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# Manifestations of Hegemonic Masculinity: the Impact of a Patriarchal State on Physical and Structural Violence against Women\*\*

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*Through an analysis of the masculine nature of the state, this case-study explores the patriarchal forces that pervade society and shape naturalised attitudes toward violence against women. Working through conceptualisations of both liberal and post-structural feminism, this paper criticises the hegemonic masculinity that contributes to perpetuating notions of male dominance and ownership, thus reinforcing the destructive nature of a patriarchal state. Through a thorough analysis of the political climate for women and women's issues, this paper will evaluate political responses to violence against women in an attempt to illuminate a society that is plagued by gender inequalities and reinforced by the institutions that benefit from the hegemony.*

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*Keywords:* violence against women, feminism, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, inequality

## Introduction

When analysing the masculinist nature of the state, it is important to look at the contextual circumstances that underpin the inherently gendered nature of the state, society and institutions that reinforce many forms of violence against women. For the purpose of this paper, this will be explored in terms the hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal values that have influenced the state, often overlooking the needs of women and feminised subjects in

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\*\* *Author's note:* While this article has foundations in intersectionality, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the absence of a specific engagement with indigenous or black feminisms. Whilst these are a central area and axis of feminist critique, particularly in the Australian context, this paper does not possess the scope or depth required to properly explore the multilayered and ongoing oppression of women of colour. The hegemonic masculinity discussed in this paper is a very small part of a much wider issue – it does not even begin to scratch the surface of the systemic violence and prejudice experienced by indigenous women and women of colour around the world.

contemporary society. The state is heavily influenced by underlying gender inequalities that perpetuate the interests of hegemonic masculinity, moving in directions contingent with ideologies of power and dominance. Feminist discourse has made a formidable attempt at unravelling the links between the masculinist state and the unconscious biases that exist within a socialised world, further providing a platform to challenge the pervasive nature of a patriarchal society. As such, this essay adopts notions of liberal and post-structural feminism to analyse violence against women as a brutal manifestation of the unequal power relations between men and women. In an attempt to capture the complex and intricate nature of violence against women, it will be discussed in terms of the physical, emotional and structural violence that continues to pervade the lives of women globally.

### **Hegemonic Masculinity: Unpacking the Patriarchal State**

The state is an inherently masculinist force that 'is also raced, heterosexed, able-bodied and classed' (Thornton, 2006, p.152). Notorious for perpetuating a white, masculine lens (Keskinen, 2018, p.158), the state has allowed men to 'dominate women' and feminised subjects, not merely because they are men, but because of the socially and politically constructed values that continue to pervade institutions and the policy making arena (Hoffman, 1998, p.162). This extends beyond the realm of family hierarchy to the masculinist state that has formed from the 'patriarchal origins of liberal societies' (Hoffman, 1998, p.162). In this sense, violence against women represents a symptom of the broader social influences that are at play in naturalising the power relations between men and women. Feminist discourse has devoted much time and effort to unravel the links between hegemonic masculinity and the physical and institutional violence experienced by women. Acknowledging the 'patriarchal shackles which confine and subordinate women' (Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.53) is vital to a greater understanding of how violence against women and other gendered issues are addressed in the social and political realm (Blanchard, 2014, p.16; See also, Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.53).

Blanchard (2014, p.62) discusses the importance of analysing patriarchy: 'to study gender and make men and masculinity visible is to foreground a set of sources of power and privilege obscured in many accounts of world politics'. Within feminist scholarship, gender is not limited to the 'biological differences between males and females,' but refers to the deeply engrained, culturally 'defined characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity' (Blanchard, 2014, p.62). The state can be perceived as male dominated in the feminist sense, that is to say 'the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women' (MacKinnon, 1983, p.644). Feminist scholarship has sought to highlight the ways in which politics is plagued by 'social order in the interest of men as a gender' (MacKinnon, 1983, p.644), legitimising norms and influencing policy making through underlying notions about femininity and masculinity (Blanchard, 2014, p.61). These social archetypes determine which political issues are considered legitimate and which are deemed irrelevant (Pateman, 1988, p.3), a concept widely understood as sexual politics (Franzway et al., 2009, p.19).

