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# Introduction

Late in 2009, the United Nations convened a great meeting in Copenhagen on an issue being defined as the greatest challenge of our time. Specialists in climate science had warned for years about the growing turbulence and risk resulting from human activities that change and especially heat the atmosphere. After two weeks of bitter wrangling, the governments of the world went home, having agreed on almost nothing. Developing countries, led by China, refused more restrictions on their high-pollution drive for economic growth; rich countries, led by the United States, refused the demand to wind down their high-consumption way of life.

In mid 2010, the British-based transnational oil corporation BP had a nasty accident at an underwater well in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting from the urgent search for more fossil fuel as the time of 'peak oil' approaches. A media blitz followed the threat of pollution to the southern coast of the United States. A few media stories – only a few – drew a parallel with the catastrophe that had already surrounded oil spills on another continent. The Niger River delta has been the scene of epic corruption, social dislocation, civil war and devastating pollution since the oil companies arrived in the 1950s.

These traumatic events are not bad luck and not failures of personal leadership. They are consequences of the way our institutions and structures work: decisions in the hands of small elites, global struggle for profits and power, massive inequalities of resources, and the triumph of short-term calculation. We do not have a global environment problem, really. We have a global *social* problem. Ecological crisis and injustice can only be solved by social action and institutional change.

The spread of HIV/AIDS, to take another critical issue, is not just a medical problem. From the early years of the epidemic it was clear that only social action could stop it. Community mobilizations did stop it, in some places – but not widely enough. The global epidemic continues to spread through social pathways formed by poverty, violence and patriarchy.

Across a broad range of other issues, people grappling with practical dilemmas need to understand large-scale social processes. Women in organizations facing the 'glass ceiling', teachers troubled about over-surveillance of their work, activists dealing with domestic violence, knowledge workers grappling with marginality, all are stronger if they have reliable knowledge about how the problems arose and why they are intractable.

That argument motivates the research discussed in this book. We need social science because social processes shape human destinies. If we are to take control of our future, we need to understand society as much as we need to understand the atmosphere, the earth, and men's and women's bodies.

There are many dubious interpretations of the social world on offer. There is market ideology, where every problem has the same solution – private property and unrestrained markets. There is 'virtual sociology' (skewered by Judith Stacey in her recent book *Unhitched*) where pressure-groups select the research results they like, ignore the ones they don't, and so present their own prejudices as scientific findings. The most enjoyable pseudo-science is the pop sociology of market research firms: Generation X, Generation Y, the creative class, the mommy track, the metrosexuals, the sensitive new-age guy, the new traditionals, the aspirationals, the sea-changers . . . The names usually define faintly

recognizable types, or at any rate marketing strategies, and the audience in wealthy countries fill in the details for themselves.

Social science is harder. It is slower. Knowledge grows by a collective process of exploration that is complex and uncertain. Research *must* be unpredictable, since we never know at the start what the results will be. (If we do know, it isn't research!) Social science needs patience and it does not suit media deadlines. It also needs resources, especially people and time. For intellectual work to be done there has to be a workforce; and that is not easily assembled or kept in being. There is often an awkward gap between significant questions and the means of answering them.

Research is usually imagined as the gathering of data, but there is much more to it. Clarifying language, generating new concepts, relating ideas to each other, building interpretations – these too are necessary steps in producing knowledge. Theory is often handed over, with a sigh of relief, to a small group of specialists. It shouldn't be. Theory is basically about trying to think beyond the immediately given; and this is business that concerns everyone with a stake in social science. In my experience, the best theoretical ideas bubble up in the midst of empirical research or practical problems and start talking to the facts straight away.

The theories most widely used in social science come from Europe and North America. This is increasingly recognized as a problem. We have become conscious of the imperial history of social science itself and the limitations of vision in even the greatest thinkers of the global North. There is now a vigorous and exciting debate about how to create a world social science that mobilizes the social experience and intellectual resources of the South – where, after all, most of the people live.

This book moves across the spectrum from empirical research to the global politics of knowledge. Three chapters report field studies: on gender equity in the public sector, school education and intellectual labour. Two chapters report documentary studies: on changing ideas about good teachers, and the global history of sociology. Two chapters try to synthesize a research field: on men's involvement with gender equality, and parent–child

relations under neoliberalism. Two chapters examine remarkable contemporary thinkers: Paulin Hountondji and Antonio Negri.

The book is an attempt to show social science at work – perhaps I should say, a social scientist at work, since it is a cross-section of my recent working life. While each chapter stands in its own right (most are based on articles in professional journals), as a collection they raise personal and political questions. I have therefore ended with an explicitly political essay, a meditation on the Australian left, that grows out of my own involvement.

