

The patriarchal dividend and gender harm

What is political about gender? In one of the foundation texts of Women's Liberation, *Sexual Politics* (1972: 23), Kate Millett defined 'politics' as 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. What made her argument scandalous was that she applied this definition to the relation between women and men.

The relation of power is only one of the inequalities described by Millett, and by the hundreds of researchers who have filled in the details since she wrote. Systematic inequalities exist in a range of resources, from income and wealth to social honour and cultural authority (see chapter 4). Inequalities define interests. Those benefiting from inequalities have an interest in defending them. Those who bear the costs have an interest in ending them.

Gender inequalities are usually expressed in terms of women's lack of resources relative to men's. For instance, in chapter 1 above I cited statistics that show women's average incomes, world-wide, as 56 per cent of men's. While this way of presenting information makes sense in establishing a case for reform, it continues the bad old habit of defining women by their relation to men. We should also turn the equation around and consider the surplus of resources made available to men. The same figures, read this way, show men's average incomes, world-wide, as 179 per cent of women's.

I call this surplus the *patriarchal dividend*: the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order. The patriarchal dividend is reduced as overall gender equality grows. Monetary benefits are not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one's own life.

It is important to note that the patriarchal dividend is the benefit to men *as a group*. Individual men may get more of it than others, or less, or none, depending on their location in the social order. A wealthy businessman draws large dividends from the gendered accumulation process in advanced capitalism; an unemployed working-class man may draw no economic benefits at all. Specific groups of men may be excluded collectively from parts of the patriarchal dividend. Thus gay men, broadly speaking, are excluded from the authority and respect attached to men who embody hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Some women also participate in the patriarchal dividend, generally by being married to wealthy men. Such women get dividends from the

gendered accumulation process (e.g. live on a profit stream generated by women's underpaid and unpaid labour), and are able to benefit directly from other women doing the domestic labour in their households. This became a political scandal in the United States in 1993, when the Clinton administration attempted to appoint several bourgeois women to senior positions, only to find they had failed to pay taxes on their immigrant women houseworkers.

The patriarchal dividend is the main stake in contemporary gender politics. Its scale makes patriarchy worth defending. Those sex-role reformers in the 1970s who attempted to persuade men that Women's Liberation was good for them, and therefore tried to start a parallel Men's Liberation movement, were undoubtedly right about the costs of hegemonic masculinity. Men would be safer not fighting, would be healthier without competitive stress, would live longer without the cigarettes and booze, and would be better off in mutually respectful relations with women. But the same reformers hopelessly underestimated the patriarchal dividend, missing what men stood to gain from current arrangements in terms of power, economic advantage, prestige, etc. Thus they missed the interest most men have in sustaining – and, where necessary, defending – the current gender order.

To argue that the current gender order should be changed is to claim that it does more harm than good. The harm of gender is first and foremost in the system of inequality that produces a patriarchal dividend, a system in which women and girls are exploited, discredited, and made vulnerable to abuse and attack. Those feminists who think that gender is inherently about inequality, who in effect see the patriarchal dividend as the core of gender relations, logically seek to abolish gender. Social justice would require no less.

The harm of gender is also found in specific patterns of practice formed in the gender order that are given power to affect the world by the collective resources of the society. Contemporary hegemonic masculinity, to take the most striking case, is dangerous regardless of the patriarchal dividend. It is dangerous because it is directly connected with inter-personal violence, and because in alliance with state and corporate power it drives arms races, strip mining and deforestation, hostile labour relations, and the abuse of technologies from motor transport to genetic engineering.

But if gender in these respects is harmful, it is in other respects a source of pleasure, creativity and other things we greatly value. Gender organizes our sexual relationships, which are sources of delight and growth. Gender is integral to our cultural riches, from *Nob* plays to rap and

reggae. The joys and strains of gender relations are among the most potent sources of cultural creation.

I would argue, then, that the stakes in gender politics include the value of gender as well as its harm. Gender politics has the possibility of shaping pleasures as well as distributing resources, and making possible a more creative culture.

Given these possibilities, 'gender politics' has to be understood as more than an interest-group struggle over inequalities. In the most general sense, gender politics is about the *steering* of the gender order in history. It represents the struggle to have the endless re-creation of gender relations through practice turn out a particular way.

