

Sexism, Class and Violence

Nancy Lindisfarne*
SOAS, University of London

Jonathan Neale**
Bath Spa University

Abstract

Without a theory of gender - of what it is and what it does in the world - we cannot explain why sexual imagery, notions of masculinity and femininity, sexual experiences and gendered relations differ in different times and places, and how and why such differences come about. We know that in class societies, elites use racism and other ideologies to divide us and make inequality seem natural. Here we suggest that gendered inequality and sexism - that is, systematic patterns of inequality between women and men in any particular setting - is found everywhere in class societies because it does this job particularly well. Our argument is radical. We argue that systematic gendered inequality is so effective in naturalizing inequality because it is always doubled-sided: one side is love, the other is imbued with gendered violence. Love and kindness are aspects of all our closest human relationships - with our parents, our children, our friends and our lovers, straight or gay. But at the same time. Our close relationships are riven with gendered differences and inequality. So love locks us in, and sexism hurts and angers us. Our theoretical argument starts from the top, from class privilege and the systematic gendered inequality found in all class societies and the inevitable resistance these provoke. Our focus, however, is on neoliberalism as a laboratory for exploring how the rich and powerful combine the use of violence with reconfigurations of ideologies of gender to respond to changes in their material circumstances to protect their economic interests and class dominance.

Keywords: sexism, class societies, sexual violence, gender, inequality, neoliberalism, ideology.

* Prof. Nancy Lindisfarne, Emerita, University of London, The School of Oriental and African Studies. London-United Kingdom. E-mail: nanstarr44@hotmail.com.

** Dr. Jonathan Neale, Senior Lecturer, Bath Spa University, School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Creative Studies. Bath-United Kingdom. E-mail: J.Neale@bathspa.ac.uk.

Cinsiyetçilik, Sınıf ve Şiddet

Nancy Lindisfarne
SOAS, Londra Üniversitesi

Jonathan Neale
Bath Spa Üniversitesi

Öz

Toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi olmadan- ne olduğu, dünyayı nasıl açıkladığını bilmeden, cinsiyetçi imgelerin, maskülenlik ve feminenlik kavramlarının, cinsel deneyimlerin ve toplumsal cinsiyetçi ilişkilerin farklı zaman ve mekanlarda neden farklılık gösterdiklerini, nasıl ve neden oluştuğunu açıklayamayız. Biliyoruz ki, sınıflı toplumlarda seçkin sınıf toplumu bölmek ve eşitsizliği doğallaştırmak için ırkçılık ve diğer ideolojilerden yararlanılmaktadır. Biz bu çalışmada, farklı ortamlarda kadın ve erkek arasında sistematik eşitsizlik örüntüsünün, yani toplumsal cinsiyetçi eşitsizlik ve cinsiyet ayrımcılığının, sınıflı toplumların her safhasında bulunduğunu iddia ediyoruz. Çünkü onlar bu işi çok iyi başarıyor. Bu iddiamız önemlidir. Bize göre sistematik cinsiyetçi eşitsizlik, eşitsizliği doğal göstermede oldukça etkilidir çünkü her zaman çift taraflıdır. Bir tarafı aşk, diğer tarafı ise cinsiyetçi şiddetle doludur. Aşk ve iyilik; ebeveynlerimiz, çocuklarımız, arkadaşlarımız ve sevgililerimizle; heteroseksüel ya da homoseksüel olsun, en yakınlarımızla yaşadığımız insani ilişkilerdeki en içten duygulardır. Fakat aynı zamanda yakın ilişkilerimiz cinsiyetçi farklılıklar ve eşitsizliklerle yırtılmış, ayrıştırılmıştır. Yani aşk bizi birbirimize kenetlerken cinsiyetçilik bizi acıtmakta ve öfkelenmektedir. Bizim teorik iddiamız yukarıdan yani sınıf ayrıcalıkları ve her sınıflı toplumda bulunan sistematik cinsiyetçi eşitsizlik ve bunlara yönelik kaçınılmaz başkaldırlardan başlamaktadır. Bununla birlikte bizim bu çalışmada esas odaklandığımız nokta neoliberalizmdir. Amacımız neoliberalizmi bir laboratuvar gibi düşünerek zengin ve güçlünün toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojilerini yeniden organize etme ve şiddetle eşleştirme süreçlerini ve bunu ekonomik çıkarlarını korumak ve sınıf hakimiyetlerini sürdürmek için nasıl kullandıklarını anlamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: cinsiyetçilik, sınıflı toplumlar, cinsel şiddet, toplumsal cinsiyet, eşitsizlik, neoliberalizm, ideoloji.