The diversity of these chapters is deliberate. I hope to show how a realist approach can work across different issues and in different types of investigation. So I should say a few words about the approach to social science that links them.

Social practices – including labour, care and struggle – are endlessly bringing new realities into existence. This is easily said, difficult to keep in mind. It is easier to think of the world as composed of things that we bump against like rocks – a family, a bank, a population, capitalism, patriarchy.

But the storm of time keeps blowing: not only destroying what previously appeared solid, but creating and destroying and creating again. Borrowing a slightly pompous word from the Czech philosopher Karel Kosík (1976), I call this the ontoformativity of social practice. Our collective actions, shaped by social structures precipitated from the past, *make* the social world we are moving into. And this social world is not a performative illusion, it becomes new fact. Social practice is generative, fecund, rich in real consequences.

This is frightening, as many of the consequences are dire. The last hundred years have generated the most intense moments of violence (Kursk, Hiroshima) and the worst famines in human history, as well as the deepening disaster of climate change. Yet the same century has seen the greatest-ever increase in literacy and the greatest increase in expectations of life. Huge empires have been dismantled; there has been an unprecedented global struggle towards gender equality; there is tremendous cultural inventiveness, even in very poor and disrupted communities (for magnificent proof, Vivien Johnson, *Lives of the Papunya Tula Artists*, 2008).

Social science, concerned with this reality, has to be empirical;

it tries to discover and describe the way things are in the world. The accuracy of its statements matters, its claims have to be testable and, ultimately, tested. That is what distinguishes social science from ideologies and pseudo-sciences, however entertaining or persuasive those may be.

It is usually quantitative researchers who emphasize the empirical character of social science. I value the distributive information that surveys and censuses give, and some will be found in this book. A democratic science must be concerned with all the people, not just an iconic few. But social science cannot be only a system of quantitative statements. That would mean a sadly thin form of knowledge, missing out everything that *produces* the distributions our statistical methods describe – missing, in fact, the ontoformativity of practice.

We need empirical methods that allow the creative surge through time to emerge. I have particularly used life-history interviews (chapters 2, 4 and 6), combined with organizational ethnography, survey research and policy analysis in different studies. There are other ways to do it, of course.

In this approach, the purpose of research is to illuminate *situations*, i.e. moments within the historical process that we call social reality. What social science produces, when working at full stretch, might be called *social diagnoses* – accounts of the dynamics of well-understood situations.

This approach is relevant to studying theory itself. In the conceptual chapters towards the end of the book, I look at social theories as creative responses to historical situations, whether by individual theorists or intellectual movements. This is the core of the argument against the Northern monopoly in theory – a monopoly that instals a privileged set of diagnoses as paradigms for the whole world.

This would hardly matter, if social science were just a remote contemplation of human affairs. I don't think we can afford this. Good social science, to me, means social science engaged with the world it studies.

There are researchers who believe that to be scientific one must be neutral, because politics means bias. Science does need

objectivity, but objectivity does not come from neutrality. Here I follow Max Deutscher's (1983: 2) sharp criticism of the belief that objectivity means detachment. Objectivity, as the attitude that leads to accurate, adequate knowledge of people and things, actually *requires engagement* with people and things.

'Democracy' is a word so contaminated by apologists for the rich and powerful that I hesitate to use it. But the principle remains and there is no better name – a world ruled by all the people who live in it, not by a privileged minority.

No one who remembers the racism of colonialist anthropology or sociology's surveillance of the poor, or who looks at economics now, would assume social science necessarily works for democracy. But social science *can*. Research can map the dynamics of the HIV epidemic for communities struggling to control it. Research can document power structures and the machinery of privilege. Social science has some capacity to multiply the voices heard in public arenas. And social theory has a capacity to bring imagination into dialogue with current reality. Doing social theory always means recognizing that things could be otherwise; that – to borrow a phrase again – another world is possible.

For some years sociologists have been debating Michael Burawoy's (2005) idea of 'public sociology'. In that debate, public sociology figures as a choice for the social scientists (Clawson *et al.* 2007). I would put the emphasis the other way around: social science is a necessity for the public. In a world where massive social institutions and social structures shape the fate of huge populations, a participatory democracy needs powerful and accurate knowledge about society. Only with this knowledge can collective decisions be made that steer our societies on the dangerous ground of the future.

I am not suggesting that social science can be a political movement. It is a type of intellectual work, nothing more. But nothing less. It is work which produces a kind of knowledge that has become vital. Clarity and depth of understanding on social issues matter more than ever. I hope some will be found in this book.

