

## **Putting Men and Masculinities into the Bigger Picture: A Partial Account after a Conference and a Half**

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### **Arriving ...**

**T**raveling to the event from Taksim Square with the kind host from the Raoul Wallenberg Institute Istanbul, I approached the Symposium, or more accurately the Conference, on “Masculinities: Challenges and Possibilities in Troubling Times”, with a good deal of excitement – and then, even before entering the building, to my great surprise and glee, met a friend and colleague from South Africa. This augured well; this was going to be a good conference!

The Conference was organised by ICSM, with support from Wallenberg, Research Worldwide Istanbul, and Özyegin University, Istanbul. After the first Symposium in İzmir in 2014, which I have say I enjoyed immensely, this was the conference that was meant to have been held in 2016 but was postponed because of the political situation.

Inside the elegant modern community centre, I was promptly and enthusiastically met by some of the hosts, more old and new friends ... and so, after milling around and meeting more friendly faces and the relaxed formalities of the conference openings and welcomings, it was my turn. I suppose it was meant as bit of a warm-up act for the main keynotes.

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But before reporting on that, I should mention two qualifications to this reflection: first, this is a very individual and personal account, in which my own participation is mixed with some brief commentaries on the many engaging and enlightening presentations; and, second, it was only after the conference had finished that I was asked to write this reflection, so it is certainly possible that, as I write this some months post-conference, some recollections are not what they should be. So apologies in advance for any inaccuracies in my account. I'm pleased that I at least kept quite a lot of notes in the neat little writing pad provided by the host university, even if some of those notes of mine now seem almost designed to be cryptic!

### Presenting ...

I had spent quite a lot of time beforehand paring down my thoughts for the allotted 15 minutes, and trying to think: ... what could I say in the time? I spoke on "Men and Masculinities in a Lurking Doom?: The Personal-Political-Theoretical", and tried to say some things that might be useful to those who were in their first conference on gender, men and masculinities, as well as raise some points for those more embedded in these studies. So, beginning with the obvious: studying men and masculinities is, in a sense, ancient; men have studied men for centuries, often as an 'absent presence'; men have historically dominated the written Word, in academia, science, histories, literature, religion, and so on, often writing about men, for men, often '*gender*'/'*cinsiyet*' seen as a matter of/for women; and men have been and are still often seen as ungendered, normalised, natural(ised). Additionally, there are many and different, even contradictory, reasons (for men) to be interested in gender: these can also be personal, political, theoretical and various overlaps between them. The personal is political, and the personal is political is also theoretical; or the personal is political is theoretical is work – to extend the 1960s slogan.

While this conference was concerned with “troubling times”, the theme is far from new, and worth thinking of historically; for some people, troubling times have been and are simply routine. In the late 1970s, when I became involved, publicly, in questions of men and masculinity, there were certainly troubling times in Turkey, with political killings before the military coup and martial law imposed in December 1978, and also in 1978 in the UK, with, for example, “The [so-called] Troubles” continuing in Northern Ireland. From 1979 there was a significant move to the Right in UK politics, with the election of the Thatcher government.

Nearly ten years later, in 1988, saw what was probably the first international conference on men, masculinities and social theory, University of Bradford, UK, organised under the auspices of the British Sociological Association, Social Theory section. The opening keynote was presented by Jalna Hanmer (1990), coining the phrase ‘naming men as men’, and reporting on 54 feminist books published by 1975 on women’s lives and relations to men. In this and other ways, Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) can be understood as part of feminist resistance.

This is a rather different way to understand CSMM than in terms of three, admitted simplified, main waves or phases of studies of men and masculinities, inspired by: first, sex role approaches to masculinity; second, power/hegemony approaches to multiple masculinities; and then, third, post-structuralist approaches to masculinities (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001; Edwards, 2004; Elliott, 2016). But there is a very large canvas missing that is often from these three frames. In particular, this includes the very large growth in international, comparative, supranational, global, post/decolonial, transnational, world-centred (Connell, 2014) approaches, including the geopolitics and locationality of knowledge in CSMM, and work from and on (semi)peripheries (Blagojević, 2009) and “global South”. In addition, there is the expansion of what I would call materialist-discursive approaches to men and masculinities (Hearn, 2014); and more rebellious engagement (Lorber, 2005) with gender hegemony/hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004; Howson

and Hearn, 2019), as part of the numerous problematisations of the very concept of gender. In brief, that the hegemony of men here refers to not just hegemony in relation to masculinities, but the gender hegemony that constructs 'men' as a social category of power.

