shows professional masculinities close to the patterns of corporate management—with possibilities of change, especially in the younger generation, held back by competitive pressures and the conservatism of their seniors.

Some recent studies have traced the gendered character of markets themselves as social institutions. An aggressive, misogynist occupational culture appears in arenas such as commodity and currency trading and financial manipulation generally (Levin 2001; McDowell 2010; Connell 2010a).

Top corporate management in the global economy is overwhelmingly the business of men. Of the five-hundred biggest international corporations listed in Fortune magazine's "Global 500" in 2014, 95.2 % had a man as CEO. In many ways the social world of these men resembles the managerial masculinities documented in the old metropole—competitive and power-oriented. Elite managers persistently construct hierarchical relationships with women, whether wives, employees, or sex workers. A striking confirmation emerges from an international bank merger in Scandinavia, a region whose gender orders are among the most egalitarian on earth. Janne Tienari *et al.* (2005) conducted interviews with the top executives after the merger. The senior managers were almost all men, and did not want to hear about gender equality problems. They took management to be naturally men's business, "constructed according to the core family and male-breadwinner model."

But transnational business masculinity cannot simply reproduce historic bourgeois masculinity. The labor of TNC management is secularized, mobile, and highly technologized, being closely integrated with corporate intranets and high-technology communications (Connell 2010b). This is not a "geek" masculinity but it requires interaction with the changing masculinities of the ICT industries (Poster 2013). Because TNC management involves negotiations with local patriarchies (Elias 2008), it requires a degree of tolerance for differences in culture; and there are indications this also applies to sexuality. A professionalization of management has been attempted through the US-style MBA, and elite business schools in the metropole take pride in having an international intake of students. Firms from relatively affluent countries in the periphery, such as Chile and Australia, mostly follow transnational managerial practice though they participate in global business on unequal terms (Olavarría 2009; Connell 2010a).

There seems, then, to be a changed hegemonic project of masculinity formation within the global corporate economy. This is not producing a kinder, more inclusive, or more feminized capitalism; a closer look at the masculinities of the main power-holding elites in the contemporary world shows the huge task still ahead for the project of gender equality (Connell 2016). But we do see hegemonic projects responding to the turbulence faced by global management and the impossibility of imposing any single gender template.

Contemporary hegemonic projects

As metropolitan power moves offshore into the complex of transnational institutions, the need for mechanisms of consent that produce hegemony at a local or national level declines. Are we now producing, on the scale of global society, the situation that Guha diagnosed in colonial India: hegemony an illusion and coercion the reality? Only in a few parts of the world do state or economic elites now rely on custom or claim old-established authority, and even where they do (e.g., in Thailand) the claim is fragile. Gone too is the old-style paternalism of improving public services or guaranteeing welfare to subaltern groups. The opposition to "Obamacare" from the political right in the United States is a striking example.

But a more limited and complex form of hegemony may be found on the world scale. Three conditions would be sufficient to sustain the position of transnational corporate masculinity:

1) The institutional complex–private property and state authority–currently delivering control of the global economy, remains socially accepted within the most powerful states. Although there is widespread discontent, seen in the 2016 Brexit vote and the Sanders campaign, no organized alternative has much traction in the United States or the European Union. Police-state repression in China and populist conservatism in India are currently well entrenched.

2) The self-selecting masculine elites now in power retain their legitimacy and organizational control within the new metropole-apparatus. The corporate recovery from the 2007–2008 global financial crisis suggests the capacity for continuing control is there.

3) The metropole-apparatus connects well enough with national power structures in the periphery to allow continued extraction of raw materials, overseas trade and corporate operations, and to sustain compliant states, in the periphery (see Mbeki 2009, for diagnosis of Africa along these lines; Messerschmidt 2010 for the symbolic projection of masculinities by the US political elite).

Yet these conditions have to be worked on. The incessant busy-ness of corporate and political management, with its penumbra of bribery and intimidation and its sponsorship of violent interventions, show there is no automatic global control. The gender dynamics outlined in this article show many examples of tension and dis-articulation. The extension of the neoliberal human rights regime to issues of reproduction and sexuality, to take just one example, has been repeatedly opposed by the most patriarchal governments in the periphery (in UN population debates as recently as 2014). The Islamist insurgencies of recent years, from Afghanistan to Nigeria, are if anything more patriarchal than the regimes they confront.