It is easy to recognize that a struggle over economic resources is 'political', less easy to think that the reconstruction of personality is. But if I am right that personality is a configuration of practice in the same sense – though at a different level – as the gender regime of an institution (see chapter 4), then struggles to change personality are equally political. Existential psychoanalysis and cultural radicalism in the 1960s produced the insight that there is a 'politics of experience' (to quote the title of a famous book by R. D. Laing, 1968), an idea that connects directly to the feminist argument that 'the personal is political'.

The masculinity therapy of the mythopoetic men's movement, then, is political not just because of its patriarchal imagery, but because of what it centrally is, an attempt to create or restore a particular gender configuration of practice. Feminist 'consciousness-raising' (out of which masculinity therapy arose) does not just lead to politics, it *is* politics. Confrontational discipline in families and schools, and confrontational policing ('zero tolerance', three-strikes laws, more prisons and harsher prison regimes), are equally political, applications of power intended to shape personality. These are practices which call out 'protest masculinity' among many working-class and ethnic minority boys and young men.

Gender politics, whether at the institutional or the personal level, always represent a collective project. This is easy enough to see in the case of modern feminism and gay politics. Both are social movements directed against an oppressive established order. But social movements are not the only form gender politics can take.

What feminism is fighting against, for the most part, is not a countervailing social movement. Though there have been efforts to create Men's Rights groups or 'masculinist' movements, most such attempts have been small-scale, cranky and short-lived. The more successful 'men's movements' in recent years have pursued agendas of therapy (the

'mythopoetic movement'), racial justice or religion (the 'Million Man March', the 'Promise Keepers'), and gender reform aligned with feminism (men's anti-violence groups). These agendas are either marginal to, or opposed to, the defence of patriarchy.

This is not to say the defence of patriarchy has been neglected. But the collective agency of dominant groups of men is expressed in other ways than social movements. Patriarchal power normally operates through the routine functioning of the institutions in which the dominance of men is embedded – corporations, churches, mass media, legal systems and governments. To the extent the dominant interest needs articulation, it is done by establishment figures (popes, generals, chief justices, chairmen of the board) who declare the perspective of authority, or by non-establishment media figures (Rush Limbaugh, John Laws) whose job it is to ridicule the opposition (for instance, by attacks on 'political correctness').

Thus the defence of hegemonic masculinity normally goes on as a collective project without a social movement. In situations of dire upheaval, however, a social movement with exceptionally clear-cut masculinity politics may emerge. The most striking case is fascism. The Italian and German fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s are better known for their class, nationalist and racist projects. But these movements, whose activists had often been soldiers, also attempted the restoration of a hegemonic masculinity severely disrupted by war and economic upheaval. The neo-nazi and racist fringe groups of the 1980s and 1990s have tried to re-create aggressive gender politics along with the rest of the package.

Gender politics, then, take a variety of forms. It is not helpful to regard *every* aspect of gender as 'political'. That would foreclose what ought to be an empirical question – what in any given situation is actually involved in the 'steering' of the gender order. But there is no doubt that gender politics are generally complex and extensive, and laden with consequences for humanity. In the final section of this chapter I will explore some of these consequences as they appear on the world scale.

Gender politics on a world scale

A structure of social relations, having come into existence in history, is open to change in history. A structure of inequality can, in principle, move in a democratic direction. Whether it does so or not is a question of social struggle. The analysis of the global gender order in chapter

6 suggests two basic arenas of struggle for democratization: in global institutions, and in the interactions between local gender orders.

Democratization in the first arena, global institutions, is straightforward in concept if difficult in practice. It is the same kind of process as the democratization of organizations at the national or local level.

In practical terms it means:

- attempting to get equal employment opportunity in transnational corporations,
- ending the misogyny and homophobia in international media,
- gaining equal representation of women and men in international forums and agencies,
- ending gender discrimination in international labour markets,
- creating anti-discrimination norms in the public culture, etc.

A world-wide agency of change is already in existence. There is a women's movement presence in international meetings (recently described by Deborah Stienstra, 2000). This works to some extent through official delegations, more consistently through the growing presence of non-government organizations, now a recognized category of participants in United Nations activities. Women's units or programmes have been set up in some international organizations, such as UNESCO, and are now coordinated through the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. There is also a certain international presence of gay and lesbian movements, and (on a smaller scale) pro-feminist men's groups.

These social forces have been able to place some issues about gender relations on the agendas of diplomacy and the international state. In doing so they have been greatly assisted by the 'human rights' agenda in international organizations. The United Nations set up a Commission on the Status of Women as early as 1946. Article 2 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights banned discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as race, religion, etc. It has been followed by specific agreements about the rights of women, culminating in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, introduced in 1979. The human rights agenda has been far more important than the 'men's movement' in winning support for gender equality from men in international organizations – support that has been vital in creating the spaces in which women's groups have operated.