Raewyn Connell
Sydney, August 2010

# 1

# *Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities and Gender Equality*

Equality between women and men has been an international legal principle since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and enjoys popular support in many countries. The idea that *men* might have a specific role in relation to this principle has only emerged recently.

Gender equality was placed on the policy agenda by women. The reason is obvious: it is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality and who therefore have the claim for redress. But men are necessarily involved. Moving towards a gender-equal society involves profound institutional change as well as change in everyday life and personal conduct, and therefore requires widespread social support.

Further, the very gender inequalities in economic assets, political power, cultural authority and the means of coercion that gender reforms intend to change currently mean that men (often, specific groups of men) control most of the resources required to implement women's claims for justice. Men and boys are in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality. Whether they are willing to open the gates for major reforms is a strategic question.

This chapter traces the emergence of a worldwide discussion of men and gender-equality reform and assesses the prospects of reform strategies involving men. To do this, we need to examine how men and boys have been understood, the politics of 'men's movements', the divided interests of men and boys in gender relations, and the research evidence about the changing and conflict-ridden social construction of masculinities.

This chapter grows out of practical policymaking, as well as research. In 2003–4 I was involved in United Nations discussions of 'the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality'. This culminated in a 2004 meeting that produced the first world-level policy document on this question. I will discuss the details later.

## Men and masculinities in the world gender order

In the 1990s, in the global metropole, there was a wave of popular concern about men and boys. The US poet Robert Bly published a book *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), which became a huge best-seller and set off a wave of imitations. Bly's book was popular because it offered, in prophetic language, simple solutions to problems that were increasingly troubling the culture.

Specific issues about men and boys also attracted public attention in the rich countries. Men's responses to feminism, and to gender equality policies, have been debated in Germany and Scandinavia (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985; Holter 2003). In English-speaking countries there has been enthusiasm for 'the new fatherhood' and doubt about real changes in men's involvement in families (McMahon 1999). There has been public agonizing about boys' supposed 'failure' in school, and many proposals for special programs for boys (Frank and Davison 2007). Men's violence towards women has been the subject of practical interventions and extensive debate (Hearn 1998) and men's relationship with the law is in question (Collier 2010). There has also been increasing debate about men's health and illness from a gender perspective (Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002).

Accompanying these debates has been a remarkable growth of research about men's gender identities and practices, masculinities and the social processes by which they are constructed. Academic journals have been founded for specialized research, there have been many conferences and there is a growing international literature. We now have a far more sophisticated and detailed scientific understanding of issues about men, masculinities and gender than before (Connell 2005a).

This set of concerns is found worldwide. Debates on violence, patriarchy and ways of changing men's conduct have occurred in countries as diverse as India, Germany, Canada and South Africa. Issues about masculine sexuality and fatherhood have been debated and researched across Latin America. A men's centre with a reform agenda was established in Japan, where conferences have been held and media debates about traditional patterns of masculinity and family life continue (Menzu Senta 1997). A 'travelling seminar' discussing issues about men, masculinities and gender equality toured India (Roy 2003).

The research effort is also worldwide. Differing constructions of masculinity have been documented by researchers on every continent, literally. The first global synthesis, in the form of a world handbook of research on men and masculinities, was published in 2005 (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). The work continues, for instance in recent research on the representation of men and masculinity in Indonesian culture (Clark 2010).

The rapid internationalization of these debates reflects the fact – increasingly recognized in feminist thought – that gender relations themselves have an international dimension. Change in gender relations occurs on a world scale, though not always in the same direction or at the same pace.

The dynamics of the world gender order affect men as profoundly as women, though this fact has been less discussed. Studies such as Matthew Gutmann's (2002) ethnographic work in poor communities in Mexico, show in fine detail how the lives of particular groups of men are shaped by globally acting economic and political forces.

Different groups of men are positioned very differently in these

dynamics. There is no single formula that accounts for 'men and globalization'. There is, indeed, a growing polarization among men on a world scale. Studies of ruling-class men (Donaldson and Poynting 2007) show a privileged minority with astonishing wealth and power, while much larger numbers face poverty, cultural dislocation, disruption of family relationships and forced renegotiation of the meanings of masculinity.

Masculinities are socially constructed patterns of gender practice. These patterns are created through a historical process with a global dimension. The old-style 'ethnographic' research that located gender patterns purely in a local context is inadequate to the reality. Historical research, such as Robert Morrell's (2001b) study of the masculinities of the colonizers in South Africa and T. Dunbar Moodie's (1994) study of the colonized, shows how a gendered culture is created and transformed in relation to the international economy and the political system of empire. There is every reason to think this principle holds for contemporary masculinities.

