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Male violence or patriarchal violence? Global Trends in Men and Violence

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Abstract: Policies and research have focused recently on men's use of violence against women, and the terms "gender-based violence" or "domestic violence" have often been used rather than "patriarchal violence." This article argues that instead of talking about "male violence," or gender-based violence, a more useful analytical framework is "patriarchal violence." Applying this lens examines how violence is based in complex power relations – with low-income men and men in specific groups, such as indigenous men or men of socially excluded ethnic groups, experiencing it more at the hands of more powerful men. The article argues for moving beyond a simplistic repressive model of violence prevention that often ignores structural inequalities, to one that understands intersectionalities and multiple power dimensions while also taking into account power dimensions of men's violence against women.

Keywords: Homicide, Violence, Masculinity, Structural Approaches.

Violência Masculina ou Violência Patriarcal: Tendências globais sobre Homens e Violência

Resumo: As políticas e a pesquisa tem tido enfoque recente na violência de homens contra mulheres, e os termos "violência baseada em gênero" ou "violência doméstica" tem sido utilizados no lugar de "violência patriarcal". Este artigo argumenta que ao invés de falar em "violência masculina", ou baseada em gênero, "violência patriarcal" seria um enquadramento analítico mais útil. Sob esta ótica o artigo examina como a violência é baseada em complexas relações de poder - com homens de baixa renda ou homens em grupo específicos, tais como homens indígenas ou de grupos sociais etnicamente excluídos, a experimentando nas mãos de homens mais poderosos. O artigo argumenta pela superação de um modelo repressivo simplista de prevenção da violência que costuma ignorar desigualdades estruturais, em favor e um que compreenda interseccionalidades e múltiplas dimensões de poder ao mesmo tempo em que considera dimensões de poder na violência de homens contra mulheres.

Palavras-chave: Homicídio, Violência, Masculinidade, Abordagens Estruturais

Violencia masculina o violencia patriarcal: Tendencias globales sobre Hombres y Violencia

Resumen: Las políticas y la investigación se han centrado en el uso de la violencia de los hombres contra las mujeres, y los términos "violencia de género" o "violencia doméstica" han sido a menudo utilizados en lugar de "violencia patriarcal". El artículo sostiene que en lugar de hablar de "violencia masculina" o de la "violencia basada en género", el marco analítico más útil es "violencia patriarcal". Basado en esa premisa, examinamos cómo la violencia se reproduce en relaciones de poder complejas entre hombres, afectando a hombres de bajos ingresos y hombres de grupos específicos, tales como indígenas o aquellos de grupos étnicos socialmente excluidos. El artículo argumenta que debemos ir más allá de un modelo represivo de prevención de la violencia que a menudo omite las desigualdades estructurales, a uno que busque comprender las interseccionalidades y las múltiples dimensiones del poder cuando analizamos la violencia que padecen las mujeres a manos de los hombres.

Palabras clave: Homicidios. Violencia. Masculinidad. Abordajes estructurales.

Male violence or patriarchal violence?

Global Trends in Men and Violence

Introduction

Linking violence to masculinity is by now obvious in global research, academic research and advocacy related to homicide, men's violence against female partners and other forms of violence. Men are the main perpetrators of physical and sexual violence against women, and they are the vast majority of perpetrators and victims of homicide (WHO, 2014a). In terms of violence by adults against children, trends are divergent. In some regions and countries, boys are more likely to be victims of such violence, or more likely to suffer more severe physical punishment in the home at the hands of adults, while girls are more likely to experience sexual violence and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital cutting (WHO, 2014a).

In light of the linkage between men, boys and violence, the facile conclusion is that there is something about how we socialize boys – or perhaps even genetically, some argue – that leads men and boys to be overrepresented in these statistics. That linkage has led us to use the expression “male violence.” In recent years, policy advocacy and research has focused significantly on men's use of violence against women, and the terms gender-based violence or domestic violence have often been used rather than “patriarchal violence”. Feminist scholar and activist bell hooks has argued that domestic violence is a “softer” term in that it too often inadvertently ignores power and male dominance inherent in such violence (hooks, 2013). Other feminist activists and researchers have similarly argued that bringing patriarchy back into discussions of violence is key to focusing on the power dimensions that drive it.