Among the consequences of this pressure are: increased recognition of the gender dimension in development aid, and concern by aid agencies to support the interests of women; the growing global commitment

to the secondary and higher education of women; a growing concern with gendered violence and with gender issues in peacekeeping; recognition of the voices of women and gay men in the global programme against AIDS.

Nevertheless the forces pushing for gender democratization are still weak in relation to the scale of the problem. The most important limit is that they still have very little influence in transnational corporations and global markets. A notional obedience to anti-discrimination laws in the countries where they have their head offices does not prevent transnational corporations maintaining sharp gender divisions in their workforce in reality. Their characteristic search for cheap labour around the world often leads them, and their local suppliers, to exploit the weak industrial position of women workers. This is especially the case where unions are hampered or where governments have set up 'free trade zones' to attract international capital, or where there is a demand for cheap domestic labour (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983, Marchand and Runyan 2000).

Even in public sector agencies there is far from being a unified force for change. Conferences of the UN Decade for Women, for instance, have been vital in articulating world agendas for gender reform. But among the national delegations attending them have been some headed or controlled by men, some headed by women with no commitment to gender equality, and some dominated by patriarchal ideologies actively opposed to gender equality. These conferences have been the occasion of sharp conflict over issues such as abortion and lesbianism. Even the concept of 'gender' was under attack at the 1995 Beijing conference, because it was supposed by right-wing forces to be a code word for feminism (Benden and Goetz 1998).

Some of these divisions arise from the second dimension of global gender politics, the relations between local gender orders. As observed in chapter 7, during the 1980s it became common to speak of 'feminisms' instead of 'feminism', and divergences between first-world and third-world feminisms were widely canvassed. While support for equality between women and men could be seen as a mark of modernity, it could also be seen as a sign of cultural imperialism. Certain forms of Western feminism which emphasized gender difference and women's autonomy aroused opposition from women who did not want to be separated from the men of their communities in struggles against racism, colonial or neo-colonial domination (Bulbeck 1988).

Even conceptualizing a democratic agenda in this dimension is difficult. The interplay between gender orders arises historically from a system of global domination, that is, imperialism and colonialism. A

democratic agenda must oppose the inequalities that have been inherited from this system, between global 'North' and global 'South'. This is a strong point made by those women who argue against separate political organization.

Yet the gender alignments here are complex. The colonial system, and the globalized world economy, have been run by men. But the anti-colonial struggle, too, was almost everywhere led by men. Post-colonial regimes have generally been patriarchal, and have sometimes been violently misogynist or homophobic. For instance, Robert Mugabe, leader of a bitter struggle to end colonialism in Rhodesia, as president of Zimbabwe is running the most openly homophobic campaign of any government in the contemporary world.

In post-colonial regimes the men of local elites have often been complicit with businessmen from the metropole in the exploitation of women's labour. Multinational corporations could not operate as they do without this co-operation. In places like the Philippines and Thailand men of local elites have been central in the creation of international sex trade destinations. Arms trafficking similarly involves an interplay between the men who control local military forces and governments, and the men who run arms manufacturing corporations in the metropole.

A further complexity, explored in Dennis Altman's important new book *Global Sex* (2001), is that the interplay between gender orders within global capitalism has produced a range of novel identities and patterns of relationship, sexual communities and political processes. They belong neither to local nor metropolitan cultures, but in a sense to both – and more exactly, to the new global society that is emerging.

The criterion of democratic action, in this dimension of the world gender order, must be what democracy always means: moving towards equality of participation, power and respect. The difficulty is that this criterion must apply at the same time to relations in the local gender order and to relations between gender orders. The resulting complexities are so great that gender-democratic practice must often be ambiguous or contradictory.

For instance, action to strengthen the bargaining power of women factory and agricultural workers may weaken the position of the local bourgeoisie in the global economy. A weakened national economy may (as the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have found) push many women towards prostitution. Attempts to strengthen the position of homosexual men and women by public campaigns and actions to reinforce a sense of community may also expose them to attack from political leaders who picture homosexuality as Western decadence.