Introduction

Without a theory of gender - of what it is and what it does in the world - we cannot explain why sexual imagery, notions of masculinity and femininity, sex experiences and gendered relations differ in different times and places. Nor can we explain how and why such differences come about. And without such explanations we cannot effectively fight against sexism - that is, systematic patterns of inequality between women and men in any particular setting - and sexual violence.

Our aim here is to suggest answers to such comparative questions about causality and change. And neoliberalism is a perfect laboratory. In the 1970s capitalists in Washington made a decision to squeeze more profit out of the system. It has been a decision they have since ruthlessly pursued for forty years. Neoliberalism is the economic system of our time.

Here we build on the theoretical insights set out in *Dislocating Masculinity*¹ to offer a new, and perhaps surprising, way of understanding of the roots of sexism and the inequality experienced between men and women in terms of sexual violence.

Our laboratory is neoliberalism, but we begin elsewhere. We start from a simple fact. For much of human history people lived in societies without class. No one was much richer than others, and no one lived by exploiting other people's work. There was great cultural variety in these non-class societies. But they were egalitarian, and there were no consistent or enduring patterns of inequality between men and women. By contrast, in class societies everywhere, past and present, we see both class inequality and systematic inequality between men and women. Why? We think there is a straightforward answer why this should be so. In every unequal society, the rich and powerful want things to stay unequal. Elites use violence to make that happen. But elites also need the rest of us to believe that inequality is natural and inevitable.

The most effective way elites have found to do this is to encourage the idea that men and women are fundamentally different. Elites enforce gendered inequality at every turn. This means we grow up thinking men and women are unequal. Sexism, and the threat of sexual violence, are a constant feature of our lives.

We argue that in class societies, elites use racism and many other ideologies to divide us and make inequality seem natural. But gender naturalises inequality better than racism. It is so effective because it is always double-sided: one side is love, the other is imbued with sexism. Love and kindness are aspects of all our closest human relationships - with our parents, our children, our friends and our lovers, straight or gay. But at the same time, our close relationships are riven with gender differences and inequality. So love locks us in, and sexism hurts and angers us. We are simultaneously trapped and divided. So we squabble about housework, or endure domestic violence, or quarrel about gender parity in workplaces rife with sexual abuse.

In these struggles, we lose sight of class inequality. That leaves us helpless, and makes it far, far easier for the elite to rule. Here we offer a radical approach to understanding the roots of sexism in class society. We begin with a framing argument and way of looking at gendered relations across the board. We then turn to look at the implication of these ideas under neoliberal capitalism. By making these links explicit we hope to contribute to the upsurge of popular resistance, in Dehli, Turkey, Britain, the US and elsewhere, to sexism and sexual violence and to the cover-ups which allow such oppression to persist. Our theoretical argument starts from the top, from class privilege².

Starting with Class Society

Though it is almost never said, running through all of our experiences are the ways that people with power at the top of society make sexual abuse and sexual violence possible. Rather this knowledge is hidden by ideologies of gender. To understand how this truth is hidden, and why, we need to look at the way sexism and violence are entangled with class.

The best way is to start by thinking of class societies since the very beginning. Since, in effect, the beginning of agriculture, some 8000 years ago. According to the impressive new archaeological work, we know now that is when class inequality began, and when systematic gendered inequality began as well. Before class societies, there were of course gendered differences which were marked in a wide variety of ways. But there was no systematic or enduring gendered inequality. However, most societies with settled grain agriculture, where people farm the same land from one year to another have been class societies³. And it is with the rise of class society that systematic gendered inequality also appears. Let us mark the logic of this argument. It is important.

Patriarchy and sexism were around long before capitalism. So we cannot explain sexism in terms of capitalism. And explanations that blame men for sexism simply can't work, because there are men in non-class societies where there was no systematic gendered inequality. So we need a different sort of explanation. One which looks at causes, and focuses on social change. That is, we need an argument which allows us to explain why, when and how relations between men and women, and between styles of masculinity and femininity, change through time. We need such an explanation because it makes sense, but also because we want to find ways to make things more equal.