In a similar light, describing men's use of violence between men, or against other men, as “male violence” ignores the power dimensions and dominance of some men over other men that are the root of such violence. In short, “male violence” is merely a descriptor, or an obvious adjective that describes the demographic characteristics of such violence without understanding the power dimensions. Thus, I argue that it is more appropriate to link violence to patriarchy and power. Rather than talking about *male violence*, a more useful analytical and political framework is to talk about *patriarchal violence*.

By patriarchy, we refer to the power structures that frame men's and women's

lives and that are rooted in power hierarchies related to gender. Patriarchy both refers to the greater aggregate power that men have over women – social, political, economic – as well as power hierarchies between individual men and groups of men. This lens of patriarchy helps us see how violence is based in complex power relations – with low-income men more likely to experience and use it – and with men in specific less-powerful groups, such as indigenous men or men of socially excluded ethnic groups, experiencing it more at the hands of more-powerful men or at times, among socially marginalized men who are mutually oppressed under economic and political systems.

This analysis is not new, of course. With the recent attention to violence against African-American¹ men by police in the U.S., or Amnesty International's new report on homicide and young men in Brazil (Amnesty International, 2015), there is a growing attention to the nexus of low-income young men (and particularly those in socially excluded groups) and violence. However, we have seldom used this analysis to focus on structural solutions, and to understand how patriarchal systems must be dismantled if we are to reduce and end patriarchal violence. We still too often look only at the results of patriarchal violence and not at the roots.

This essay will reflect on emerging trends in lethal violence and view them through this lens of patriarchal violence. Finally, I will examine how understanding violence as patriarchal helps us identify the necessary structural solutions.

Global Trends in Patriarchal Violence

It is useful to start by looking at global trends related to violence. Is lethal violence – and men's use of and victimization from violence – decreasing and/or increasing worldwide, and if so why? Comparative, historical, consistent and high-quality data are too limited to arrive at an easy answer to that question. Certainly, with the rollout of better data collection by governments and better household surveys on various forms of violence, we are getting better at counting violence and can come up with some conclusions. At the same time, how we count and classify violence is far from the neutral exercise that some would claim it is; what gets counted as homicide or intentional killing is clearly related to who does the killing and who holds patriarchal power.

In his influential book, *The Better Angels of our Nature* (Pinker, 2012), Steven

¹ Alternative expressions in the United States include “black” and “of African descent”; in Brazil and some parts of Latin America, expressions also include “Afro-American” and “Afro-descendent.”

Pinker argues that there has been a steady, historical decline in fatal violence in some parts of the world (notably North America and Western Europe, where he focuses his attention), which he attributes to: 1) the human rights revolution; 2) the end of the Cold War and World Wars (by which he refers to those involving Europe and North America); and 3) United Nations (UN) mechanisms and collective action, including by civil society, to protest and hold governments and other actors accountable for violence. In short, he argues that systems of human rights, rule of law and lower rates of large-scale conflict between states are leading to lower rates of homicide and conflict-related fatal violence.

The argument is reasonably persuasive. Other researchers have also suggested that states are becoming less repressive, and thus that state-sponsored homicide is decreasing. The number of repressive regimes declined from 90 in the 1970s to fewer than 20 in 2014 (Human Security Research Group, 2014). Of course, there are groups of individuals – among them, immigrants, African-American young men, Muslim young men – who might say that countries such as the U.S., Germany and France could be classified as repressive regimes. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say there has been a decrease in the number of *overtly* oppressive regimes.

In addition to Pinker, many other researchers confirm a decline in conflict-related deaths, as seen in the two graphs below. PRIO estimates that if current trends continue, countries affected by civil wars could decline by half in 2050. Research strongly suggests that large-scale conflict is decreasing, while low-intensity, micro-conflicts of fewer than 1000 deaths are increasing (Human Security Research Group, 2014).