## Shifting ground: men and boys in gender equality debates

In both national and international policy documents concerned with gender equality, women are the subjects of the policy discourse. The agencies or meetings that formulate, implement or monitor gender policies usually have names referring to women. They are called 'Department for Women', 'Women's Equity Bureau', 'Prefectural Women's Centre' or 'Commission on the Status of Women'. Such bodies have a clear mandate to act for women. They do not have an equally clear mandate to act with respect to men. The major policy documents concerned with gender equality, such as the 1979 UN *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*, often do not name men as a group and rarely discuss men in concrete terms.

However, men are present as background throughout these documents. In every statement about women's disadvantage there is an implied comparison with men as the advantaged group. In

the discussions of violence against women, men are implied and sometimes named as the perpetrators. In discussions of gender and HIV/AIDS, men are commonly construed as being the problem, the agents of infection.

When men are present only as a background category in a policy discourse about women, it is difficult to raise issues about men's and boys' interests, problems or diversity. This could only be done by falling into a backlash posture and affirming 'men's rights' or by moving outside a gender framework altogether.

The structure of gender equality policy, therefore, created an opportunity for anti-feminist politics. Opponents of feminism found issues about boys and men to be fertile ground. This is most clearly seen in the United States, where authors such as Christina Hoff Sommers (2000), purporting to defend men and boys, bitterly accused feminism of injustice. These ideas have not stimulated a social movement, with the exception of a small-scale (though active and sometimes violent) 'father's rights' movement in relation to divorce. The arguments have, however, strongly appealed to the neoconservative mass media, which gave them international circulation.

Some policymakers have attempted to straddle this divide by re-shaping gender equality policy as parallel policies for women and men. For instance, some health policymakers in Australia added a 'men's health' document to a 'women's health' document (Schofield 2004). Similarly, in some school systems a 'boy's education' strategy has been added to a 'girls' education' strategy (Lingard 2003).

This acknowledges the wider scope of gender issues. But this approach risks weakening the equality rationale of the original policy. It forgets the relational character of gender and therefore tends to redefine women and men, or girls and boys, simply as different market segments for some service. Ironically, the result may be to promote more gender segregation, not less.

On the other hand, bringing men's problems within an existing framework of policies for women may weaken the authority that women have so far gathered in that policy area. In the field of gender and development, for instance, some specialists argue

that 'bringing men in' – given the larger context in which men still control most of the wealth and institutional authority – may undermine, not help, the drive for gender equality (White 2000).

The role of men and boys in relation to gender equality emerged as an issue in international discussions during the 1990s (Valdés and Olavarría 1998; Breines, Connell and Eide 2000). The shift became visible at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Paragraph 25 of the *Beijing Declaration* committed participating governments to 'encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality'. The detailed *Platform for Action* that accompanied the Declaration prominently restated the principle of shared power and responsibility between men and women, and argued that women's concerns could only be addressed 'in partnership with men' towards gender equality (pars. 1, 3). The *Platform for Action* went on to specify areas where action involving men and boys was needed and was possible: in education, socialization of children, childcare and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence and the balancing of work and family reponsibilities (pars. 40, 72, 83b, 107c, 108e, 120, 179).

Participating governments followed a similar approach in the twenty-third special session of the UN General Assembly in the year 2000, which was intended to review the situation five years after the highly divided Beijing conference. The *Political Declaration* of this session made an even stronger statement on men's responsibility: '[Member states of the United Nations] emphasize that men must involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality' (par. 6). It remained the case that men were on the margins of a policy discourse concerned with women. The initiative of 2003–4 was an attempt to change this situation, to bring men's role in gender equality politics right into focus.

## Divided interests: support and resistance

There is something surprising about the worldwide problematizing of men and masculinities, because in many ways the position

of men has not much changed. Men remain a very large majority of corporate executives, top professionals and holders of public office. Worldwide, men hold nine out of ten cabinet-level posts in national governments, nearly as many of the parliamentary seats and most top positions in international agencies. Men, collectively, receive approximately twice the income that women receive and also receive the benefits of a great deal of unpaid household labour, not to mention emotional support, from women.

The United Nations Development Programme now regularly incorporates a selection of such statistics into its annual report on world human development, combining them into a 'gender-related development index' and a 'gender empowerment measure'. This produces a dramatic outcome, a league table of countries ranked in terms of gender equality, which shows most countries in the world to be far from gender-equal. It is clear that, globally, men have a lot to lose from pursuing gender equality because men, collectively, continue to receive a patriarchal dividend.

