Mainstreaming Men and Masculinities: Technical Fix or Political Struggle?

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The Rise and Rise of Men's Studies

Interest in men and masculinities has been soaring in academic circles and the international donor community for over two decades. Programmatic efforts to integrate men and masculinities into development and peacebuilding initiatives (dubbed by some as "male-streaming") have multiplied. United Nations agencies have been active is this domain with UNWomen taking the lead with programmes such as the HeforShe campaign and Engaging Men. The World Bank commissioned numerous studies and incorporated their insights into the World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development. Advocacy NGOs such as Promundo which have an explicit mission to target men in their various roles as fathers, fighters and citizens and aim to incentivize "responsible" models of manhood, have also received donor support. The principal aim of this article is to briefly take stock of these developments, interrogate their central premises and, ultimately, their political direction.

Diverse reasons have been offered for the meteoric rise of men and masculinities as a field of study. In academic terms, the shift from "women" to "gender" and the concept of "gender mainstreaming" adopted since the 1995 UN International Women's Conference in Beijing called for a more nuanced understanding of gendered identities and the social relations they imply (Razavi and Miller, 1995). In the global North, debates on men and masculinities had already started to capture the

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attention of social scientists as early as the 1980s. Likewise, the growth of men's movements from the 1990s onwards- some resisting and others supportive of feminist goals- also put the issue of masculinities firmly on the public agenda.

In more practical terms, women-targeted development projects which disregarded the relational nature of gender tended to "misbehave". Although they were found to have some welfare effects, they had little or no transformative potential since they failed to take account of the complementarities between men and women and between the generations. It is worth noting that the initial interest in men and masculinities in the field of development originated from feminist concerns. It was even argued that interest in men and masculinities was being advanced by women, for women (Chant & Guttmann, 2000). Some however, have been quite sceptical about the political impetus behind this wave (Pearson, 2000). Indeed, initiatives to incorporate men tended to centre rather narrowly around fields such as sexual and reproductive behaviour, HIV/AIDS, conflict and domestic violence (a package that Andrea Cornwall dubbed 'men -as -problem'). The emphasis of some UN documents on transforming so-called "harmful masculinities" could easily sound like a male rehabilitation project to be realized through technical fixes, such as gender training. Numerous scholars had already noted that the gender agenda had been depoliticized by being stripped of the original concern with inequitable power relations and the interactions between gender and other axes of inequality such as race, class and sexual orientation (Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2007).

An even more consequential set of reasons centre around changes in gender relations in the world at large, in spheres such as employment, education, and family life, most recently illustrated in UN Women's Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World. Key works such as Raewyn W. Connell's Confronting Equality: Gender, Knowledge and Global Change (2011) and Masculinities under Neoliberalism (2016) edited by Andrea Cornwall, Frank Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne provided nuanced accounts of macro-level

transformations and the ways these affect men and women in different localities. The rapid, and disquieting changes that gender relations have been undergoing worldwide signalled, for many, a 'crisis of masculinity'. Among other things, the notion of the male provider that underwrote claims to legitimate male privilege in many societies was overturned in an era of precarious labour and property relations. Public discourse versions of masculinity popularized terms such as "frustrated masculinities" and "aggrieved entitlement" coined by Michael Kimmel (2017) to denote men's existential state of fear and rage about having their rightful place questioned and challenged.

The reception of critical studies on men and masculinities and, more particularly, of donor-funded programmes targeting men in the global South has been very mixed. In a review article, Frances Hasso (2018) argued 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". Although the texts I referred to above and many others show an acute awareness of the situated nature of masculine identities, Hasso (2018) claimed nonetheless that Arab and Muslim masculinities, are often ahistorically naturalized on the basis of cultural differences that are essentialized as if they are permanent, homogeneous, and static in shaping masculine affects and embodiments -thus feeding racism and imperialism.

I believe the main source of unease underlying this stance is articulated by authors such as Paul Amar (2011 a, 2011b) who claims critical approaches to masculinity can easily become incorporated into liberal, colonial, or disciplinary state projects since they often begin from a perspective of sociological deviance, focusing on male behaviours that disrupt the social order, sometimes inviting punitive policy interventions to mitigate them. More concretely, he suggests, for instance, that donor-funded Violence Against Women (VAW) projects in Egypt and the middle-class, urban NGO's run by feminists who administer these projects end up criminalizing and marginalizing working-class

masculinities in collusion with the security state. This inadvertently drags us into to the familiar trope of denouncing feminism as the handmaiden of imperialism, with donor-funded NGOs cast in the role of fellow travellers, thus depriving actors on the ground of genuine agency. By an unfortunate coincidence, this is also the position espoused by all authoritarian, nativist regimes around the globe who denounce any egalitarian stirrings in the realm of gender as foreign imports and impositions.