Figure 1: Global Trends in Battle Deaths from State-Based Conflicts, 1946–2008
Source: PRIO, 2005 in Human Security Research Group, 2014

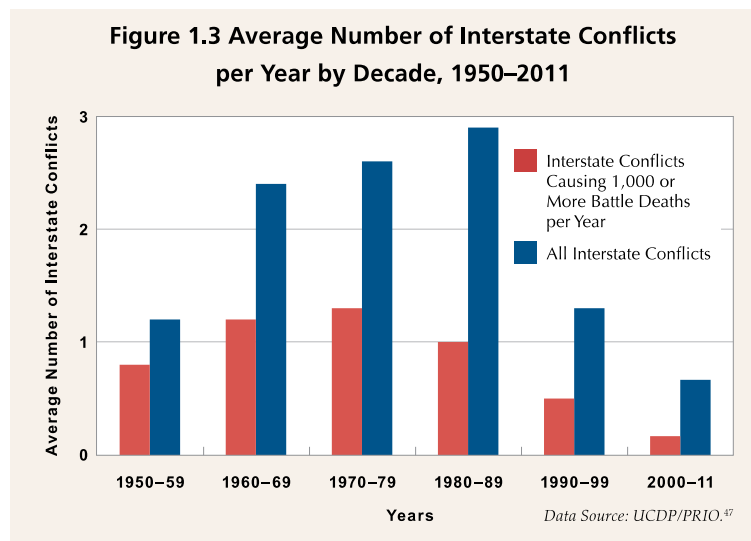


Figure 2: Average Number of Interstate Conflicts per Year by Decade, 1950–2011
Source: UCDP & PRIO, 2012 in Human Security Research Group, 2014

What about global trends in homicide? There were an estimated 475,000 homicide deaths in 2012, 60% of which were males ages 15–44, making homicide the third leading cause of death for men in this age range, as seen below. Latin America has the highest per capita homicide rates, nearly twice that of Africa. Global trends show that homicide is coming down, but it is declining more quickly in richer countries (WHO, 2014a). Where income and patriarchal inequalities are strongest – which is what we see in Mexico, Central America and elsewhere in Latin America – homicide is not declining. In fact, in parts of Latin America, homicide rates are decreasing among the middle class, but are increasing per capita among low-income men. One could argue, based on the data, that patriarchal power structures are getting better at targeting their violence (WHO, 2014a).

Age group (years)	Homicide rate per 100 000 population		
	Male	Female	Total
0–4	2.8	2.7	2.7
5–14	1.7	1.2	1.5
15–29	18.2	3.2	10.9
30–44	15.7	2.7	9.3
45–59	10.2	2.0	6.1
>60	6.7	2.7	4.5
Total	10.8	2.5	6.7

Table 1: Estimated homicide rate per 100 000 population by age group and sex, 2012, world
Source: WHO, 2014a

Thus, to respond to the question of whether lethal violence is declining, the answer is: it depends. There is progress and rule of law working for *some* groups and in *some* countries. Pinker's data is mostly from Europe and North America where such data has been collected and is somewhat accurate. But such data is difficult to gather in many countries, precisely because of patriarchal power. In Latin America, for example, such historical-trend data is missing in part because during military dictatorships, death rates from lethal violence were deliberately manipulated or hidden.

Furthermore, measuring homicide at the national level often obscures certain deaths, which are undercounted or skewed, and mixes very different kinds of lethal violence. A homicide in a bar between two men or by a man against a woman in the home (no less tragic and horrendous, by any means) are counted the same as state-sanctioned violence against a black man who is "resisting arrest." Similarly, deaths caused by famine or disease during conflict, which disproportionately affect women and children, may not be counted as homicide or conflict-related fatalities, or even as intentional deaths, but may in fact be desired and provoked by invading armies or combatant groups.

