Session: Globalisation and Gender Injustice

Intertwining of Structures and Individuals

Examining the principal cause of mortality in men this 19th century painting says
"This is life — men killing each other."
"We thought this barbarism would be suppressed with development and civil rights but we see in many countries of Central America that’s not true" de Keijzer

Synthesis of Discussions at the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014

Examining flip side of US War on Terror

What is the paradox of Bangladeshi garment workers

Does economic globalisation enable or limit the process of change for gender equality

How corporate globalisation widens chasm between urban and rural India
The session ‘Globalisation and Gender Injustice’ held during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 — Men and Boys for Gender Justice, organised in New Delhi from November 10-13, outlined key features of the current global political economy and its regional, national and local manifestations. The session also explored how these are reshaping gender orders and creating different forms and intensities of gender injustice. As moderator Alan Greig from the Challenging Male Supremacy project in New York, USA, said, “Structural conditions get expressed and reinforced in individual lives.”

**Dispossession, Consumption Reshape Violent Masculinities in India**

Nivedita Menon, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India described different kinds of masculinities being produced, reshaped and reproduced at different ends of India’s economic spectrum because of corporate globalisation (as different from globalisation processes like peace and feminist movements across borders), which has two effects – largescale dispossession and access to new worlds of desire and consumption.

“The first process of dispossession reflects the incomprehension of Indian elites towards rural and tribal communities, ripping them from economies and lands they occupied for generations to transplant them overnight into an alien setting called rehabilitation,” she said. Studies of dislocated communities have found that even in the case of settled urban populations -- for example when industries offer workers cash packages -- immediate access to cash leads to its dissipation. Those pushed out from forests and lands end up as debris in urban slums, periodically flushed out only to trickle back again to build roads and flyovers, scurrying across the city’s underbelly to perform myriad tasks that keep it alive and remind us of the dark history of development. This dispossession rapidly escalates stark inequalities, producing violent masculinised spaces in urban India.

“At the other end of the economic spectrum is the threatened masculinity of the traditional, patriarchal elite and the new consuming middle classes. Young upper caste men from urban villages with traditional cultures and cash to burn -- often because they have sold their lands for industrial projects, who drive recklessly in SUVs -- feel entitled to the phantasmagoric images of consumption on television and the internet,” she said.

“Delhi Police hoardings tell Indian middle classes to watch out for the driver, nanny and domestic servant, who bring the hazard of outside violence into their pure domestic space. The institution of domestic servants in South Asia compromises the masculinity of the male domestic servant within the Indian household vis a vis his female employer. This subordinate masculinity of male domestic servants can be perceived sometimes as irrelevant or non-existent for the woman of the household, sometimes as overwhelming and dangerous”: Menon

**Male Anxieties Spread In Urban and Rural Spaces**

The frustration of their desires, said Menon, often draws them into right wing mobilisations such as violent attacks on women in pubs, on couples kissing in public, on transgender communities and on inter-caste and inter-religious love affairs. Traditional anxieties about protecting the purity of caste and religious identity come together with modern right-wing anxieties about numbers. Are Hindus going to become a minority because Hindu women are increasingly marrying Muslim men? She opined that the coming together of these two anxieties is tied with the deep-rooted violence of Hindu society that contributes to violent masculinisation of the countryside, urban spaces and private spaces.

Ritualised violence is practised on, for example, Dalits -- parading their women naked, chopping Dalit men into pieces for stepping out of line like daring to ride a mare in a wedding ceremony or falling in love with an ‘upper caste’ woman. “You find similar routinised violence against Muslims. The processes that produce violent masculinities are internally differentiated,” pointed out Menon.

“Irony of Bangladeshi Women Garment Workers – The Heroes Become the Harassed”

Dina Siddiqi, Professor, BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh, gave a sense of how broader structural forces of neo-liberal capitalism play out on the ground in the lives of individual men and women in Bangladesh in relation to, specifically, garment workers.
Bangladeshi men, she said, are not represented as violent, religious fanatics. “This is the country with micro-credits and micro-finance, where the market has freed us from the shackles of religious patriarchy and poverty. Bangladesh used to be the basket case of the world; now women in the garment industry index a kind of modernity and pride for the middle class.