Violence and Arbitrary Class Power

Clearly if the rise of systematic gendered inequality is associated with the rise of class society, this is the place to begin. By class society, we mean that there is a ruling group who are fed, and live for most of their lives off the labour of others, and they are able to pass this privilege down to the next

generation. For most of the history of class society, most of the work has been growing food. Peasants or slaves grow the food, the lord, the landowner or the king takes a third or a half of the crop in taxes or dues, and uses it to feed his family, priests, soldiers and servants. Nowadays class relations are somewhat more complicated, but almost all of us still work for them. That is, the work the vast majority of us do supports the ruling class. Class inequality is a relationship between two classes of people. We can characterize them as the leisure classes and those who work. Or as the rulers and those who are ruled, the haves and the have-nots, or in the words of the Occupy movement, the 99% and the 1%.

The absolutely key thing about class inequality, and class privilege, is that it is arbitrary. By arbitrary we mean that those things that distinguish the ruling class from the subordinate peasants or workers who support them are contrived, socially constructed, and always open to question. Elites do NOT have blue blood. Elites are not privileged because they are blonder, or whiter or have better table manners. They can be replaced - dynasties change, revolutions happen, ruling classes lose their grip and are overtaken by others. Because class privilege is arbitrary, it is precarious, it can be challenged, and it can be resisted and overturned. And this means that ultimately class privilege everywhere and always is kept in place by violence, and by ideology. The violence is always there.

Why the ideology favours men over women is an enormous question without the possibility of a definitive answer. Probably sexism too is best explained in terms of the way violence is used to maintain class privilege. Indeed, our hunch is that the answer may be quite simple (Lindisfarne and Neale, 2014). Men in any one community have marginal advantages over women in terms of size and strength. Until the advent of weapons which require no brute strength such as gunpowder and guns, this makes men likely enforcers of inequality - as bodyguards, soldiers, or domestically - in any particular unequal society.

There was violence by feudal thugs and henchmen. Nowadays there is still the violence of class enforcers like the police and the army, but other class enforcers are overbearing managers and administrators of industry and corporations, and by the people who run the prison system, the mental health system, and the school system, by those who manage and administer the institutions of the state.

Saying this puts violence right where it belongs - at the heart of class power. And it allows us to think analytically about violence. The idea of distinguishing three types of violence - direct violence, anonymous violence and symbolic violence - is a useful way to start (Žižek, 2009). Direct violence is where actors are known and can be named, where Tom bashes Harry, or a young woman slaps her child. Anonymous violence is part of the system, but it is hard to pin responsibility on any particular person. Who is responsible for the drones which kill women and men in Afghanistan? Who is responsible when

a man dies in police custody? And third there is symbolic violence. Star wars. Statutes of Jesus on the Cross. Bullying. The manipulation of fear.

Resistance

Violence is central to arbitrary class power, but so too is resistance central to understanding the limits of that power. Resistance is the other side of the equation. Resistance and power must be treated in tandem, together. They are aspects of an ongoing process and struggle which is the very essence of the class divide⁴.

Resistance to inequality is basic to who we are. Human beings are social animals, and therefore empathic. This means we can understand what other people are thinking, and what they feel, and we are able to see the world from another person's point of view. We know from the archaeological record, and from history, that ordinary people have always been able to see the similarities between themselves and other people. A notion of 'common humanity' lies at the heart of all the world religion traditions, and everywhere there are always available popular ideologies of fairness as well. Because such universalizing discourses emphasize sameness and can appeal to the majority of the people at any one time and place, they are powerful ways to challenge authority. In confrontations, the balance of forces between popular opposition and elite power determines the outcome of electoral contests, social movements, civil wars and revolutions. How you judge the outcome - as progressive or conservative - depends on whose side you are on⁵.

Because resistance is part of our makeup, the violence associated with class inequality cannot ever be only notional. It must also include real sanctions and sometimes terrible punishments for defying class etiquette, or questioning the stereotypes that mark class differences or challenging class hierarchy and privilege. A fear of violence itself serves to discipline people. But to keep inequality in place, ordinary people must be made to understand that violence can become immediate and real. They must be taught that the ruling class will meet defiance with harm - perhaps by causing them physical and mental privation, or pain, or by turning to systematic torture and killing.