This much we can confirm: large-scale wars are killing far fewer people than small-scale conflicts. All forms of armed conflict kill far fewer persons than homicide. Latin America continues to have the highest per capita rates of homicide among the world's regions. Within Latin America, the highest rates of homicide are increasingly concentrated among particular groups of low-income young men. The overall conclusion: lethal violence may be declining on aggregate, but it is being increasingly focused on socially marginalized young men under the age of 20 with limited education. Add to this equation suicide, which kills nearly as many men as homicide and wars combined, and which also shows specific patterns related to gender, masculinities and patriarchy, as will be discussed further.

In addition, before we jump to credit the human rights apparatus and structures (and our civil society efforts) with bringing down rates of violence, let's consider these data from the World Health Organization (WHO) based on consistent, high-quality household surveys across multiple countries: a quarter of all adults report having been physically abused as children; one in five women reports having been sexually abused as a child; one in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her lifetime; one in 17 older adults reported abuse in the past month (WHO, 2014a).

Some of the most lethal forms of violence may be in decline in the world for some of the population, but other forms of patriarchal, gender-based and power-based violence are still high with no evidence that they are declining.

Specific Patterns of Patriarchal Violence and What They Mean

It is useful to examine various trends and forms of lethal violence and examine what they might reveal. In this section, I will look at mass killings, specific trends in homicide among black men or men of African descent in the U.S. and Brazil, and suicide. All of these, I argue, represent specific forms of patriarchal violence against men.

Mass Killings

“Mass killings” are defined as the killing of four or more people by the same killer. These used to happen only a few times every decade in the U.S. but since the 1970s have been increasing. There have been 221 incidents of mass violence since 2006 in the U.S., almost one every two weeks. All the perpetrators have been men (Way, 2011).

Research on men who have carried out mass killings in the U.S. are varied but tend to point to a cluster of factors: ubiquitous access to guns, undetected mental illness, social isolation, having experienced homophobic bullying, economic stress or grievance about job loss or prestige loss, and in some cases having been humiliated by a female partner or girlfriend (Gilligan, 1997). In most cases, in these men we see stories of what Michael Kimmel calls “aggrieved entitlement.” (Kimmel, 2015). They are often angry and disturbed young men – angry at having lost something (jobs, income, prestige, access to female partners, privilege) they thought they were entitled to. They typically are men stuck in rigid notions of manhood, who have faced some form of childhood trauma and deeply yearn for meaningful human connection.

In short, “mass killings”, far from being a U.S. aberration (although – by the weapons used and the public attention via social media – these have a quintessentially U.S. face), are in many ways a form of patriarchal violence, carried out by men who see themselves as losers in a patriarchal, capitalist system, and who are socially isolated and perceive themselves as unable to seek help. They often crave a kind of “blaze of glory” of media attention as a way to break out the invisibility that a patriarchal world of winners and losers has forced on them.

The War on Black Men

To the point mentioned earlier of where homicide is concentrated, Brazil is a tragic case study. Brazil continues to lead the world in the largest absolute number of homicides per year (even though per capita homicide rates are higher in other Latin American countries). The cumulative effect of more than 40 years of high rates of homicides means that there are now more than 4 million more women than men in the country. In short, there are more than 4 million missing men

in Brazil (Barker, 2005). Millions of families in Brazil are missing sons, fathers, husbands and brothers who were victims of homicide. There are an alarming 56.4 homicides for every 100,000 people in Brazil (using 2010 data) (Amnesty International, 2015). And even though overall homicide rates have fallen in Brazil, they have not come down for black men.

These data are not new. The troubling part is how long and how persistent the homicide rates for black men in Brazil are in light of how much life has improved for the poorest segment of the population. In the last 15 years, Brazil has seen an impressive and unprecedented reduction of social inequality. Brazil's poor have more money in their pockets and their children have more access to education and health. However, these important achievements have had little effect on reducing homicide rates among low-income young men. In this example we see clearly the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity and poverty and the utility of applying this lens to both understanding the roots of high rates of homicide among young black men in Brazil as well as responding to it. Intersectionality is the notion, first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw to describe the ways that multiple factors including class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality interact to create vulnerabilities and explain social disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991).