“Women garment factory workers have gained a measure of financial empowerment. They have been re-imagined as willing capitalist subjects, exercising their right to freedom and consumption practices, among other things. I think here is a paradox. Despite having some of the best social indicators in South Asia and despite women’s very active participation in the wage labor force, the level of violence against women, both public and private, are incredibly high.”

Siddiqi called for greater attention to the deeply entangled nature of gendered injustices, particularly in the casting out of male labour to the margins of the country’s new hyper visible but extremely unequal economy. Talking about the sexual harassment of garment workers, in particular in public spaces, Siddiqi said there are 3-4 million women who work in this industry in Bangladesh, primarily in two urban centres, who walk to work and back home every day. They are subjected to incredible hostility on the streets from men.

Marginalised Men’s Desperate Bid To Reclaim Public Spaces
One way to understand this sexual harassment is a kind of way for men to try and reclaim public spaces that used to be all-male spaces. “There’s a kind of performance of sexual entitlement in public spaces that goes on with the sexual harassment. Here I think the fear of religious extremism in Bangladesh often becomes a cover for not looking more closely at neo-liberal forms of development,” said Siddiqi. She added: “We have to expand our understanding of gender justice. We can’t talk of women only. We need to think about the ways in which poverty and the global system feeds into the local.”

‘Even as the women are celebrated as the heroes of the nation, they embody male failure - the inability of male family members to be successful breadwinners, with multinational capital searching for cheap labour that valorises the disciplined women.

It also signifies the absolute lack of prospect of males getting the same kind of jobs and their being cut off from the promise of neo-liberal modernity.

Benno de Keijzer, Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico, speaking from the perspective of a region from where the word ‘machismo’ originated, said, “I am of the generation where the father was the sole breadwinner. What the mother did wasn’t considered work. Today, several members work, though it is flexible, informal work with the consequent loss of rights like pension and health services. Every time these policies of the so-called welfare state are reducing themselves.

‘Market Forces Affect Gender Equality in Mexico, Latin America’

Economic polarisation - the 99% against the 1% who hold power and money, has transnationals rampaging through countries. This unjust economic situation has caused Central America’s social conflict and huge migration. Of the 12 million Mexican migrants trying to go to the United States and Canada for economic survival, causing a humanitarian crisis on the border, de Keijzer said, “Many young men enter in gangs. They don’t have access to education or work. Once inside it’s very difficult to get out unless you are dead. How can we break this cycle of corruption and lack of opportunity?

“So the question is can gender evolution stand alone? It has to link with other important movements, dealing with citizen’s rights, class and economic movements.”

US War On Terror Muzzles Domestic Violence Victims

Quentin Walcott, Co-Executive Director, Connect, New York, USA, spoke about his organisation’s domestic violence and gender violence prevention work in New York City since three weeks after 9/11 and in the wake of the US-led global war on terrorism.

Post 9/11 Islamophobia was a serious issue in NYC. “Surveillance of faith communities increased,” Walcott said. “The biggest fear for
people at that time was state intervention. So, if domestic violence was happening in that part of town, it was unlikely that it would be reported because of fear of deportation, poor relationships with the community and police.

“What else was happening in that time was some form of police brutality on young men of colour, unarmed men being shot by the police. There was really no justice or holding the police and the state accountable. We had to approach this by looking at how to organise communities to police themselves and find justice in different ways.

“The other piece was that communities where all these other forms of violence and health issues and social justice issues were taking place, like those concerning women of colour in particular, who were victims and survivors of violence, they didn’t want to bring the same police into the communities because of what was happening to coloured men.” Connect created safe spaces where people could come together and dialogue on these issues.

“For me, that was the beginning of how the war on terrorism militarised the police into using more powerful weapons. I remember looking online at a picture of a tank stationed in front of a town’s pumpkin patch and its basis was to protect that pumpkin patch from terrorism,” he said.

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**Market Forces Reshape Violent Masculinities**

- Need to address range of issues in India - from the kind of corporate globalisation that is inequitable, to the ways in which caste and other identities inflict maleness - in order to think meaningfully about both masculinity and violence
- High violence against women is backlash to marginalisation of male labour in Bangladesh’s neo liberal industry
- In new corporate economy, masculinities may be recuperated through various consumption practices
  - War On Terror makes it difficult to address domestic violence among coloured people in USA
  - Latin America links globalisation to same process of exploitation of resources, social and gender injustice and international policies as under centuries’ old practice of domination through colonisation

This synthesis paper is also available in other languages

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