

# The 'Missing' Men of International Relations

Written by Jeff Hearn

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JEFF HEARN, MAY 23 2012

Whether we are talking about academic research, media commentaries or everyday practices of international politics, it is still rather rare for international relations (IR) to be seen from a gender perspective. Just as the state is still often represented as gender-neutral, so too usually are relations between states and other aspects of IR. Mainstream understandings and constructions of the state, national politics and IR have been critiqued by feminist scholarship. However, even when IR is seen as gendered, this gendering does not usually extend to the critical gendering of men. Yet look around at the operation of IR – in foreign affairs, world summits, the UN, diplomacy, negotiations, sanctions, espionage, terrorism, extraordinary renditions, war, bombing, military deployments, even much “peacekeeping” – it is men who are dominant, both in sheer numbers, and in dominant ways and means of doing things. So, where are the ‘missing’ men? And why is it important to study men and masculinities with respect to IR?

### Men, states and IR

There has been a notable growth of explicitly gendered and critical research on men and masculinities in recent decades. Within this there is increasing focus on postcolonial, transnational, and global perspectives, including global processes of masculinity formation, transnational and hybrid masculinities, and the centrality of men/masculinity in war. This entails examining interrelations between various genderings and political economic processes within and between states. Despite this, there remains a massive deficit in critical studies of men in IR. Men’s practices in IR are so heavily embedded in social, economic and cultural relations that men’s dominant practices are often equated with what is seen as ‘normal’, usual, even the official way of doing things. This is evident in the ‘gender-neutralisation’ of men’s practices in international decision-making. In IR decision-making men’s practices are constructed as ordinary, mundane, even if masculinist; women’s as noteworthy, dramatic, ‘quirky’, or worse.

International relations are partly, though not only, about relations between states. The “man question” is almost always present implicitly when talking of the state. The state has been seen as the dominant legitimate controller of violence in military, police, custodial and repressive forces. This has brought huge collective violence and linked constructions of men and masculinities. The state and state actions are partly directed to citizens *within* the state, partly for those *outside* it. There is a long history of state policy, implicitly or explicitly, about men – in armed forces; religion and manual work; health; violence; sexuality; social assistance, by sex and marital status; nationality and family status. Gendering of states is not only about relations of ‘men’ and ‘women’; states also construct and are constructed by multiple gender processes, sexualities and intersectionalities, for example, making different (male) sexualities legal or illegal. Four Russian cities, including St. Petersburg, have recently criminalized the so-called promotion of homosexuality, which can be taken to mean a small public demonstration. There is popular debate on whether to make this national law.

In gendering IR it is important to consider governmental systems within broad global contexts. While studies of gender and government have focused on the nation, there is growing attention to international, transnational and multinational governances. Key global issues are the gendering of IR, globalisation, multinational corporations and enterprises, the environment, and development. These change the context of government and reconstruct their structures and processes. There are huge intersections of capital and government, as in the massive use and subsidising of private businesses, such as Blackwater and Halliburton, by the US state in Iraq and elsewhere, and in

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the arms trade.

Resistance continues in IR to seeing men's practices as gendered, to 'naming men as men'. Though much of the operations of IR are controlled and conducted by men – as politicians, world leaders, diplomats, financiers, civil servants, transnational governmental officials – it is remarkable how such 'missing' men are rarely named as such – as men. This non-naming of men is one way in which men's domination of IR continues. Whilst men's domination of IR is overwhelming, an implicit assumption is often made that top governmental power brokers are all, or almost all, of the same gender: male. Men and their social construction and power are generally left unspoken; they are, in that sense, invisible, an 'absent presence'. This is despite, or perhaps because of their dominance, especially at the highest levels, and within international policy practice and discourse.

Moving beyond these various silences and partial approaches to IR involves analysing gender and diversity of men more fully. This raises many questions, especially when considering men on a global, transnational scale, within and constituting transnational patriarchies, or transpatriarchies for short. In many transnational movements, both physical and virtual, particular groups of men are the most powerful actors. The transnational governmental class is very much a male transnational governmental class. The study of ruling elite men is a very fertile research area, both as a collective social group and in individual biographies, be it Bush family dynamics or Putin's body image. It is particular kinds of 'political man' that IR rules and structures are designed for. Different masculinities and men's gendered practices are observable in the contrasts between the cool urbane diplomat, the sound-bite politician, the career Eurocrat, and so on. Urgent studies and actions are needed on men and men's power in IR, MNCs, development agencies, sex trade, international finance, energy policy, global representations, transgovernmental machineries, and perhaps most obviously militarism.