Many of the young men who are murdered – or murder – in Brazil are connected to drug trafficking gangs. Most of these homicides occur in urban areas, where the drug trade emerged as a response to limited employment and limited presence of the state, and where there is easy access to firearms. It is also related to competition for reputation, for recognition and honor and for prestige among female partners by young men who have few things that make them feel like socially recognized, adult men (Barker, 2005). Add to that violence by police against young black men. In 2007 police killed 1,330 people in the state of Rio de Janeiro alone (Amnesty International, 2015).

Similarly, recent protests of black men at the hands of police in the U.S. have called increased attention to the issue there as well. While the rates of police violence against black men in the U.S. do not seem to be increasing, what is new is that we are now calling it what it is: male police officers killing black men. And the main civil society movement that has emerged has also called our attention to race: black lives matter. It might, though, be more precisely called: black *men's* lives matter. There has been one suicide of a black woman after brutal treatment by a white male police officer, but all the direct killings of blacks by police in recent months have been black men. This is not to minimize the effect of patriarchal violence on black women, not least of which includes police violence (such as the recent case of a white US police officer convicted for abusing police power for years by sexually assaulting black women).

To these statistics, we must add the slow killing of black men in prison. The U.S. has the shame of having the highest absolute numbers of persons in prison in the world with 2.2 million. China, with more than three times the U.S. population, has 1.7 million persons in prison, and Russia has 670,000 persons. Brazil is in fourth place with 581,000 persons in prison (International Center for Prison Studies, 2013). In Brazil and the U.S., men of African descent are far more likely to be imprisoned than white men. The inhumane prison conditions, and the dearth of rehabilitation in many U.S. and Brazilian prisons, means that mass incarceration could also be considered a form of slow, lethal patriarchal violence. Here again, in the U.S. and Brazil, we see the intersectionality of ethnicity; the historical legacy of slavery; a repressive and non-rehabilitative public security system; and poverty/class and identity aspects of gender – namely the limited social space for low-income black men whose limited access to licit means of employment, early exposure to specific forms of violence at the hands of other men and boys and other factors create the conditions for shamefully high and blatantly unjust rates of incarceration for low-income black men.

Suicide

It may seem unusual to include suicide in a discussion of patriarchal violence. Indeed, suicide is typically treated as a mental health issue rather than power-based or gender-based violence, much less patriarchal violence. But I argue that suicide has aspects of gender, masculinity and patriarchy, intersecting with poverty, that should to be considered. First off, as the WHO acknowledges, suicide is violence – self-inflicted violence. Certainly in cases of long-term illness or deteriorating quality of life, suicide may be life-affirming and humane. But in most cases, suicide is violence, and it is patriarchal violence.

There were 800,000 suicides in 2012, a number that far exceeds conflict-related deaths and homicide combined. Nearly two-thirds of those who commit suicide are men. In the richest countries, men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women and in the poorest countries men are one and a half time more likely to commit suicide. Suicides represent half of male, violent deaths and 71% of female deaths from violence. Research on the risk factors for suicide is limited, but data suggest financial stress, mental health issues, use of alcohol and physical health issues (associated with chronic pain). Other factors include stigma associated with help-seeking, trauma (sometimes related to war and conflict) and loss of livelihoods. In other words, many of those who commit suicide are men who perceive themselves as losers in the global system of patriarchal power (WHO, 2014b).

Add to all these factors, the issue of age: globally men over the age of 70 are those most likely to commit suicide (WHO, 2014b). Some of this may be a response

to chronic pain and declining health. But many of these deaths are no doubt, an indictment of how we treat our elderly, and reflect a crisis of connection among older men. Their bodies and virility in decline; unwanted in the workplace, elderly men are often considered superfluous to a patriarchal economic system that wants young, able male bodies. Add to that the social isolation of elderly men in many parts of the world relative to women. In the recent WHO report on suicide, it is telling that not a single paragraph discusses this crisis of connection and the role of patriarchy, and why it is that men over the age 70 might feel discarded in a patriarchal system.