The emerging world gender order is far from being a smoothly-running machine. Rather, it is a scene of conflicting hegemonic projects. It has multiple tiers, where different configurations of masculinity are at work, and come into conflict. Major gains for gender equality have been made in the last half century, notably in state provision of education for girls and the rising participation of women in wage work. Up to now, however, these changes have yielded only a little ground for democratic projects of change in masculinity.

Counter-hegemony

Movements for change in masculinity, nevertheless, keep welling up. South Africa, for instance, remains a violent and unequal society, where gender inequalities are deeply implicated in the world's heaviest burden of HIV/AIDS (Epstein *et al.* 2004). But South Africa has also seen intense debates about changing masculinities, accompanied by local projects of change (Sideris 2005; Shefer *et al.* 2007; Ratele 2014). India too is a highly unequal society, yet has multiple sources of change among men, revealed in Radhika Chopra's books From Violence to Supportive Practice (2002) and Reframing Masculinities (2007).

Programs concerned with the reduction of violence or the prevention of AIDS are now widespread. They are found in Latin America (Zingoni 1998), in Africa (e.g., Sonke Gender Justice, www.genderjustice.org.za), and in Southeast Asia and other regions (Lang *et al.* 2008; United Nations 2013). They have recently been linked internationally through the MenEngage network (www.menengage.org), which has sponsored two international conferences of activists, the most recent producing the "Delhi Declaration" of 2014. These projects represent a historic change, mobilizing men internationally for gender justice.

But to be realistic, they remain relatively small; and mostly follow concepts developed in the global North. As Dowsett (2003) noted in a study of AIDS prevention in Bangladesh, Anglophone categories such as “MSM,” “identity,” “heterosexuality,” and even “men” may misrepresent local social realities. Over time, a greater concern with distinctive local experience and strategy has been developing. Melissa Meyer and Helen Struthers’s media project [Un]covering Men: Rewriting Masculinity and Health in South Africa (2012) is an example of the creative work that results.

Das and Singh (2014) offer something even more striking. From more than a decade of NGO-based programmes in India, including the well-known Men’s Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), they have generated a seven-point theory of change. This theory emphasizes the different starting-points in gender reform for men and women, the inevitability of resistance, and the strategies most likely to overcome it.

Do local gender-equality projects among men represent a counter-hegemonic strategy at the societal level? That question was raised by a team leading workshops about masculinity and violence in the very difficult environment of El Salvador, after a brutal civil war (Bird *et al.* 2007). Part of their answer is that local interventions bring out alternative practices and desires for peace that already exist in the society. Such possibilities can be seen in other places too (Haque 2013; Myrttinen 2012).

However, the NGO format of social action has been problematic for feminists, because of the way it is integrated into neoliberal politics (Alvarez 1999). The NGOs specifically concerned with gender-based violence overwhelmingly depend on corporate charity, international aid programs, or national states. Published research reveals few connections between masculinity reform efforts and union activism, landless people’s movements, environmental activism, or other movements that offer a significant challenge to corporate or state power. They seem, so far, no threat to the corporate masculinity of the new metropole. For such a challenge to develop would require a different structure of politics.

Conclusion

As Rachel Jewkes *et al.* (2015) show in a valuable current review, the concept of hegemonic masculinity informs much anti-violence activism and when carefully used can illuminate problems of strategy. Their argument is consistent with the approach adopted here of analyzing masculinities in terms of collective hegemonic projects, local, societal, and global.

I am arguing that the changing structures of imperialism and neoliberal global power are a vital part of our understanding of masculinities. They represent both the structural conditions of hegemonic projects now and the sedimented consequences of gender projects in the past. Hegemony cannot be presumed in the violent and exploitative social relations that constitute imperial and transnational gender orders. But hegemony is constantly under construction, renovation, and contestation.

In this contestation, intellectual struggle is required. Knowledge produced in the majority world and Southern perspectives on social relations and power are increasingly important for global gender politics. A notable example is provided by AMEGH, the Mexican Association for the Study of the Gender of Men, and the Colegio de la Frontera Norte. Their work has recently produced a powerful volume on the gendered violence in northern México, Salvador Cruz Sierra’s Vida, muerte y resistencia en Ciudad Juárez (2013).

Knowledge is not a substitute for action. But accurate knowledge and theoretical insight are priceless assets for action, when action is concerned with contesting power and achieving social justice. That was our hope in formulating the concept of hegemonic masculinity and remains the reason to build on it today.

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