Another Path to The Mainstream: Gender and The Global Culture Wars

While these academic debates were raging, the subject of men and masculinities was taking centre stage in public discourse through quite a different route. In October 2018, an article titled "Sex, violence and the rise of populism" appeared in the Financial Times - a publication that is not ordinarily given to gender analysis. It commented on the militantly misogynistic tone of populist movements in the US, Brazil, the Philippines, Italy and elsewhere, providing illustrations by means of outrageous statements made by a variety of leaders such as Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, Jair Bolsonaro, the Brazilian president, Matteo Salvini, the dominant figure in the Italian government of the time and the US president Trump himself. Images of a bare-chested, horse riding Vladimir Putin and gibes about rape in the political rhetoric of male leaders seasoned with assorted sexual slurs that demean female politicians started appearing in the popular press. Açıksöz and Korkman (2017) suggested that an over-visibility of masculinity (and hyper-masculinized leaders) had become a constitutive part of the political repertoire of the contemporary right-wing populist wave. Cas Mudde (2018), a scholar of populism, argued forcefully in an article titled Why is the far right dominated by men? that we should take masculinity more seriously in our discussions of the far right, and right-wing politics. He stressed the fact that many radical right parties espouse a strongly gendered discourse, in which they appeal to a

frail masculinity, threatened by emasculating feminists, effeminate liberals, and overly virile "Others" (such as immigrants or blacks).

Is any of this new? As I reflected on the particular version of masculinity that amalgamates militarism, the glorification of violence and misogyny, I came across a 1909 citation from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of the Futurist movement and an avid supporter of Benito Mussolini. He articulated the first concrete definition of fascist aesthetics in reference to Italy's Ethiopian conquests. Marinetti wrote, "We want to glorify war—the only cure for the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for women."

Given the historical pedigree of these ideas, it is not, I believe, in the language of policy which presents gender equality as a depoliticized issue, based on expert knowledge and evidence-based solutions that the struggle for equality is best enjoined but in the political domain where alliances in defence of values that are worth fighting for may be realized.

A picture has been emerging over the years of a powerful, well-funded global alliance of ultra-conservatives and far-right political actors, many of whom unite around a socially conservative worldview with the politics of gender at its heart. A major tool in the culture wars against progressive social policies in Europe is the emergence of a transnational anti-gender ideology movement extensively documented by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (2017). The demonization of 'gender ideology'-a term concocted by the Vatican in the mid-1990s has become a key rhetorical tool in the construction of a new 'common sense'; a form of consensus about what is normal and legitimate. This has led to the creation of broad alliances that unite various religious and non-religious actors that have not, necessarily, been eager to cooperate in the past.

The United Nations is also implicated in these culture wars. The "protection of the family" has become a catch phrase for policies aiming to bolster heteronormative and heterosexual standards. The Group of the Friends of the Family (under the logo of United Nations for a Family

Friendly World) is a coalition of UN member states that include the Vatican, Russia, Egypt, Qatar and Bangladesh among others .Their website "reaffirms that the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state". The central claim is that "gender ideology" is being peddled by Western elites who want to destabilize the traditional family and the natural order of society, obfuscating the fact that anti-gender politics is well and thriving at the very heart of what passes as the West. How these global trends find expression in diverse contexts is entirely contingent on local dynamics that translate them into concrete policies and political outcomes. The variety of societal responses these elicit defines the contours of a new politics of gender.

Violence against Women and the Politics of Masculinist Restoration

The paradoxical nature of these dynamics is excellently illustrated in the case of Turkey, especially in the realm of gender-based violence. On paper at least, Turkey has an exemplary record in combating violence against women. The Amendment to the Turkish Penal Code passed in 2004 is unprecedented in the Middle East region. These legal changes prevent sentence reduction for 'killings in the name of customary law' (so-called honour killings); criminalise marital rape; abolish the article foreseeing a reduction or suspension of the sentence of rapists and abductors marrying their victims; criminalise sexual offences such as harassment at the workplace, and abolish the distinction between virgins and non-virgins in sexual crimes. Turkey was, furthermore, among the first signatories of the *Council of Europe's 2011 Istanbul Convention* to combat violence against women that came into effect August 1, 2014.

However, although the legal system offers ample means to bring perpetrators of violence to justice offenders, often quite literally, get away with murder. Multitudes of rapists and killers benefit from so-called "good behaviour" reductions in sentences for nothing more

consequential than having a respectful bearing, wearing a tie to court, expressing regret or pleading intolerable provocation to their male honour. This chasm between the letter of the law and its implementation inevitably politicises the issue of violence against women and implicates the state in its perpetuation. The task of seeking justice for women falls on the shoulders of civil society actors, among which are groups like the Platform to Stop the Murders of Women that monitor the grisly toll.

Like many other countries jumping on the women's rights bandwagon for geopolitical advantage, Turkey made the most of the legal advances of the early 2000s during the first term of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) (2002-2007) when EU accession was still high on the policy agenda. Yet behind a façade of compliance with international treaties and standards, a heavy-handed social engineering project was under way targeting gender relations and contesting women's existing rights (Kandiyoti, 2019). Indeed, five years after it came into effect the Istanbul Convention became the topic of a heated debate among Islamist and conservative circles, after president Erdoğan reportedly announced in a meeting that it could be "annulled" and that he "understands the discomfort against the gender equality projects." In a similar vein, the Gender Equality Project that had been running in schools and universities was annulled earlier by their respective authorities, the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education.