A recent national survey in the U.S. indicates that one out of every three adults over the age of 45 now reports feeling lonely, whereas only one out of every five adults reported feeling lonely ten years ago, with single men more likely to report feeling lonely than single women and married women more likely to report feeling lonely than married men (Way, 2011). The conclusion that one can take from this study is that men, by being emotionally cut off from themselves in a patriarchal system, are not very good company or companions for their spouses, nor for themselves. This sense of isolation and loneliness is no doubt one of the favors associated with men's higher rates of suicide and is a by-product of patriarchy. Men, in the U.S. and elsewhere, are often encouraged to cut off their inner lives; to repress their emotions; and to be hard-shelled workers, protectors and providers, and if they cannot live up to the model, they are subject to ridicule and scorn. They have no role in the system. This too is a form patriarchal violence, as well as factor of how boys are too often socialized.

How to De-Naturalize Men's Violence and Build Human Connection

Why is it useful to think about men's violence as patriarchal violence rather than just being "male violence"? First, it helps us to see that violence by men against men – and against specific groups of men – is not natural nor a normal part of manhood, and not merely a function of gender but also a factor of power. It is, as we have seen, part of the deliberate reinforcement of power structures: groups of men with more power, or representing more powerful groups, kill or imprison less-powerful men. To be sure, there are individual and family factors involved; some men use violence because of early exposure to violence and mental health issues, factors which in turn interact with patriarchy and gender.

But the overall trends in violence point to power and patriarchy. Simply "essentializing" or merely describing violence as male makes it seem inevitable, puts the blame on individual men and does not cast light on the structural inequalities that drive it. Furthermore, talking about "male violence" calls more attention to

violence than to the resistance to violence that most men show every day. Indeed, we might be better served talking about “male resistance to violence” than talking about “male violence.”

I argue that men’s resistance to patriarchal violence is much more natural or biological, or “normal”, than is violence. Indeed, study after study affirms the extent to which lethal violence is *not* part of men’s or women’s “nature.” The research overwhelmingly and consistently affirms that it takes a huge effort to turn men (or women) into killers. Researchers including James Gilligan (Gilligan, 1997) and Cynthia Enloe (Enloe, 2007) have studied how extreme trauma, humiliation and shaming is nearly always part of the making of men who kill. Other researchers have shown how the effects of toxic childhoods and damaging relationships distort our human nature and turn us into killers. All of this research affirms that killing is not natural nor biologically rooted nor typical of men (or women). Yes, we as men (and women) are biologically capable of killing and can be induced or conditioned to do so. But we know that militaries around the world *have to* invest hugely in systems to teach boys and men, and sometimes women, to kill – to reduce their natural resistance to taking human life.

Contrary to what faulty analyses of science would say, it takes a huge effort to turn boys and young men into killers. From primatologist Frans De Waal (De Waal, 2010) to evolutionary anthropologist Sarah Hrdy (Hrdy, 2011), to developmental psychologist Niobe Way, we know that neither women nor men are killers by nature. In fact, the opposite is true. Men and boys and women and girls want to care and be cared for. We thrive and have survived as a species in relationships of mutual caring. Turning young men into lethal combatants, whether in standing militaries, insurgency groups or violent gangs, or as lone killers, is extremely time- and resource-intensive. It generally takes months if not years of constant breaking and rupturing of basic human connections; it requires systematic cruelty and brutality.

The research, from Darwin onwards, is overwhelming that we survived and thrived as a species because our biological and social propensity to live in connection and close cooperation with others is overwhelmingly stronger than any propensity to kill each other. It takes systematic cruelty and inhumanity to create killers among men. It is important here not to oversimplify the arguments from evolutionary anthropology. Homicide and killing have been more or less frequent in different moments of our human historical trajectory. We can and do become more violent and kill each other more often in response to immediate conditions. Finding biological or genetic arguments that explain human killing – or biological or genetic arguments that explain why we do not kill each more – both run the risk of essentializing human violence instead of understanding the power dimensions behind it.