Sexism, the Ultimate Ideology of Divide and Rule

However violence alone is never enough to stop ordinary people from fighting for human equality. To keep inequality in place, the ruling class also needs ideologies which naturalize difference and make inequality seem normal and right. When something is successfully 'naturalized', it is made to seem 'god-given', 'meant to be', and wrong or impossible for ordinary people to challenge or want it changed. The class hierarchy is naturalized when we feel it is right and proper that the British royals should live in palaces, and it doesn't immediately cross our minds to ask why some of us are homeless and others struggling to pay for a roof over their heads.

Ideologies which naturalize inequality divide and rule by punishing and excluding people who are the wrong sex, or the wrong colour, wrong nationality or wrong religion. Such ideologies are shaped and propagated by the ruling class. After all, the elite are the ones they benefit. Which means we need to think clearly about this top down process.

We all know how racism works. Of course there are differences of skin colour between all of us - it is a continuum. But so what? Racism isn't about shades of melanin, it is about someone making skin colour an issue, making it important. It is about marking difference and using it to oppress and exploit some people for the benefit of others.

We all also know that racisms vary. In South Africa, there were whites and blacks and a mixed race category of 'coloureds' in-between. In Brazil, racism works on a gradient of skin colour. In the American South, under slavery, one drop of Negro blood was enough to make an ostensibly white-skinned person black. These ideas are different, but they are all variants of the same kind of racist ideology. They are based on the same principle: that skin colour can be used to mark and sustain class inequality.

Sexism, Intimacy and Love

Just as racist ideologies naturalize inequality, we suggest that this is also what sexism, and sexist ideologies. Sexist ideologies are immensely powerful, and have been since the beginning of class society. They are the most effective way ruling classes have found to naturalize inequality for one simple reason - gender goes deep and divides us from the people we love. It is new, and useful, to see sexism in this light.

All of our close relations are gendered - with our parents, our children, and our partners and lovers - gay or straight. So too all of the emotions we prize are also gendered - our capacity for affection and joy, our passion, our energy and the thrill of sexual desire and pleasure. We know this. Yet we also know how our closest relationships and our most decent feelings can be ruined by gendered neglect and hurt and anger and fear. The boundaries between sexual pain and pleasure are blurred, culturally specific, part of all our everyday lives and always up for debate. This is the stuff of great novels and soap operas, grand opera and country music - and the horror and tragedy of *Kiss with a Fist*.

Sexism is a source of endless personal confusion for us all. Just think of the little boy who loves his daddy and wants to grow up to be just like his dad. In that very wish, the little boy is buying into the inequality that favours men over women. And however caring, and fair-minded his father is, he still benefits from a system which favours men, and so too will his son when he grows up. Or consider the little boy who loves his Mum, loves cooking, wants to grow up to be just like her. Just think of the trouble that child is likely to face.

All our lives, all of us, every one of us, negotiate the contradictions between love, and sexist inequality. Consider two examples - These days most young couples know the sex of their child before s/he is born. From that moment the child is named, and the whole pink/blue regime begins. Little boys are handled more robustly than little girls, they're exposed to louder music and more noise and encouraged to take more risks, to run faster, to climb more trees. Sure you love your little girl and your little boy equally, but your child's experience of gendered inequality started long ago in the womb.

A second example is romantic love making. However exciting, magnificent a particular experience, however much you lose yourself in your lover, inequality isn't far away. First, there are always lurking questions about who's on top, and who's come. And there are other nagging questions. Am I pretty enough, or rich enough, or smart, or kinky enough? And are you good enough for me? And what are your expectations - a fun fuck in the back of a car? Or silk sheets and breakfast in bed? And most important of all, who has to go to work in the morning? And who will take the kids to school?

Of course there are differences between women's and men's bodies. Some people have dicks, others have vaginas, breasts and so on. But these differences, like the differences of skin colour, are really of no great importance compared with the similarities between our bodies - our bones, blood, our metabolism, our intelligence, and the structure of our emotions.

Men and women are far, far more alike than they are different. But we can very easily forget this when we are in the grips of a sexist ideology. What sexist ideologies do is make it seem like women and men are absolutely different from each other, as if one is from Venus, the other from Mars. Sexism is when gendered differences - between 'women' and 'men', but also between 'straight' and 'gay' - are marked socially in ways we can't ignore. And they are linked to a presumption that men are more equal than women. Gender is marked in all those moments - from a fleeting gesture to outright abuse - when someone, or something, makes you aware of yourself - not simply as a person, but as a woman, or a man, or as straight or gay.