But this way of picturing inequality may conceal as much as it reveals. There are multiple dimensions in gender relations and the patterns of inequality in these dimensions may be different. If we look separately at each of the substructures of gender, we find a pattern of advantages for men but also a linked pattern of disadvantages or toxicity (Connell 2003a).

For instance, in relation to the gender division of labour, men collectively receive the bulk of income in the money economy, and men occupy most of the managerial positions. But men also provide the workforce for the most dangerous occupations, suffer most industrial injuries, pay most of the taxation, and are under heavier social pressure to remain employed. In the domain of power, men collectively control the institutions of coercion and the means of violence. But men are also the main targets of military violence and criminal assault, and many more men than women are imprisoned or executed.

One could draw up a balance sheet of the costs and benefits to men from the current gender order. But this would be misleading. The disadvantages are, broadly speaking, the *conditions* of the advantages. For instance, men cannot hold state power without

some men becoming the agents of violence. Men cannot be the beneficiaries of women's domestic labour and care work without many men losing intimate connections with young children.

Equally important, the men who receive most of the benefits, and the men who pay most of the costs, are not the same individuals. As the old saying puts it, generals die in bed. On a global scale, the men who benefit from corporate wealth, physical security and expensive health care are a very different group from the men who dig the fields and the mines of developing countries. Class, race, national, regional and generational differences cross-cut the category 'men', spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. It is not surprising that men respond very diversely to gender equality politics.

There is, in fact, a considerable history of support for gender equality among men. Nineteenth-century intellectuals from Said Ahmad Khan in India to John Stuart Mill in Britain advocated the education and emancipation of women. Many of the historic gains by women's movements have been won in alliance with men who held organizational or political authority at the time. For instance, the introduction of Equal Employment Opportunity measures in New South Wales, Australia, occurred with the strong support of the Premier and the head of a reform inquiry into the public sector, both men (Eisenstein 1996).

The most prominent examples of organized pro-equality activism among men are concerned with gender-based violence. The White Ribbon campaign, conducting public education among men and boys, originated in Canada but is now international. Beginning in the 1990s, there are now research and action campaigns on the issue of violence in many countries (e.g. India: Chopra 2002). Since 2004 an international network called MenEngage, based on NGOs and UN agencies, has linked campaigns in many countries; over 400 organizations are now members.

What of the wider state of opinion? European survey research has shown no consensus among men either for or against gender equality. Sometimes a third/third/third pattern appears, with about one-third of men supporting change towards equality, about one-third opposing it and one-third undecided or intermediate

(Holter 1997: 131–4). Nevertheless, survey evidence from the United States, Germany and Japan does show a long-term trend of growing support for gender equality, especially among the younger generation (Mohwald 2002).

There is also significant evidence of men's and boys' *resistance* to change in gender relations. The survey research reveals substantial levels of doubt and opposition, especially among older men. Research on workplaces and on corporate management has documented many cases where men maintain an organizational culture that is heavily masculinized and unwelcoming to women. In some cases there is active opposition to gender equality measures or quiet undermining of them (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Research on schools has also found cases where boys assert control of informal social life and direct hostility against girls and against boys perceived as being different (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson 1998).

Some men accept change in principle, but in practice still act in ways that sustain gender inequalities. In strongly gender-segregated societies it may be difficult for men to recognize alternatives or to understand women's experiences (Kandiyoti 1994; Fuller 2001; Meuser 2003). Another type of opposition to reform, more common among men in business and government, rejects gender equality measures because it rejects all government action in support of equality, in favour of the unfettered action of the market.

The reasons for men's resistance include the patriarchal dividend discussed above, and threats to identity that occur with change. If social definitions of masculinity emphasize being the breadwinner and being 'strong', then men may be offended by women's professional progress because it makes men seem less worthy of respect.

Resistance may also mean ideological defence of male supremacy. Research on domestic violence suggests that male batterers often hold very conservative views of women's role in the family (Ptacek 1988). In many parts of the world there are ideologies that justify men's supremacy on grounds of religion, biology, cultural tradition or organizational mission (e.g. in military forces). It is a

mistake to regard these ideas as simply 'traditional' and therefore outmoded. They may be actively modernized and renewed.

## Grounds for optimism

The public debates about men and boys have often been inconclusive. But they have gone a long way, together with the research, to shatter one widespread belief that has hindered gender reform. This is the belief that men *cannot* change their ways, that 'boys will be boys', that rape, sexism, brutality and selfishness are natural to men.