One important aspect of all this that I don't think receives enough attention in CSMM is the impact of the relation and tension between the nation and nationalism, and empires, specifically the loss of empires, on the other. Moving into this political and epistemological terrain raises not only questions of methodological nationalism (Scott, 1998), whereby the/a nation is taken-for-granted as the framing of studies, but also how historical disruptions of national and imperial power have prompted critical reflection on men and masculinities. There are many examples here of how historical disruptions and transformations of empires have prompted political and academic problematisations of men and masculinities. Examples here include: the loss of British Empire (Tolson, 1977); the (Post-)WWII fracturing of dominant fiction (Silverman, 1992); the US defeat in Vietnam War (Bliss, 1985); the post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (Novikova et al., 2005); post-apartheid South Africa (Morrell, 2001; Ratele, 2014; Shefer et al., 2007, 2018). Yet until the recent growth of studies of populism and nationalism, there was rather little attention to men, masculinities and nationalism (Nagel, 1998) in CSMM. Seen thus, a major contemporary task is to deconstruct the nation and nationalism, in the context of transnational processes of populism and globalising and transnational men and masculinities.

The current "lurking doom" referred to a number of crushing crises, and the prospect of *worst of worlds*: crises around environment, economy, politics, war, and refugees; intensification of global capitalism, (neo)colonialism, (neo)imperialism, nationalism, xenophobia; spread and normalization of alternative facts, post-truths; entrenchment of authoritarianism, even as 'virtue', maybe proto-fascism; and even the convergence of economy, business, politics, culture, and entertainment. MenEngage (2014), the global activist, policy and practice development organisation puts it succinctly:

Patriarchal power, expressed through dominant masculinities, is among the major forces driving structural injustices and exploitation. ... manifestations of militarism and neoliberal globalisation, including war; proliferation of weapons; global and local economic inequality; violent manifestations of political and religious fundamentalisms; state violence; violence against civil society; human trafficking; destruction of natural resources.

Yet, lurking dooms and crises, like troubling times, are not new, depending on one's geopolitical location. Violent nationalisms and violent empires have been and are a familiar and normalised element of history in many parts of the world. What have changed are the rise of finance capitalism and increased economic inequalities; the use of data as power in surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019); the return of racism in 'respectable politics'; and threats to the planet (Enarson and Pease, 2016). To put the first of these points graphically:

“Almost a half of the world's wealth owned by 1% of the population. The bottom half of world's population owns same as the richest 85 people in the world” (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014)

These conditions force a return to an 'old' issue, that of patriarchy, or rather patriarchies, as both persistent and taking new forms. Patriarchies do not go away, but have become bigger, more transnational, more complex. Following feminist critiques of the concept of patriarchy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there has been a gradual revival of the concept, in a range of feminist-inspired publications (see Kandiyoti, 1988, on bargaining with patriarchy; Grewal, 2013, on outsourcing patriarchy; Hearn, 1987, 1992). There have also been discussions of neo-patriarchy and neoliberal patriarchy (Campbell, 2014; Özyeğin, 2015) and transnational patriarchies (Hearn, 2015) and transnational dispersed patriarchal centres (Hearn et al., 2019).

Knowledge construction in and of CSMM now seems a lot more complex than when in the throes of the three phases previously noted

earlier. What might appear as moves towards rather distant, macro, global, transnational and hyperpatriarchal politics and theory interconnect very much with the everyday, local, personal, bodily performance of “being men”. Even with the dispersals of globalisation, local and transnational patriarchies strike back, in the body, in experience, in the pressures and pleasures of everyday life. Knowledge construction needs to be both more material and more discursive, as in the focus on the hegemony of men. There is also an observable urgency here in the state of the world, in real time, in the speed of change, as with, for example, information and communication technologies, social media, robotics, AI, and kindred socio-technologies and biotechnologies. Troubles, crises, and attacks on the natural environment abound. In this lurking doom, knowledge of and in CSMM needs to become prognostic, future-orientated, even apocalyptic, not just historical and descriptive of more of the same.