## Men and war

The military and militarism are clear arenas of power, violence and killing. The ways militaries are organised and act are literally questions of life and death for all concerned. This applies with 'wars of resistance', 'just wars', 'unjust wars', 'peacekeeping', or simply 'peacetime'. The military arena of IR is that which is most clearly men's. The growth of the modern state and modern IR has been very closely associated with the formation, organisation, modernisation and management of national militaries. The modern state has become a major controller and producer of violence, injury, fear, torture and death. Men have dominated such individual and collective actions. The extreme case might appear to be the Nazi regime of the Third Reich. However, there are many other examples of mass persecutions in recent history, in the Soviet Union, China, South East Asia, East and Central Africa, the Balkans. Bringing together analysis of different kinds of violence – military violence, rape in war, and violence to women in the home – is a key challenge. The scale of manmade (*sic*) death, often organised specifically by states and counter-states, is difficult to appreciate. Expert estimates of deaths *caused by humans (largely men)* in the 20th Century are 188-262+ millions, about 5% of the total. Men remain the *specialists* in violence, armed conflict and killing, whether by organised militaries, terrorism or domestic violence.

There are, however, major complications in this picture. Not all armies are made up of men; there are many examples of women taking up arms, as with gender-neutral conscription in Israel. In the 1941 Yugoslav Liberation war about 100,000 women carried arms as active fighters. Women's involvement in struggles against colonial and imperialist powers has been formidable. Often such participation has subsequently been undermined in moves to 'peace'. And even armies and other militaries formally made up of men often have women in servicing or administrative positions.

## International policy debate on men

Having said all this, there is a more positive story in IR, with some moves towards a more positive focus in policy in relation to men. A relatively new theme in recent years has been men's relations to gender equality policy. Many transnational organisations, such as the EU, the Council of Europe and the UN now recognise the place of men in attempts to move towards gender equality. In 1995, the Platform for Action adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women read: "The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's

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issue. The Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world." The UN held a Beijing+5 Special Event on Men and Gender Equality in June 2000. In March 2003, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women organised a worldwide online discussion forum and expert group meeting in Brasilia on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.

The recognition of the importance of men's relations to gender equality has been pioneered in the Nordic region, for example, the Nordic Council of Ministers' 'Men and gender equality' programme 1995-2000. Many countries have undertaken some initiative supporting men's active participation in gender equality. In the European Union, some initiatives include: the FP4 European Men's Profeminist Network; the FP5 CROME Network; the first EU Conference on 'Men and Gender Equality' under the Swedish 2001 EU presidency; men's relations to gender equality as a priority in Finland's 2006 EU presidency; and a current study on 'The Role of Men in Gender Equality', due to report end of 2012.

There may, however, be deep-seated contradictions in men's involvement in gender equality: first, to involve men to increase women's power in relation to men; second, to reassert men's power or so-called 'rights' in relation to women. Men's involvement in gender equality has often been in terms of fatherhood and reconciliation of 'work and family'. Promoting fatherhood is often assumed axiomatically to be a 'good thing'. There is, however, often a lack of policy linkage between men as fathers/parents, and men as violent partners/parents. Men's violence to women and children is receiving more attention in IR, for example from the EU and the Council of Europe, around such questions as abduction, adoption, and internet abuse; extending mainstream IR debate to men and war is some way off.

## Development and men

These perspectives on the critical gendering of men are extremely important in development and development studies. It is now recognized very widely that ungendered "development" is unlikely to progress, leading onto the "women and development" and "gender and development" movements. There is a lesser but growing recognition that changing development also means changing men, not as any kind of competition with women and gender, but as a means to more equal, sustainable social and economic development. Recent work in Southern Africa and elsewhere has addressed the negative effects of what has been called inequitable masculinity, in terms of sexual practice, violence, HIV/AIDS and other health risks, which in turn impact on social and economic development of all, not least in health costs, harm from violence, and loss of labour. Conversely, equitable masculinity can assist in more equal development. Equally dramatic examples come from war zones, for example, in the recruitment, forced or otherwise, of boy soldiers.

Meanwhile, the total cost of the Iraq War to the US was placed at over half a trillion US dollars, and global annual military spending, even prior to the Iraq War, was estimated at \$1000 billion USD, and as twenty times poverty aid. Changing these dire situations means nothing less than a transformation of men and masculinity, and the gendered allocation of resources, globally and locally. Some recently published books confront the issues of men and development.[1]

A key question that remains is how is it that IR usually manages *not* to explicitly attend to gender, including the gendering of men. Is this mere carelessness or something more significant?

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**Jeff Hearn** is Professor of Gender Studies (Critical Studies on Men), Linköping University, Professor of Sociology, University of Huddersfield, Professor of Management and Organisation, Hanken School of Economics, Finland, and a UK Academician in Social Sciences (AcSS).

[1] See *Men and Development*, edited by Andrea Cornwall, Jerker Edström and Alan Greig (Zed Books); and *Men*

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*and Masculinities around the World: Transforming Men's Practices*, edited by Elisabetta Ruspini, Jeff Hearn, Bob Pease and Keith Pringle (Palgrave Macmillan).