We now have many documented examples of the diversity of masculinities and of men's and boys' capacity for equality. For instance, life-history research in Chile has shown that there is no unitary Chilean masculinity. While a hegemonic model is widely diffused across social strata, there are many men who depart from it and there is significant discontent with traditional roles (Valdés and Olavarría 1998).

Though boys in schools often have a dominant or hegemonic pattern of masculinity, there are usually also other patterns present, some of which involve more equal and respectful relations with girls. There is very interesting research in Britain, for instance, that shows how boys encounter and explore alternative models of masculinity as they grow up (Mac an Ghaill 1994; O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000).

Psychological and educational research shows personal flexibility in the face of gender stereotypes. Men and boys can strategically use conventional definitions of masculinity, rather than being rigidly dominated by them. It is even possible to teach boys (and girls) how to do this in school, as experiments in Australian classrooms have shown (Davies 1993; Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Perhaps the most extensive social action involving men in gender change has occurred in Scandinavia. This includes provisions for paternity leave that have had high rates of take-up, among the most dramatic of all demonstrations of men's willingness to

change gender practices. Øystein Holter sums up the research and practical experience in an important statement:

> The Nordic 'experiment' has shown that a *majority* of men can change their practice when circumstances are favourable . . . When reforms or support policies are well-designed and targeted towards an on-going cultural process of change, men's active support for gender-equal status increases. (Holter 2003: 126)

Many groups of men, it is clear, have a capacity for equality and for gender change. But what reasons for change are men likely to see?

Early statements often assumed that men had the same interest as women in escaping from restrictive sex roles (e.g. Palme 1972). Later experience has not confirmed this view. Yet men and boys often do have substantial reasons to support change.

First, men are not isolated individuals. Men and boys live in social relationships, many with women and girls: wives, partners, mothers, aunts, daughters, nieces, friends, classmates, workmates, professional colleagues, neighbours and so on. The quality of every man's life depends to a large extent on the quality of those relationships. We may therefore speak of men's *relational interests* in gender equality.

For instance, very large numbers of men are fathers and about half of their children are girls. Some men are sole parents and deeply involved in caregiving – an important demonstration of men's capacity for care (Risman 1986). Even in intact partnerships with women, many men have close relationships with their children, and psychological research shows the importance of these relationships (Kindler 2002). In several parts of the world, young men are exploring more engaged patterns of fatherhood (Olavarría 2001). To make sure that daughters grow up in a world that offers young women security, freedom and opportunities to fulfil their talents is a powerful reason for many men to support gender equality.

Second, men may wish to avoid the toxic effects that the gender order has for them. James Harrison (1978) long ago issued a 'Warning: The male sex role may be dangerous to your

health'. Since then, health research has documented specific prob-
lems for men and boys. Among them are premature death from
accident, homicide and suicide; occupational injury; higher levels
of drug abuse, especially of alcohol and tobacco; in some coun-
tries, a relative unwillingness by men to seek medical help when
it is needed. Attempts to assert a tough and dominant masculin-
ity sustain some of these toxic practices (Hurrelmann and Kolip
2002).

Social and economic pressures on men to compete in the
workplace, to increase their hours of paid work and sometimes
to take second jobs, are among the most powerful constraints on
gender reform. Desire for a better balance between work and life
is widespread among employed men. On the other hand, where
unemployment is high, the lack of a paid job can be a damag-
ing pressure on men who have grown up with the expectation
of being breadwinners. This is, for instance, an important gender
issue in post-Apartheid South Africa, where there is active discus-
sion of new patterns of fatherhood (Richter and Morrell 2006).
Opening alternative economic paths and moving towards what
German discussions have called 'multi-optional masculinities'
may do much to improve men's well-being (Widersprüche 1998;
Morrell 2001a).

Third, men may support gender change because they see its
relevance to the well-being of the community they live in. In situ-
ations of mass poverty and under-employment, for instance cities
in developing countries, flexibility in the gender division of labour
may be crucial to a household's survival. Rahul Roy's recent film
*City Beautiful* provides a striking example of this dilemma for
working-class families in India.

Reducing the rigidity of masculinities may also yield benefits in
security. Gender relations are, as Cynthia Cockburn (2010) argues,
causally related to militarization and war. Men as well as women
have an interest in peace.

Finally, men may support gender reform because gender equal-
ity follows from their political or ethical principles. These may be
religious, socialist or broad democratic beliefs. J. S. Mill based the
case for gender equality on classical liberal principles; Ali Shariati

based the case for gender equality on Qur'anic principles. The idea
of equal human rights still has credibility among large groups of
men.