Gender marking makes you aware of the boxes, and squeezes you into one.⁶ Sometimes gender is marked in ways which make us feel good about ourselves - a nice haircut, a smart suit, someone holding open a door, someone flirting with us. Then we are made to feel like 'a natural woman', or queer and sexy, or a cool dude. Such moments may be quite benign, but they are still moments when gender is marked.

More often, much more often, gender is marked in ways which make us feel bad, and even very bad, about ourselves. Even the milder forms of gender marking inscribe sexism deep in our souls. We feel bad about ourselves when we hear a homophobic remark, when someone jokes that 'all men are bastards', or someone says 'you're behaving just like a woman'. It is the same when a bullying colleague sneers and makes us feel ugly, or stupid, or a failure. We all know those moments.

Gender marking comes into play when a class elite want to hide their privilege by encouraging us to focus and fight among ourselves. Because sexism confuses us, by twisting our love and everything we like about ourselves and our concern for other people - with inequality. This makes it hard to think straight, and serves to naturalize all inequality incredibly well.

The sexist conundrums, whether about parenting or romance are charged with emotional and intellectual confusion. They are also the enormously rich material from which the ruling class shapes and fashions various sexisms to fit their purpose. That is what sexism does. So of course most men are relatively better off than most women of the same class. That is exactly how the ideology works.

Sexual Violence

Approaching sexism in this way also opens up an analytical space to think about three quite different things - violence, sexuality and sexual violence. These are deliberately confused in the ideologies used to naturalize class inequality.

Our emotions are not discrete, nor easily labelled and tidily packaged away. Our feelings of affection and love always include elements of sexual desire. Such overlapping emotions can be a source of creativity and great joy. And people everywhere manage the ambiguity these overlapping emotions pose via rituals and rules.

In class societies, however, confusions between love, attraction, excitement and desire simultaneously threaten class control and offer another means of class control. Elites are committed to a rigid interpretation of essentialized categories, because that's how stereotypes work and class boundaries are maintained. So things, and people, who blur the categories must be suppressed, because they show up the lies behind class and gender inequality. What happens depends on who exactly is breaking the rules and who is charged with enforcing them, but most often all the people who differ from the idealized norms - homosexuals, trans people, bossy, big balled women, cuckolded, henpecked men - are ridiculed and often punished, with violence or with exile. And they are sometimes killed⁷.

Of course there are always questions of interpretation and relative power and resistance. But the slide from innocence to sexual violence can be both imperceptible and very nasty indeed. But what is certain is that however the arbitrary distinctions are marked they will have a sexual charge, And when violence is used to mark and distinguish between intense, overlapping emotions in terms of what is licit and what it not, it violence becomes an extremely powerful tool of social control⁸.

In this respect it is important to think hierarchically across the class divide, and consider relations between the boss and the men and women who work for him, between the lady and her maid. Ruling class women and men manage the rhetoric and practices of gendering between classes with ferocity and

great care. After all, this is an important part of how their privilege is created and sustained.

But because no social class is homogenous, it is also important to think about relations within classes as well. Within any class, men will mostly dominate women. However, because ruling class men and women benefit enormously from class inequality, they have a very strong shared interest in managing sexism to their mutual advantage well out of sight of the hoi polloi. Sometimes, however, there is a breach case, and things go awry and ordinary folk get a glimpse of how sexism works within the ruling class. That's the Princess Diana story.

An intra-class perspective is also important when we think about a peasantry, or the working class. Here too gender hierarchies which privilege straight men over gay men and most women are likely to dominate people's experience. But it is also important to notice the subtleties of relative privilege: within any class, there will always be some people who are more successful, or more beautiful or harder working than others. Unequal relations between people of the same class - women and men vis-a-vis each other, and between women and between men - are an intrinsic part of class society. And intra-class inequality feeds into, and serves to naturalize, class relations between an elite and those who work for them. Here too, sexism - systematic gendered inequality - is not something that has to be explained away, or denied. Sexism is how the system works. In practice, of course, we experience the harms of gender, race, sect and other inequalities simultaneously, thus compounding the ways we can be confused and distracted from seeing the great inequalities in the system between ourselves and the ruling class.