Using a Lens of Patriarchal Violence to Find Solutions

This understanding of resistance and power is not merely an academic exercise. It is a lens for focusing on political and structural solutions. The field of violence prevention has advanced significantly in recent years with a plethora of evidence-based approaches and impact evaluation (of increasing rigor, as defined in public health and social sciences). Summarizing this growing field of “what works”, the WHO lists these recommendations for preventing violence: developing safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers; developing life skills in children and adolescents; reducing the availability and harmful use of alcohol; reducing access to guns and knives; promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women; changing cultural and social norms that support violence; providing and improving victim identification, care and support programs (WHO, 2014a).

All of these recommendations are important and necessary, and getting countries to roll them out and adequately resource them must be a global priority. At the same time, though, we also need to look at the structural and intersecting drivers of violence, including patriarchy. The WHO acknowledges that “violence of all types is strongly associated with social determinants such as weak governance; poor rule of law; cultural, social and gender norms; unemployment; income and gender inequality; rapid social change; and limited educational opportunities.” (WHO, 2014a, p. ix). We need to understand that gender means empowering women socially, economically and politically, and also means empowering specific groups of young and socially excluded men who are the main victims of extreme income inequality. It means that we need to hold accountable those who build patriarchal power structures that allow, encourage and turn a blind eye to the abuses of power against powerless men and women.

It also requires us to talk about income inequality. Young men I have talked to in urban slums from Brazil and South Africa and the U.S. affirm this syllogism: no work and no respect means no manhood (Barker, 2005). They also affirm, like middle-class young men, that being men means being sexually active (and heterosexual); not backing down from a fight; and being faster, stronger, tougher or richer than the guy next to you. Few are able to escape the feeling of being in a brutal trial to prove they are real men. They are not allowed to complain or question, nor to show vulnerabilities. We are told: *Man up and move along*. For middle-class men, transgressing the norms of manhood is to risk ridicule or social stigma. For those low-income men who step out of line and use violence against the patrimony or bodies of the middle class, they are the ones most likely to face police violence and incarceration. Patriarchal systems punish those who transgress, but the punishment is higher for the poorest, most vulnerable men.

Indeed, some of the violence used by young men, including homicide, is related to acquiring status, or comes as a result of lacking status and perceiving that they have nothing to lose in using violence. The use of violence by the state against specific groups of “threatening” young men is precisely used to maintain systems of inequality that keep the middle and upper class in charge and to keep those in the lower class in “their” place.

And finally, consider this root of patriarchal violence: In 2013, Oxfam released a study confirming that the wealthiest 85 individuals in the world controlled as much of the world’s income as the 3.5 billion poorest people on the planet (Oxfam, 2015). A recent UNDP human development report affirmed that half the world’s working population works in informal or precarious employment (UNDP, 2014). Add to that the waves of immigrants arriving in Europe – the majority of those young men in search of work. If the data are inconclusive about historical trends in lethal violence, the data are clear when it comes to income inequality. Absolute poverty and hunger have declined worldwide in the past years, but income inequality has increased (Oxfam, 2015).

All of these points to a key conclusion: we must move beyond the notion that violence is “natural” and normal for men. We must move beyond a repressive model of violence prevention, or a public health model that too often ignores structural inequalities, or the blaming of individuals (even as we must hold individuals accountable for their actions). We must instead see the patriarchal structures that create violence. We must see the need for human connection and equality and see as more common and frequent our resistance, as women and men, to violence. We must remove the financial interests in repressive security policies – taking away the profit motive from arms manufacturers, consulting firms, and for-profit prison industries that benefit from the repression and incarceration of men and women. We must focus on equitable, non-violent, caring versions of manhood and womanhood, and of humanity. We must build states that in addition to counting violence, create and measure public good, public welfare, and social equity. When these are in place, patriarchal violence will truly decline.

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