## Grounds for pessimism

The diversity among men and masculinities is reflected in a diver-
sity of men's movements. A study in the United States found
multiple movements, with different agendas for the remaking of
masculinity, operating on the terrains of gender equality, men's
rights and ethnic or religious identities (Messner 1997). There
is no unified political position for men and no authoritative
representative of men's interests.

The most extensive experience of any group of men organizing
around issues of gender and sexual politics is that of homosexual
men – in antidiscrimination campaigns, the gay liberation move-
ment and community responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
Gay men have pioneered in areas such as community care for the
sick, community education for responsible sexual practices, rep-
resentation in the public sector and overcoming social exclusion
(Kippax *et al.* 1993; Altman 1994). Though tolerance has grown,
homosexual men frequently face opposition and sometimes severe
violence from other men.

Explicit 'backlash' movements exist, but have not generally had
a great deal of influence. Men mobilizing as men to oppose women
tend to be seen as cranks or fanatics. Much more important for
the defence of gender inequality are movements and institutions
in which men's interests are indirectly promoted – among them
churches, ethnic organizations, conservative parties and nationalist
movements.

A particularly important case of indirect gender politics is neo-
liberalism, the dominant economic ideology today. Neoliberalism
is in principle gender neutral. The 'individual' has no gender, and
the market delivers advantage to the smartest entrepreneur, not to
men or women as such. But neoliberalism does not pursue social

justice in relation to gender. In Eastern Europe the restoration of capitalism and the arrival of neoliberal politics were followed by a sharp deterioration in the position of women. In rich Western countries, neoliberalism from the 1980s on has attacked the welfare state, on which far more women than men depend; supported deregulation of labour markets, resulting in increased casualization of women workers; shrunk public sector employment, the sector of the economy where women predominate; lowered rates of personal taxation, the main basis of tax transfers to women; and squeezed public education, the key pathway to labour market advancement for women. However, the same period saw an expansion of the human-rights agenda, which is, on the whole, an asset for gender equality.

Neoliberalism can function as a form of masculinity politics largely because of the powerful role of the state in the gender order. The state constitutes gender relations in multiple ways and all of its gender policies affect men. Many mainstream policies (e.g. in economic and security affairs) are substantially about men or advance men's interests, without acknowledging this fact (Bezanson and Luxton 2006).

This points to a realm of institutional politics where men's and women's interests are very much at stake, without the publicity created by social movements. Public-sector agencies (Schofield and Goodwin 2005), private-sector corporations (Connell 2010), and unions (Franzway 2001) are all sites of masculinized power and struggles for gender equality. In each of these sites some men can be found with a commitment to gender equality, but in each case that is an embattled position. For gender-equality outcomes it is important to have support from men in the top organizational levels, but this is not often reliably forthcoming.

One reason for the difficulty in expanding men's opposition to sexism is the role of highly conservative men as cultural authorities and managers. Major religious organizations, in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, are controlled by men who sometimes completely exclude women. The Catholic Church, for instance, vehemently refuses to have women as priests, and the Pope has recently denounced the very concept of 'gender'. Transnational media organizations, such as the Murdoch (Fox) media empire, are also active in promoting conservative gender ideology.

Men and men's interests are central in the growing complex of commercial sport. With its overwhelming focus on male athletes; its celebration of force, domination and competitive success; its valorization of male commentators and executives; and its marginalization and frequent ridicule of women, the sports/business complex has become an increasingly important site for representing and defining gender. This is not traditional patriarchy. It is something new, welding exemplary bodies to entrepreneurial culture. Michael Messner (2002), one of the leading sociologists of sport, formulates the effect well by saying that commercial sports define the renewed centrality of men and of a particular version of masculinity.

On a world scale, explicit backlash movements are of limited importance, but very large numbers of men are nevertheless engaged in preserving gender inequality. Patriarchy is defended diffusely. There is support for change from equally large numbers of men, but it is an uphill battle to articulate that support. That is the political context with which new gender-equality initiatives have to deal.

## Ways forward: a global framework

Inviting men to end men's privileges and to remake masculinities to sustain gender equality, strikes many people as a strange or utopian project. Yet this project is already underway. Many men around the world are engaged in gender reforms, for the good reasons discussed above.

The diversity of masculinities complicates the process but is also an important asset. As this diversity becomes better known, men and boys can more easily see a range of possibilities for their own lives, while men and women are less likely to think of gender inequality as eternal. It also becomes possible to identify specific groups of men who might join in alliances for change.