Clinging to Class Privilege

Class inequality is about the power to exploit the great majority of ordinary people who do the work in any class society. We have suggested that all ruling classes use violence, but also ideologies of racism and especially sexism, to legitimize privilege. The reasons they do so are economic. The ruling class project in any era is to manage the economy to keep themselves in power. And when something important changes in an economy, it is likely to challenge elite power - new technologies appear, or new people grab control of raw materials, or manage to take over established businesses or banks. When this happens, the ruling class move to protect themselves as swiftly and effectively as they can.

We know the drivers of social change are economic. Ruling classes respond to the threat of competition in many ways. They may invest in coal mines, railroads and hedge funds, or fight oil wars in the Middle East to protect their privilege. Ruling elites are always looking for new sources of wealth and are quick to occupy positions commensurate with new forms of power. We also know that hanging onto class power is a ruthless business - today, the utter disregard for threat of climate chaos is a clear measure of that (Klein, 2014).

Most of the history we are taught in school concerns how, in any period, a ruling class responds to economic change and threats to their economic power. And as they respond, class relations also change. And to naturalize new forms of unequal class relations, the ruling elite also try to reshape gender relations to better fit the new forms of class inequality. So, for instance, one set of sexist ideas fitted some feudal societies - the glorification of knights, ladies and chivalry - the cult of thugs on horseback. Those ideas changed as that form of feudalism changed. Other sexist ideas justify changing forms of capitalist economy. We all know how, during the two World Wars of the twentieth century, governments responded to the demands of their war economies by moving men to the front lines and encouraging women to take up 'men's work' on the land, in the public services, and in factories.

Given the centrality of waged labour to capitalism, the changing patterns between women's domestic work or work for wages is not surprising. And at each turn, ideologies of the family, and women's autonomy have changed too. So for instance in the late 19th century, the 'dutiful' wives of men of the new professional middle class were encouraged to become domestic managers, care for their children and support of their 'breadwinner' husbands. But unless we look carefully, we are apt to miss seeing the many other young women who became factory workers or entered domestic service and worked for wages in the households of the new middle class.

Making the connection between the economy, and the class interests sexism serves, offers us a way to explain how and why gendered relations change. In this respect, the history of neoliberalism presents a clear picture of a top-down political project adopted by a capitalist ruling class in response to an economic crisis (Neale, 2004 & Klein, 2008). By focusing on neoliberalism it is indeed easy to see how changes in the economy come first and drive the ways gender relations are realigned to fit with new economic imperatives.

Not all changes have been bad. For some, living standards have improved and longevity increased. But these benefits are not universal. Other heartening changes have been forced on the ruling class by popular resistance, as has been the case with the gay movement and now gay marriage. But most changes have increased inequality as neoliberal capitalists have, over the past forty years, sought to privatize the welfare state, deregulate banking, tax laws, and legal protections at work, to squeeze more profit out of the system. And as inequality has increased, gender differences have become more sharply marked, and gender relations the focus on political attention. Thus debates over abortion and birth control - battles we thought were long won - have re-emerged. In the UK, for instance, cuts in legal aid have made women facing domestic violence even more vulnerable than before. In Britain even breastfeeding in public has again become a political issue. Similarly across Europe there are new debates about sex work, sex trafficking and pornography which reshape sexism and reconfigure gendered differences in ways that fit the newest phases of the neoliberal global economy, while comparable processes are going on in China, India and elsewhere.

Other neoliberal changes have had other, often very confusing, consequences. In the universities, it is true, that women and men are more equal compared with forty years ago. As members of a professional class. They (and we) are part of an educated 20% of the population, men and women who over the past forty years, have been co-opted and rewarded by neoliberalism and drawn closer to the ruling class. Obama's presidency is part of this process.

But just as women's liberation liberated some women, it ensnared others. And these same recent gains by educated 20% also serve to make the professional class blind to the 80% of working class women, and especially working class men, and especially black working class women and men, and especially working class children, boys and girls, white and black, who have been terribly hurt by austerity, by the benefit cuts, by the sell-off of public housing, by the end of free school meals, and by the increase in prison populations.

Neoliberals have also done everything they can to force more people into the work force for lower pay. So they've attacked and weakened labour unions, they have introduced zero hour contracts and much more. These changes have had the direct effect of increasing working class poverty. They have also greatly altered conventional understandings of working class masculinities and men as responsible breadwinners. Now the adverse consequences of poverty for children are recast as parenting failures. Many working class men are unemployed or underemployed. And 'good' women are those who 'work (for wages)', often in part-time, poorly paid jobs, to make sure their households can scrape by, while women who stay at home to look after young children are said to be feckless, lazy and labelled scroungers or 'benefit cheats'. At the same time further government proposals in Britain will mean 'women will overwhelmingly bear the brunt of the freeze in tax credits and benefits'.