Male dominance and its subsequent structures of power have developed from a history of 'sexual politics re-producing the gender inequalities of the public/private divide and the patriarchal state' (Franzway, 2016, p.19). This is pertinent to the notion that the public sphere (ie. government, business and law) is reserved for masculinities, and that women are relegated to the private sphere (household and family), further demonstrating the public/private dichotomy as a means of maintaining masculine relations of power (Erika, 1986, p.54). If the sexual politics that relate to gender were equal, there would be no persistent need for 'efforts to enforce and maintain male dominance of the relations of gender' (Franzway, 2016, p.19). This can be understood in terms of the 'sexual contract' (Pateman, 1988 p.2), another integral part of the private sphere, which is often excluded from the narrative of the social contract for the benefit of patriarchy. In this context, the social contract is viewed as a site of freedom, and 'the sexual contract as a story of subjection (Pateman, 1988, p.2), facilitating the 'modern social whole of patriarchal civil society' (Pateman, 1988, p.12). These masculinist influences have and continue to permeate the state, society and institutions, leaving women as citizens in a perpetual state of inequality that is vehemently rejected by those who benefit from it.

There are significant interconnections between citizenship, violence and gender. As such, the state plays an integral role in both condoning and overcoming pervasive forms of violence in contemporary society. 'Citizenship has always been defined, understood and practiced in terms of gender' (Franzway, 2016, p.19). As such, the state is very much central to the 'dynamics of gender and citizenship' (Franzway, 2016, p.18). How women are understood in terms of their relationship to the state stems from their conditions as citizens (Lake, 1996, p.154), further reinforcing the ways in which 'masculine freedoms have rested on women's 'oppression' (Lake, 1996, p.155). Gendered notions of citizenship leads to the creation of 'specific categories of people as lacking the requisite capacity, credibility and knowledge to participate as fully active citizens' (Franzway, 2016, p.23), often resulting in a state that fails to recognise and value women's difference. As a result of gendered inequalities in citizenship, male dominance has unequivocally 'claimed the power of the state' (Franzway, 2016, p.23), resulting in deeply engrained power imbalances.

### **The Masculinist State: Enforcing Patriarchy**

The state has often been accused of adopting a masculinist perspective, nurturing gender roles that 'are conducive to or permissive of violence in the home' (Alarbeed and Alhakim, 2013, p.10). The very structures that maintain and naturalise violence against women have formed as a result of the formal institutionalisation of the public/private divide (Erika, 1986, p.55). Under a patriarchal system, men and masculinities are regarded as the dominant 'norm', and women the subservient 'other', often leading to the creation of policy that reflects the male perspective and 'does little to consider or address the impact of such policy on the oppressed gender' (Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.54). Historically, the state has perpetuated the interests of men, often overlooking political issues that fall outside of masculinist benefits (Murphy, 2010, p.21). Further, it has been

argued that the development of Australian democratic politics is 'a masculinist activity that operates to bolster domestic patriarchy' (Murphy, 2010, p.32).

It is no coincidence that attitudes towards the many forms of violence against women have continued to overlook the root of the cause: 'gender inequality and power imbalance' (Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.54). As a result, women are subjected to a position of subservience and invisibility (Alarbeed and Alhakim, 2013, p.10), reinforcing the need to challenge the State's response to the structural violence that underpins pervasive issues such as violence against women (Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.54). Neglecting the interests of women at a state level is to neglect the interests of the community at large. As Vida Goldstein famously stated 'the woman's cause – and after all the 'woman's cause is man's' – is deserving of as much enthusiasm as the labour cause' (cited in Murphy, 2010, p.29).

Blanchard (2014, p.62) draws upon the work of Raewyn Connell, arguably one of the first to acknowledge the existence of a 'multiplicity of masculinities', to provide valuable insight into patriarchy and its influence on the state. Masculinity manifests through socially constructed values that promote underlying notions of dominance, strength and 'manhood' (Blanchard, 2014, p.63), a pertinent example being the idea of a 'male head of household' – a masculine protector (Young 2003:3). Through 'a play of social forces that extend... into the organization of private life and cultural processes' (Blanchard, 2014, p.63-64), culturally accepted masculinities justify and contribute to the way women are expected to display obedience in the home (Young, 2003, p.2).

The very objective of first- and second-wave feminism was to bring women into the state to challenge the socially constructed notions of 'woman' that were politically necessary to give effect to the patriarchal society that assumes women actively and willingly participate in the 'state-driven breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy' (Pixtey, 1991, p.294; see also Thornton, 2006, p.152). The idea that women exist for their domestic and child bearing responsibilities (Pixtey, 1991, p.296) allows the state to 'appear to be fair in order to maintain its legitimacy' (Thornton, 2006, p.151). This alterity of women, the idea that women need protecting, continues to dictate political relations with little to no accountability, resulting in women being treated as 'mothers and wives, rather than citizens' (Pixtey, 1991, p.296-297). Women are therefore reduced to a position of inferiority when they are faced with the pressures of being 'truly feminine – that is, frivolous, infantile, irresponsible, the submissive woman' (DeBeauvoir, 1956, p.8).