Public policy for gender equality relies on the idea of an alliance between men and women. Some groups within the women's movement, especially those concerned with men's violence, are reluctant to work with men or are deeply sceptical of men's willingness to change. Other feminists argue that alliances between women and men are possible, even crucial. In some social movements, for instance environmentalism, there is a strong ideology of gender equality and a favourable environment for men to support gender change (Connell 2005a; Segal 1997).

In local and central government, practical alliances between women and men have been important in achieving reforms such as equal-opportunity hiring rules. Even in dealing with men's violence against women, there has been cooperation between women's groups and men's groups, for instance in prevention work. This cooperation can be an inspiration to grassroots workers and a powerful demonstration of women's and men's common interest in a peaceful and equal society (Pease 1997). The concept of alliance is itself important, in preserving autonomy for women's groups, in pre-empting a tendency for one group to speak for others, and in defining a political role for men that has some dignity and might attract widespread support.

Given the spectrum of masculinity politics, we cannot expect consensus for gender equality. What is possible is that support for gender equality might become hegemonic among men. In that case it would be groups supporting equality that provide the agenda for public discussion about men's lives and patterns of masculinity.

There is already a broad cultural shift towards a historical consciousness about gender, an awareness that gender customs came into existence at specific moments in time and can always be transformed by social action. What is needed now is a widespread sense of agency among men, a sense that this transformation is something they can actually share in as a practical proposition.

From this point of view, the 2004 meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was profoundly interesting. The CSW is one of the oldest of UN agencies, dating from the 1940s. Effectively a standing committee of the General Assembly, it meets annually and its practice has been to consider

two main themes at each meeting. For the 2004 meeting, one of the defined themes was 'the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality'. The section of the UN secretariat that supports the CSW, the Division for the Advancement of Women, undertook background work. The Division held, in June–July 2003, a worldwide online seminar on the role of men and boys, and in October 2003 it convened an international expert group meeting in Brasilia on the topic.

At the main CSW meetings, there is a presentation of the Division's background work, and delegations of the forty-five current member countries, UN agencies and many of the nongovernment organizations attending make initial statements. There is a busy schedule of side events, mainly organized by NGOs but some conducted by delegations or UN agencies. And there is a diplomatic process, in which the official delegations negotiate over a draft document in the light of discussions in the CSW and their governments' stances on gender issues.

This is a politicized process, inevitably, and it can break down. In 2003, the CSW discussion on the issue of violence against women reached deadlock. In 2004 it was clear that some participating NGOs were not happy with the focus on men and boys, some holding to a discourse about men exclusively as perpetrators of violence. Over the two weeks of negotiations, however, the delegations did reach consensus on a policy statement, known as 'Agreed Conclusions'.

Reaffirming commitment to women's equality and recognizing men's and boys' potential for action, this document made specific recommendations across policy fields such as education, parenthood, media, the labour market, sexuality, violence and conflict prevention. These proposals have no force in international law – the document is essentially a set of recommendations to governments and other organizations. Nevertheless, it was the first international agreement of its kind, treating men systematically as agents in gender-equality processes. It created a standard for future gender-equality discussions, presenting gender equality as a positive project for men.

An account of these discussions and examples of action projects

around the world is now available in a widely distributed document *The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality* (Division for the Advancement of Women 2008).

The United Nations process connects with the social and cultural possibilities that have emerged from the last three decades of gender politics among men. Gender equality is an undertaking for men that can be creative and joyful. It is a project that realizes high principles of social justice, produces better lives for the women whom men care about, and will produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run. This can and should be a project that generates energy, that finds expression in everyday life and the arts as well as in formal policies, that can illuminate all aspects of men's lives.

# 2

# *Steering towards Equality?*
# *How Gender Regimes Change*
# *inside the State*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that we live in an era of gender change. Gender identities, gender performance and gender relations are all supposed to be in flux. Mr Bingley, though in possession of a good fortune, may no longer be in want of a wife.

Whether the process of gender change can be *steered*, in the sense of following a conscious agenda of reform, is an important and difficult question. Gender equality policies are precisely an attempt to do this. Neoliberals broadly assume that 'social engineering' is impossible or wrong. Feminists debate how to steer gender change and how to evaluate the experience of those who have tried (Eisenstein 2009).

This argument centres on the main steering mechanism in modern societies, the state. A considerable volume of feminist research has shown how state agencies and policies regulate the lives of women, both in the family and in the public realm (Borchorst 1999). The research focus has widened to the state's influence on gender relations generally, including the gendered lives of men (Connell 2003b).

In early discussions of the patriarchal state it was common

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