Their (or our) recent gains also serve to make the professional class blind to the enormous numbers of people around the world whose lives have become much harder over the past forty years. And become much harder in new ways. In the Philippines, many of the new migrants are women who leave their husbands caring for children in Manila while they work as maids in Hong Kong or in the Gulf, or keep hospitals running in the US and UK. It is mostly young Bangladeshi women who work in the sweat shops of Dacca. And when the Rana Plaza factory collapsed it was more than 1,300 mostly young women who died, and another 2,500 mostly young women who were terribly injured. Elsewhere the elite have also deliberately reconfigured gendered ideologies and practices to defend, and sometimes deepen, inequality. For instance, the neoliberal ruling class has increased the divide and rule rhetoric of racism, immigration and Islamophobia, while trying to pretend they are doing nothing of the sort. States have always been brutal, but present neoliberal ruling elites seem far less embarrassed about practices of torture and extra-legal state terrorism than were Western elites after the Second World War. We

argue that this increased ruthlessness and systemic violence is a reflection of the increased inequality which is basic to neo-liberal political economy.

Masculinities and Protecting Women

Consider, the slight of mind involved in the rhetoric of 'protecting women'. Protecting Afghan women' was the actual phrase Cherie Blair and Laura Bush, used at the beginning of the American war in Afghanistan in 2001. In a quite calculated and coordinated fashion, they were using a feminist-sounding, but sexist, and Islamophobic ideology to legitimize an imperial war.

The success of the Afghan resistance fighting a guerrilla war against overwhelming military odds tells you that ordinary Afghan women - the mothers, sisters, wives, daughters of the very Afghan men the NATO bombs were killing - have hated the foreign occupation of their country just as much as their men. And it is not as if the drones haven't targeted and bombs haven't fallen on women too (Lindisfarne, 2008).

'Protecting women' is also a phrase used by politicians at home to talk about trafficking, and sex work. Here too 'protecting women' is part of a sexist ideology manipulated by the ruling class. Discussions about trafficking and sex work get a great deal of media attention. They reinforce ideas of difference between men and women. They also carry with them all kinds of racist ideas about immigrants. And at base they are debates about the legality, and illegality, of low-waged work and the exploitation of the people who do that work⁹.

Perhaps most important of all, the rhetoric of 'protecting women' acts as a smokescreen and diverts our attention from the vulnerable men, women and children who have not been protected - from sexual abuse by Catholic priests around the world, or from the elite or their enforcers in Britain. Rather the concern of the elite and their managers, the Pope and his Archbishops, has been to cover up. And these cover ups are far less gendered than classed. Catholic nuns, women social workers, teachers, women police officers, media managers, and women politicians have been involved. The elite, and the enforcers of class power, both women and men, are the ones who've been hiding the truth¹⁰.

Abuse and Resistance

Of course the sexual regimes mandated by senior officers and manager are contested. People object. But the vulnerable people who are most harmed by systemic violence are of course exactly those people who are least able to resist. That is the logic of power - they pick on the weak, and often toy with our need to be loved and cherished. However, within a sexist institution there will always be people who disapprove of what they see.¹¹ Often they are junior people. Perhaps they simply believe in keeping to the rules. But whatever their motives, their own previous silence, institutional loyalty, and

the fear of losing the job are all likely to limit what they can do. Everyone knows that whistle-blowers are usually discredited, and likely to pay a considerable personal price.

Elsewhere, wherever constraints and sanctions are less formidable, ordinary people will fight against sexism, sexual abuse and violence. In effect what we see is that struggles over sexual violence are also struggles between the people who run institutions and the rest of us. They are examples of that old-fashioned thing - class struggle!

The Gathering Storm

Since the revelations about the Catholic church began and were amplified by movements inspired by the Arab Spring, the deflection strategies of the ruling class have begun to lose their power. In India, the US and the UK, campaigns against sexual violence have acquired a critical mass, and are beginning to gain real traction. If you only read the newspapers, it looks like what is happening is that journalists are exposing abuse. But if you look carefully, everywhere that you hear about systematic abuse, you find organisation by survivors - often informal, usually local, and sometimes on social media.