Feminist scholar Catherine MacKinnon (1989, p.163) made assertions about the patriarchal nature of the state in an effort to highlight the institutional power of the state on the social construction and treatment of women. Through dominance and authority, a masculinist state is a direct representative of the fact that very few 'aspects of life are free from male power' (MacKinnon, 1983, p.638). As such, women are institutionally marginalised by the hegemonic masculinity that pervades their lives – from employment opportunity to property rights and medical autonomy, women are subjected to ineffective and gender biased laws

that continue to act in the interest of men (MacKinnon, 1989, p.168). The structural violence experienced by women begins at the top. That is to say, the patriarchy that exists at 'higher levels in society (state parliaments, judiciary) interlocks and reflects local arrangements (families, local councils, schools) (Voyce, 2015, p.358), further disseminating and naturalising violence against women.

### **The Effect of Hegemonic Masculinity**

One of the most pervasive 'manifestations of women's suppression that knows no bounds is violence against women' (Fletcher and Star, 2018, p.53). It is categorically a State issue, costing the Australian economy approximately '\$22 billion a year' (KPMG, 2016). More pressing is the research revealing intimate partner violence as a 'leading contributor to illness, disability and premature death in women aged 18-44 (Ayre et al., 2016, as cited in White Ribbon Australia 2018). But despite the recognition of family violence as a pressing issue in Australia, the State must acknowledge its role in perpetuating the oppression of women. Through a holistic approach in dismantling this structural disadvantage, male perpetrators must be 'understood as proxy agents of the patriarchal state' (Rose, 2015, p.31) acting under a system that continues to turn a blind eye.

There are multiple levels of liability when it comes to intimate partner violence, however the state plays a key role in prevention and punishment. Feminist scholarship has been particularly vocal about the 'shift of focus from women to family' (Winter, 2007, p.40), suggesting that this way of thinking encourages a view that intimate partner violence is the same as any type of violence in the community. The state has been widely criticised for supporting intimate partner violence through the endorsement and funding of 'powerful institutions that conceal, normalise and tolerate the harm (Rose, 2015, p.36). This stems from a number of sources that exacerbate the vulnerability of women and feminised bodies in situations of domestic violence, perhaps one of the most omnipresent being the institution of medicine, which has been accused of preserving the invisible nature of domestic violence through a lack of communication with patients that present blatant signs of abuse (Rose, 2015, p.36).

Further, state-authorised medical institutions have been subject to scrutiny for valuing the needs of men over women, often neglecting and violating women's rights and bodies (Rose, 2015, p.36). Graham et al. (2016, p.335) maintain that women's reproductive choices in Australia have been influenced by 'pervasive ideologies of women's roles in society and the family'. As argued in McDonald and Moyle (2018, p.203), a patriarchal state allows men and masculinist values control 'the important social institutions associated with having children'. The choices that women are allowed to make in terms of reproduction are contingent upon public policy, reinforcing that being a woman in contemporary society is heavily affected by the masculinist influences that have come to shape politics (Graham et al., 2016, p.337). In this sense, the root of gender-based violence begins in the State and the very institutions that promote the idea of women's bodies as dependant on protection of the male citizen'

(Franzway, 2016, p.21), These powerful institutions reinforce the structural context that legitimises the dominance of women, in turn creating a culture in which violence against women is permissible.

When breaking down the many layers of institutional disadvantage of women, specific attention must be given to the participation of women in the public and political arena. After all, the 'underrepresentation of women in decision making bodies' (Gaard, 2015, p.28) leads to an underrepresentation of women's rights. In particular, parliaments have been understood as 'patriarchal institutions holding out against women's right to the possession of power through professional advancement' (Lake, 1996, p.169), particularly in the political arena. It has been argued (Bjørnå, 2012, p.51) that 'women are under-represented in the parliaments of all advanced democracies', reinforcing the need for stronger female representation in the political sphere. The hegemonic masculinity that dictates policy agenda requires urgent intervention in the form of women in politics fighting for policies that adequately reflect the 'practical aims emerging from the conditions of women's lives' (Bjørnå, 2012, p.54). Policies relating to women are central sites for advancing gender equality and addressing the social values that underpin this structural violence. With this in mind, policy planning must make recognition of the fact that violence against women emerges from the very 'social power relations between men and women' (Chappell and Costello, 2011, p.633),