### **Listening and discussing ...**

**A**fter this, a recorded speech, presumably from Australia, from the first of the keynote lectures, Raewyn Connell (2019) on “Masculinities in Troubling Times: Thinking on a World Scale”, was shown. The text of her speech, along with those of the three other keynotes, was published in the last issue of the journal, and so, as readers can themselves enjoy them at their leisure, I only make short comments on each of them here. Connell addressed, albeit if in what may have appeared at first as somewhat, and deceptively, restrained terms, the state of the world, and the Global South, when seen in terms of men and masculinities under neoliberal economic relations, not least the importance of the rise of dominant national and world leaders, the “strongmen” (see Connell, 2016). The speech was succinct and measured in summarising the new authoritarianisms and the combination of power blocs dominated by certain men operating nationally, regionally and globally. In addition, some guarded critical words were delivered against the widespread adoption of the non-relational concept of “toxic

masculinity” in some sections of academia, as well as media and wider discourse. I think that was a helpful intervention against what can easily be close to a reinvention of sex role theory and the still frequent allusions to “traditional masculinity”, rather than an engagement with shifting forms of hegemony.

Then, with these openings done and dusted, it was the turn of the parallel panel sessions. Inevitably what I say from now on is an even more partial and personal take than what I’ve said above, as I haven’t yet found a simple way of being in more than one place, and for most of the time four sessions ran simultaneously. Altogether there were 35 parallel sessions, 15 in Turkish and 20 in English, across nine time slots, with 88 papers and 8 special or workshop sessions, for example, graduate forums and a UN Women session, listed on the conference programme, with only a few no-shows, with travel costs and so on. This was an impressive collection and gathering of expertise, commitment and enthusiasm, that was simultaneously and very international and very Turkish.

Necessarily, I only went to the sessions in English language, though some of these did include papers by Turkish scholars on Turkish material and society. However, this meant inevitably a clear limitation and partiality on what I can report about in relation to the conference. Amongst the papers and sessions that I did attend, I won’t comment on every paper I heard, but on some that especially stayed with me, in different ways.

For the first panel, I attended that on “Trans and masculine femininity experience”, with three papers. Having recently been involved in the European Research Council (ERC) “Transrights” project, I was eager to hear these papers, and was not disappointed. First, two papers, rich in detail, addressed transgender lives in Turkey: Lukka Alp Akarçay discussed this focus in the context and through the navigation of urban space; and then R. Ash Koruyocu highlighted the importance of organisational influences in the lives of transgender people, and thus the potential of critical organisational studies in understanding and

contributing to change for transpeople. Finally, Sofia Aboim, the Director of the “Transrights” project, and Pedro Vascencolos presented on their ethnographic work on transgender in Portugal, focusing on transmen and transmasculine individuals. This included a fascinating exposition and then discussion on different bodily strategies for doing masculinity, briefly: metamorphosis (the body as a revealer of inner masculinity), approximation (binary masculinisation but embracing ambiguity), contestation (desire of bodily masculinisation but non-binary discourse), and discursiveness (no major physical transformation/intervention but bodies read through discourse).

The afternoon began with the second plenary session: the US scholar, James W. Messerschmidt (2019) spoke on “Hidden in Plain Sight: On the Omnipresence of Hegemonic Masculinities”. In his talk, he argued for the continuing usefulness of the concept of hegemonic masculinities, notably in the plural, in a significant range of US contexts, drawing largely on a variety of his own studies. This got me thinking of the importance of time and place in the construction of knowledge in CSMM.

Subsequent panels I attended were labelled: “Media”, “Gender Equality”, “Masculinities and Identities”, “Social Class and Precarity”, “Politics and Gender/Sexual Identity”, along with parts of “Military/Militarism”, “Modernisation and Kemalism”, and finally “Men and Instabilities”.

The next session I attended, on “Media”, was an excursion for me into some less familiar areas, with two initial papers on the analysis of Turkish television. This was something of an educational privilege for me in learning about how, in this context, the (strong) male body can be understood as foundational of the nation and nationalism (presented by Deniz Zorlu), and yet how traumatised masculinities figured in the TV series “Kuzgun” (presented by Özlem Akkaya). The session also included a very topical paper by Ellen O’Sullivan on the incelosphere, a particularly nasty branch of the manosphere (see Ding, 2017), even not

all incels, so-called involuntary (heterosexual male) celibates, claimed that identity explicitly and proudly.

Between the parallel sessions were slotted two further major keynotes: one by Deniz Kandiyoti on “Mainstreaming Men and Masculinities: Technical Fix or Political Struggle?”, and another by Nancy Lindisfarne on “The Roots of Sexual Violence”. As noted, these have also been reproduced in the journal.