These developments were unfolding against a background of soaring levels of femicides, beatings, mutilations and harassment of women which continue unabated. Even a casual perusal of newspaper reporting of murder cases and other crimes of violence shows that perceived female disobedience and insubordination act as primary triggers: women murdered by husbands they wish to divorce, or ex-husbands they have dared to divorce, rejected suitors, and obstinate girls refusing to fall in line with their fathers' or brothers' wishes jostle on the pages of dailies. Women's rising aspirations and determined male resistance create a perfect storm in the gender order that manifests itself in both official attempts to "tame" women and shore up men's privileges,

and in the unofficial excesses of street-level masculinist restoration. There is now a bottom up discourse on male victimization and a budding men's rights movement in Turkey coalescing around divorce, alimony payments, child custody, the İstanbul Treaty and Law no. 6284 that protects women against violence which may be considered relatively new in a society that takes male privilege for granted.

I proposed the term masculinist restoration in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings in 2011 to denote a break with the past and identify a phase when patriarchy is no longer secure and requires higher levels of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction (Kandiyoti, 2013). In this perspective, new patterns of violence against women can no longer be explained with reference to some assumed routine functioning of patriarchy but point to its threatened demise at a point in time when notions of male dominance and female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic. Reactions to gender-based violence in Turkey are now defining the contours of a political divide that crosses gender lines, and pits conservative men and women who believe that women should "know their place" against others who defend the safety and freedom of all citizens at all times and in all circumstances as a fundamental human right. This political terrain produces unprecedented levels of societal polarization as well as new alignments and alliances.

Meanwhile, Turkey's enmeshment with global governance institutions and gender equality standards continues to both feed new tensions and create platforms for cooperation between women of different political persuasions on vital issues such as violence against women. For instance, even the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM) an officially approved GONGO founded on March 8, 2013, vice-chaired by the daughter of President Erdoğan, was castigated by conservative critics who charged it with feminist leanings because of its collaboration with women's organizations such as the Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation and the Women's Solidarity Foundation in the Subcommittee of Monitoring and Effective Implementation of the İstanbul Convention, formed by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social

Services. Although both the Ministry and KADEM have been at pains to dissociate themselves from these charges by triggering an anti-Pride campaign on social media under the hashtag "don't mess with my ancestry" and "the family is our everything" and denouncing "gay perversity" as an assault on the family, their involvement in EU-funded projects still made them a target. An abruptly founded network, The Turkish Family Assembly, just before 8 March, International Women's Day in 2019 adopted the motto "Stop the global war on the family", echoing the slogan of anti-gender mobilisations in Europe and elsewhere. The global circulation and repurposing of slogans, actions and forms of protest (such as the performance by Turkish women parliamentarians of the Chilean Las Tesis protest against gender-based violence (Deutche Welle, 2019) gets assimilated into local struggles over governance and legitimacy, highlighting the political stakes around gender and contestations around the meanings of gender identities.

Conclusion

In this article, I examined the multiple sources of the rising interest in men and masculinities as a field of study and argued that the ways in which it was absorbed into the mainstream led to its de-politicization and sceptical reception in the South. Programmatic efforts to integrate men and masculinities into donor-funded projects in fields such as development, peacebuilding and combatting violence against women achieved high visibility at the cost of settling for technical fixes.

Meanwhile, the politics of gender started taking centre stage through quite a different route with the global rise of right-wing populist movements whose misogynist, racist and male supremacist overtones fed into a global culture war in the realms of gender, family and sexuality. I suggested that this marks a period of masculinist restoration when a no longer hegemonic patriarchal gender order endeavours to bolster male privilege through coercive and ideological means.

In the context of established and rising authoritarianisms, masculinist restoration requires a politics of systematic indoctrination, greater surveillance and higher levels of intrusion into citizens' lives. It is therefore a central pillar of authoritarian, non-democratic governance. The contradictory pulls of the politics of masculinist restoration on the one hand, and anti-patriarchal resistance on the other, open up new fields of contestation for a new generation of men and women who are more fully alert to the intimate relations between authoritarian rule and forms of oppression based on gender, creed, ethnicity or sexual orientation. We have seen (and continue to see) numerous examples of these new sensibilities on display in the course of episodes of youth-led mobilization during the Gezi protests of 2013 in Istanbul and on the streets of Cairo and Tunis during the Arab uprisings (Kandiyoti, 2014). One of the lessons that youth activists - male and female – appear to have absorbed is that as long as the patriarchal social order is taken for granted, naturalized and not opened to question, citizenship must remain imperfect and democracy crippled. It is therefore not in the language of policy and technical fixes that struggles for rights and equality are best enjoined but in the political domain where alliances in defence of values that are worth fighting for may be realized.

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