Women in the Australian political arena have historically been subjected to gendered discrimination that has had a profound impact on the exercise of the true intention of politics, most notably former Prime Minister Julia Gillard (McLean and Maalsen, 2017). In view of this, McLean and Maalsen (2017, p.24) emphasise how 'discourses of power and gender produced a challenging governance context for Gillard that undermined her leadership' ability and achievements. The hostility toward Gillard in her time as Prime Minister is reflective of the fact that Australian women are not 'routinely accepted' agents of authority (Connell, 2014, p.219). Further, 'if a woman who held the highest political office in Australia experienced such sexism, what does this say about gender and political processes' (McLean and Maalsen, 2017, p.25)? The Patriarchal nature of the state inhibits the equal representation of women in politics and all facets of life, and it will continue to do so if it is subjected to 'gendered power relations' that delineate the political process (McLean and Maalsen, 2017, p.25).

Unequal opportunity for women manifests in a variety ways, particularly through employment and education. Despite significant advances, employment and education continues to be a problem for the state (Franzway et al., 2009, p.89). From working 'for less pay and in poorer conditions' to uneven 'distribution across the labour market', Franzway et al. (2009, p.90), maintain that women have suffered adversity at the hands of gendered politics in Western Societies. The propagation of gender stereotypes results in 'gendered occupational cultures, gendered labour markets... and divisions of labour in workplaces and homes' (Connell, 2014, p.219), all leading contributors to the structural violence experienced by women. The ability to break through such barriers (i.e. entry for women into 'high status professions') is dependent upon the 'continuous

negotiation of gendered politics' (Franzway et al., 2009, p.90). That is to say, the opportunity for women to dismantle the naturalised violence and dominance of men is heavily influenced by the current masculinist nature of the state.

This hegemonic masculinity has devastating consequences for all members of society. In an era of high security, Winter (2007, p.25) explores how women's rights in Australia have been heavily impacted by state policy in an effort to 'safeguard Australia'. Following an increase in threats to global security, it is suggested (Winter, 2007, p.25) that the Howard Government, under the guise of increased spending on national security measures, purposely diminished funding for the public services that concern women the most. Moreover, former Prime Minister John Howard was notorious for perpetuating masculinist values such as 'mateship' and 'battler' (Dyrenfurth, 2007, p.211), subsequently reinforcing patriarchal values that position men as leaders and protectors (Young, 2003, p.3) women as dependant and subordinate. It has been suggested (Dyrenfurth, 2007, p.213), that the very idea of mateship exists in order to legitimise and reproduce 'dominant masculinities amid the wider structures of power relations'.

Winter (2007, p.26) argues that 'The Howard Government provides a vivid example of a masculinist state that blurs the boundaries between paternalistic "protector" and hypermasculine aggressor'. A hypermasculine aggressor exists as a result of perpetuating notions of dominance and ownership, perhaps manifesting in the form of an overtly and physically violent partner. Protective masculinity can present as a more manipulative version, saving 'their women from the "other" type' (Winter, 2007, p.26). Both forms perpetuate the notion of masculinist protection (Young, 2003, p.1), the very notion that underpins the subordination of women under a masculinist state (Winter, 2007, p.27).

In response to the domineering patriarchy that exists in contemporary society, feminist resistances have emerged to draw attention to the daily struggle of women and their continuous exposure to physical, emotional and structural violence. In the fight to combat violence against women, feminist activists are gathering collectively to undermine the "oppressive structures" that nurture gender inequalities, bringing women's issues further to the forefront of the political agenda (Elias and Machado, 2018, p.115). Despite the dangers associated with partaking in feminist resistance movements, women are working together in solidarity to develop new identities as survivors and political activists (Zulver, 2017, p.1500), working tirelessly to spark hope in the form of large and loud movements (Lutterman-Aguilar, 2018, p.133). Using their lived experience as victims of destructive violence, women across the globe are reshaping societies, rewriting the rules and advancing women's rights through a strategy of resistance (Zulver, 2017, p.1503) to the Patriarchy.

## **Conclusion**

Through analysis of liberal and post-structural feminist discourse that discuss patriarchal influences on the state, it becomes abundantly clear that the state and its institutions are inherently masculinist. The hegemonic masculinity that is perpetuated throughout society has had, and continues to have a profound

impact upon the very policy framework and institutions that regulate and enforce women's rights. As discussed in this paper, it is through gender norms and power imbalances that patriarchy creates a context and culture that enables violence against women. Thus, overcoming gender inequalities and the deeply engrained patriarchal values that dictate politics is essential in rectifying the current masculinist state of affairs. To quote Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the recent documentary film *RBG* (West and Cohen, 2018), 'I ask no favour for my sex, all I ask of our brethren, is that they take their feet off our necks'.

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