Kandiyoti’s (2019) speech was both wide-ranging in scope, whilst being directed to recent political and policy events and change in Turkey and well beyond around gender, men and masculinities. The *political nature* of gender, gender (equality) policy, and studies on men and masculinities was made very clear. As her title suggests, seeing gender as resolved and fixable by technical and policy fixes was critiqued. There were many points of interest, including her elaboration on how Hasso’s critique that ‘the dominant theories in contemporary masculinity studies were produced largely by white male scholars in the United States and Australia whose assumptions in relation to Western societies have been “globalized as theory writ large relatively unselfconsciously”’ (Kandiyoti, 2019: 32, citing Hasso, 2018). This was an important guiding message for the whole conference and CSMM beyond. More specifically, the rise of masculinist restorations in the region and elsewhere was discussed, as well as the complex positioning and shifting political path of women’s and equality-related organisations and agencies sitting, stuck, between the state and civil society. This perspective is highly relevant to the situation of many state, quasi-state and NGOs, especially those state-funded that have to negotiate for their resources and existence.

Her lecture also made me think more about the question of living away from one’s own country of origin, and how this affects one’s relations to it, academically and politically. While Kandiyoti has long worked (and I assume lived) in (or near) London and remains an authority on Turkey, I got to musing on my own childhood in London, my own living away from the UK, and my own uncertainties in understanding about what is happening there. In some ways, this means

seeing the UK more clearly; in other ways, that country seems more and more remote

The “Gender Equality” session included papers based on material in several very different locations: by Brendan Kwiatkowski and Allyson Jule from Canada on the old chestnut of “unrestricting” men’s and boys’, in this case, adolescents’ emotions; Michal Zeevi on the integration of men into feminist activism in Israel; and Marcela Ondekova on men as activists – or rather antagonists, allies, and advocates – in relation to women’s empowerment in Bangladesh. All three papers pointed to the political difficulties of simple solutions or resolutions of men’s and boy’s positioning within entrenched gender power relations, even when there are good intentions – in some ways reinforcing Kandiyoti’s keynote message.

As it happened, the Bangladeshi context also figured in the next session, Fauzia Erfan Ahmed’s paper in the session on “Masculinities and Identities” – in which she addressed the question: does modernisation overcome patriarchy? She described the dramatic social change in the country with fertility rates decreasing by two-thirds from 1975 to 2018, creating the conditions for different, ‘new’ gender positionings and also various forms of social ambivalence and contradictory consciousness, to cite Matthew Gutmann (1996/2006), and ‘mixed’ or split, rather than, say, hybrid, forms of masculinity, if I understand it correctly. In the Bangladeshi context, men are changing but slowly, and doing so with ambivalence and contradictions, in relation to women’s changing relations to production and reproduction (see Ahmed, 2008). This was one of the most gripping of the individual papers that I heard at the conference.

Lindisfarne’s (2019) lecture was another *tour de force*, addressing roots in a different sense, now the roots of sexual violence. The talk ranged widely, but built, perhaps unusually in this context, on historical and pre-class, pre-historical anthropology, primate-human relations, anatomy, evolution, change in agricultural systems, and political economy, amongst other inspirations – in seeking a unified theory of

gender and class. It also sought to “think afresh about human origins: beginning with the 200,000 history of egalitarian cooperation, and then the recent 12,000-year history of class inequality with its consistent associations with patriarchy, and gendered violence.” (Lindisfarne, 2019: 50). In distilling many points, Lindisfarne introduced some the major ideas in her forthcoming book with Jonathan Neale (Lindisfarne and Neale, f.c.), including pointing to the power of love, that is love that legitimates patriarchal relations, as an underpinning of sexual violence. These historical processes may have become more complex and even subtle, but are still there. It would be immensely interesting to put this analysis alongside what is probably the most developed feminist-materialist theorist of love, namely, that of my Örebro University colleague, Anna Jónasdóttir (1994; Jónasdóttir and *Ferguson*, 2013), and the Feminist Love Studies more generally, as well as with the foundational materialist work on the politics of reproduction and fatherhood by Mary O’Brien (1981; 1990), one of my personal intellectual inspirations (Hearn, 1999).