Yet progressive movements cannot evacuate these arenas simply because democratic practice is difficult. Anti-democratic forces are certainly not evacuating them. In many parts of the world the rise of feminism has been followed by a backlash, as the journalist Susan Faludi (1991) argued in the case of the United States. This has mostly taken the shape of informal cultural movements which reinforce the supremacy of men, argue that gender hierarchy is biologically fixed, or claim that women's advancement is damaging to the family, to children, or to religion. In the 1990s a campaign against 'political correctness', begun in the United States and circulated internationally by neo-conservative networks, attacked measures against sexism on the grounds that these violate free speech, and programmes for women on the grounds that these discriminate against men.

Political agendas reflecting these arguments have been advanced in individual countries, from the de-funding of women's groups in Australia to the restriction of abortion rights in the United States. They have also been pursued in international forums, such as the Cairo international conference on Population and Development in 1994. At this conference an alliance against women's reproductive freedom was put together by the Vatican, certain Catholic countries influenced by the Vatican, and some Islamic governments including Iran (though in this case the alliance had little effect). Backlash ideas are also given wide publicity in international media.

Perhaps more powerful than all backlash movements put together is the impact of neo-liberalism. This has been the dominant movement in world politics in the last two decades. Neo-liberalism was already on the rise before the collapse of Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and its satellites around 1989, but was given a tremendous boost by those events. Neo-liberal agendas, closely associated with the power of global markets, have attempted to 'roll back' the state through deregulation of markets, privatization of public services, and reduction of public expenditure. In international finance, agencies such as the International Monetary Fund have used a continuing debt crisis to force neo-liberal policies on many governments which were needing loans, or needing to re-finance old loans.

The resultant weakening of welfare states has broadly been to the detriment of women. Because of the gender division of labour and inequalities of income, women have been more dependent than men on public services and on income transfers through the state. Men control almost all market-based institutions, such as corporations, and acquire most of the income distributed through markets, such as salaries and

wages. Neo-liberalism, in exalting the power of markets, has thus tended to restore the power and privilege of men. It is not surprising that the installation of a market economy in former communist countries has been followed by worsening conditions for women.

The 1990s saw the appearance, particularly in the rich countries, of 'men's movements' of several kinds. These movements have mostly been inspired by what I have called the 'toxicity' of the gender order. They have offered psychological or religious solutions to the damage (the 'wounds', as some put it) suffered by men. Most have had little to say about gender democracy. The main exceptions are the small but active men's anti-violence movement, and the longest-established 'men's movement', the gay community politics descended from Gay Liberation. Gay men's groups have struggled against prejudice and homophobic violence, and have in some situations (though not all) been aligned with feminism.

At present there is a spectrum of masculinity politics in the rich countries ranging from explicitly pro-feminist to distinctly anti-feminist; the American sociologist Michael Messner has provided a useful map of this terrain in *The Politics of Masculinities* (1997). Surveys of broader populations of men have found similar divisions. For instance, a 1988 survey of men in Norway found them dividing into three groups of roughly equal size, one-third supporting gender equality, one-third negative towards women and equality issues, and one-third in the middle (Holter 1997: 131-5). A German survey in 1998 also found a national sample of men dividing into 'new' vs. 'traditional', plus two intermediate groups, 'pragmatic' and 'uncertain' (Zulehner and Volz 1998). I do not know of any study which has looked at the gender ideologies of men in international organizations, but I think it probable there is a similar range of views.

The diversity of men's gender outlooks makes possible a range of political responses and alliances. However strong the combination of neo-liberalism and gender backlash is in particular cases, there are also possibilities for progressive politics among men, and possible alliances with women's groups. This can be seen, for instance, in international discussions of violence and peacemaking, where feminist concerns with gendered violence have recently been brought together with masculinity research and men's groups (Breines, Connell and Eide 2000).

We are still in the early stages of the struggle for gender democracy on a world scale. As that struggle develops, gender theory and research will have a number of roles to play.

Simply documenting the patterns of gender inequality, as Valdés and Gomáriz (1995: 12-13) argue, helps overcome the invisibility of women

and the taken-for-granted character of gender oppression. Providing accounts of how gender inequality is produced can be important in contesting the ideologies that present gender inequality as biologically driven or god-given. Documenting changes in gender relations and struggles for gender democracy (e.g. Naples 1998) is a significant way of circulating knowledge and models of action, and thus disseminating tools for democratic politics. Gender theory, specifically, makes it possible to communicate ideas between people in different situations.

None of this means that familiar Western models of gender can or should be imposed on the rest of the world. As feminism itself has found, one cannot go global without being profoundly changed. Gender theory and research will need to reconsider themselves again and again, in the light of the diverse cultures and forms of knowledge that appear in world gender politics. Given willingness to learn, gender theory and research can play a significant role in making a more democratic world.