The most important struggles in North America, Europe and Australia have been by groups of people who were abused as children by Catholic priests. They have persevered for many years. There have also been smaller, but widespread student protests in the United States, particularly in the elite universities. The problem at these Ivy League colleges was not confusion about consent, a student rape culture, or flawed disciplinary processes. It was that standard university policy was to do nothing to discipline rapists (Flanagan, 2014).

In Britain, the high profile case of Jimmy Saville the serial abuser was blown open when a journalist talked to a group of older women who had all been in the same facility for teenage girls. They remained in contact with each other, and encouraged each other to speak out. In India, many people know about the Pink Sari movement in UP led by Sampat Pal, which mobilises large numbers of women to protest at rapists, wife beaters, and bullying by upper castes and rich politicians (Fontanella-Khan 2013). Recently, collective organisation has begun to explode in new forms of protest, following the rape and murder of the young physiotherapist in December 2013 (Bhattacharya, 2014).

These are all examples of the contested relation of class, and the gendered consequences of that contest. Because class inequality lies behind gender inequality, this means that struggles over gender inequality or racism rapidly become class struggles as well. They are some of the actual ways in which people resist inequality and class power. But at each turn, we need also to remember that whenever we try to change something, we immediately run into the mechanisms of class power.¹² That is why it is so hard, and why it has to be done.

Notes

- ¹ See Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994a and 1994b.
- ² Versions of this paper were given at the First International Symposium of Men and Masculinities in Izmir, 11-13 September 2014; the Institute of Development Studies lecture series at the University of Sussex, 13 November 2014; the International Gender Studies Centre Seminar on Masculinities, Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford, 22 January 2015 and as a keynote address at the 5th International Conference, Neoliberal Discourse and Gender Equality, at the Eastern Mediterranean University Centre for Women's Studies, Famagusta, North Cyprus, 26th March, 2015. An earlier, extended version of the argument is Lindisfarne and Neale, 2014, which includes extensive footnotes. For more detail and elaboration of the arguments made here, we have also included references to our blog, Sexism Class Violence, at www.sexismclassviolence.wordpress.com. Many people have helped us think through these ideas; we are enormously grateful for their interest and support.
- ³ On the transition to grain agriculture and the rise of class societies and the state, see Flannery and Marcus 2013; Jones 2007; and Scott 2014. For further references, see Lindisfarne and Neale, 2015a.
- ⁴ For a brief account of the global wave of protest against sexual abuse and violence, see Lindisfarne and Neale, 2015d.
- ⁵ For a case study which develops these ideas in terms of Pashtun politics, see Lindisfarne, 2012.
- ⁶ For an extended example of how labels and the boxes 'traditional' and 'modern' work in this way in Turkey, see Lindisfarne, 2015.
- ⁷ On the targeting of gay men by the Iraqi regime and by the ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq, see Lindisfarne and Neale 2015c.
- ⁸ Consider just a few recent examples. 'Fallen' women (but almost never their male lovers) were shamed, and often terribly punished for conceiving a child out of wedlock as was the real and terrible fate of the young girls in Ireland banished to and enslaved in the Magdalene Laundries. Some politicians regularly use homophobia, and systematically target gays and lesbians, to claim political legitimacy. Extreme sexualized violence is an aspect of the most horrific of prison regimes, including that at Abu-Ghraib: see Lindisfarne and Neale 2015e.
- In the UK, where the most vulnerable girls and boys have been subject to rape and violent abuse for years, only now are the systematic cover-ups of these horrors by senior officials and managers in the government, social services and the police being exposed. See also Lindisfarne and Neale 2015f.
- ⁹ See Agustin 2007; Chin 2013; Bernstein 2007; and Kempadoo 2005.
- ¹⁰ Yallop, 2008, is the best book on abuse in the Catholic Church. Davies, 2014, is the best source on the paedophile abuser Jimmy Saville. And see Danczuk and Baker, 2014, for an account of systemic abuse covered-up at the very top of British society.
- ¹¹ See Lindisfarne and Neale 2015b for accounts of the debates within the British police about the cover-ups of abuse by upper class men of the political establishment; and Lindisfarne and Neale 2015f for conflicts and debates among police, social workers, and other professionals in Oxfordshire.
- ¹² We take this idea from Patrick Bond in conversation.

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