The two sessions following – on “Social Class and Precarity” and “Politics and Gender/Sexual Identity” – proved to be among the most interesting of the parallel sessions in the conference. In the first of these two sessions: Cecilie Mueenuddin spoke of changing power relations among middle-class men in Pakistan; Mandisa Malinga addressed work, money, sexual prowess, powerlessness and shame among precarious day labourers in South Africa; and Christina Mouratides Mediouni examined the lived tensions and precarious plight of even well-educated men in post-revolution Tunisia. The session dovetailed well onto the next on “Politics and Gender/Sexual Identity”, with: Arpita Chakraborty speaking on violent masculinity and religion in India, including an insightful critique of Ghandi’s writings; Ivan Bujan on some contradictions around homonationalism and HIV prevention in the US; and Begüm Selici on conservative LBGTI+ groups in Turkey. We now have a bigger picture (cf. Connell, 1993; Hearn, 2003, on the ‘big picture’) than is usual with some contemporary concerns with identity, in everyday presence and presentations.

Unfortunately, with some other demands, I was only able to get to part of some sessions, namely the “Military/militarism” session, and Thomas Süssler-Rohringer’s presentation on military and civic masculinities in Austria since 1960; “Modernisation and Kemalism” with Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay on “Queer Marxist Feminism on the Kemalist stage”; “Men and instabilities” with Rafaela Werny on “Masculinities in nursing homes”. These were all engrossing presentations showing the breadth and depth of current scholarship.

Finally, I comment here on an improvised Open Forum participatory workshop that I ran on the theme of “What is Going on with Men in Studies of Gender, Men and Masculinities?” The workshop proved popular in terms of the numbers that attended (perhaps as it was the only English-language session at that time), though I cannot comment on its popularity in terms of reception. I gave some brief overview of what is happening in CSMM, some part, present and future trends (Hearn, 2019; Hearn and Howson, 2019); and the gender dynamics within this area of study, drawing in part on Tristan Bridges’ (2019) recent analysis of representation of women and men in the relevant journals. On one hand, men, certain men, are most well-known in the arena of CSMM; on the other hand, in some parts of the world at least, such as Central and East Europe, the Nordic region, and South Africa, feminist women are leading the work on CSMM. At the same time, some men scholars appear to use the sub-field of CSMM for their own not-so-feminist-at-all purposes. In the workshop, I also asked participants to spend short blocks of time discussing in twos or threes key questions, such as:

- What are the most important issues/difficulties/challenges/contradictions that concern **you in your work?**
- How do these issues/difficulties/ challenges/ contradictions work **for you ... personally, empirically, politically, theoretically?**

- How do **you deal with** these challenges in your work? On your own? With others? Institutionally (universities, NGOs, networks)?

This generated a lot of talk and then feedback to the whole group, including on how some scholars are working in relative isolation within or outside their academic institutions. For myself, I enjoyed it, in part as a change of rhythm and a chance to hear from participants to talk to each other and reflect on their own research and the challenges they face in their own institutional and academic location, politically and epistemologically.

### Reflecting ...

Conferences such as this allow for the passing on of information and knowledge, mutual learning, sharing new ideas, finding inspiration (sometimes in the unexpected), taking stock, and moving forward more critically. Such conferences around CSMM are, however, rarely only *about knowledge construction* of particular topics, *x* or *y*, out there, elsewhere; they also *do knowledge construction* in terms of what and whose knowledge is most legitimate and acceptable, and which directions CSMM is (practiced) going in and not going in. This particular conference helped to push CSMM towards the bigger historical and geopolitical picture, and towards broader theoretical concerns beyond the immediacy of interpersonal doing and representation of gender, without neglecting that.

One other observation, from my perspective, is that many presentations were able to bridge the gap between more materialist analysis and more discursive analysis, and recognise, if only implicitly, the frequent arbitrariness of the separations of academic disciplines that still persist – between sociology, political science, international relations, cultural and visual studies, and so on. The conference was also both clearly local, national (but not nationalistic) and Turkish in its location, base, organizing and (in part) language), and also at the same time very

international and transnational in many different ways. That relation was a virtuous one.

The conference was a conference and a half, a true political and intellectual feast. It signals a form of 'maturing' of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, whereby historical, geopolitical and social structural realities are interrogated alongside calls for social justice, intersectional analysis, deconstruction of the taken-for-grantedness of men and masculinities, and recognition of the diversity of masculinities and men's and male experiences, however they are defined.

Finally, many thanks are due the organisers, the caterers, and no doubt others too, for not only for arranging all the practicalities, but for creating, along with the presenters and the audiences, such a positive and supportive atmosphere, in and around the conference that meant that sessions were both critical and peaceful. I recall many enjoyable conversations, meetings and moments.

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