POWER, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

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Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison?

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Abstract Reflecting on male gender activists' lessons from India, this article explores how intersectionality can help men (and women) better understand the structure of patriarchy, by connecting it to other forms of oppression, based on class, caste and age. The centrality of the gender and class/caste intersection is well illustrated, as is how understanding this can help men better understand their own internal conflicts around masculinity in the politics of everyday lives. Whilst taking a structural perspective, the work also engages with dynamic and personal change, by balancing structure and fluidity to understand the interactive shaping of identities, as well as of institutions and projects of justice. We see how using intersectionality can facilitate activists' work on personal change as well as on building critical consciousness, by linking it to other social justice struggles. The article closes with reflection on the need for practical tools and directions for further research.

Keywords: power, gender, activist, India, patriarchy, oppression, change, social justice.

1 Introduction

As gender and development actors now increasingly look towards the new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to link inequality, power and exclusion and 'leave no one behind', we have seen an increased use of the term 'intersectionality', without any clear sense of a consensus on how best to apply the concept. I want to pick up this issue in the context of how men and masculinities feature in debates on power and gender in development, and how this may be better linked to power dynamics rooted in systems of social oppression beyond – but also linked to – gender. In this article I focus in on our colleagues' experiences from India, which demonstrate how work with men can politicise men and masculinities to challenge patriarchal ideologies, precisely by analysing intersecting social inequalities of gender, age, caste or social class. Shared analyses of such intersections within their

communities, homes and workplaces can build shared commitment to struggle for gender and other social justice goals.

I will draw on fieldwork and analysis from two qualitative studies exploring work with men for gender equality in India – from Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW) in Uttar Pradesh (Edström, Shahrokh and Singh 2015a) and Samajhdar Jodidar (meaning 'Understanding Partner') in Maharashtra (Edström, Shahrokh and Singh 2015b). Both approaches have been supported and nurtured by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) in Delhi, and work by analysing gender within contextually rooted histories of intersecting inequalities as a basis for men's collective and reflective political engagement with feminist objectives (Das and Singh 2014). In these approaches, groups of men have raised their critical consciousness of how deeply rooted power structures institutionalise male supremacy and privilege alongside other forms of patriarchal oppression, which has proved crucial in their challenging their own attachment to powerful masculinities.[1]

In this article I address the central question: can intersectionality – as a conceptual tool – offer a key to help pro-feminist men to critically engage with gendered power and oppression in everyday life, to challenge gender inequality and to break out of their/our patriarchal prisons? As I will argue that it can, I also aim to address the questions of 'how' and 'what more' do we need? The method of this article is to combine some ideas on intersectionality with ideas on patriarchy and power developed in my interactions with colleagues in India, as well as in Africa and elsewhere, to construct an analytical lens on practical experiences of men contesting gendered oppression. I then use this lens to describe and analyse aspects of the two case studies mentioned above. I end by reflecting on the utility of intersectionality and explore avenues for further exploration of the conundrum of how to get men (and women) focused on power and social justice to engage more meaningfully with gender inequity as part of the overall problem of inequality and power.

2 Theoretical refraction for the analysis

CHSJ's approach with partners has increasingly centred on politicising men's personal engagement with gender equality, in terms of a deepening analysis of patriarchy as linked to other forms of social injustice in their lives and over time (Das and Singh 2014). Here the issue of the relationship between patriarchal and other inequalities poses a pressing question, which demands some theoretical reflection. I will take intersectionality to mean the idea that intersecting social identities (overlapping, at the level of individuals) and related hierarchies of social stratification work together in individuals, groups and interrelated systems of privilege and oppression; based on gender, race, class, caste, sexuality, religion, ability and so on (Mohanty 1991; Nash 2008). These interact simultaneously on multiple levels, which can help us understand how different forms of oppression, such as misogyny, racism, elitism and homophobia interrelate and act together. A homophobic or class-based

insult is very often inflected – or laced – with a misogynistic subtext of not being 'man enough', when directed at men or boys.[2]

To begin exploring the theoretical and political potentials and limits to intersectionality, it is useful to reflect on how gender inequality and patriarchy can be understood in work with and by men for gender equality; especially as we need to challenge the basic relationship between men, masculinity and systemic gender inequity. Building on our co-constructed vision of a need to revisit and 'undress patriarchy' as a concept of a social system (Edström *et al*. 2014), our conceptual approach to the study of MASVAW (Edström *et al*. 2015a) was an interactive, participatory peer-enquiry, which was also used to guide our study with Samajhdar Jodidar (Edström *et al*. 2015b). Deploying insights from feminist theory, research on masculinities and on power, men's collective action for gender equality was explored against a critical understanding of patriarchy as a complex, dynamic and adaptive system in which we are all implicated.

Focused on the importance of developing critical consciousness through collective action, we applied a set of four gender-dimensional lenses on: 'Male centredness' (in a sociocultural or representational dimension); 'Male privilege' (in a material and institutional dimension); 'Male supremacy' (in an ideological and political dimension); and 'Male order' (in an epistemological or 'evidential' dimension). The first three are readily linked to the feminist calls for representation, redistribution and redress, respectively, whilst the fourth calls for a pro-/feminist 'reframing' of evidence, knowledge and study method, which is a framework I have laid out elsewhere (Edström 2014, 2015). I have more recently come to realise that another dimension is also required to capture certain issues raised by 'Male identification', stressed by Allan Johnson (1997) as central to patriarchy, and the 'Othering' of women in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) terms; namely a dimension of identity and history, which can also be clearly linked to women's call for 'recognition'. It is important to underline how this subordination, discrimination, marginalisation and 'Othering' not only applies to many different women, but also to 'lesser males' and all who are subordinated by virtue of not fitting the idealised identity, or being recognised in relation to it. By addressing this elementary dimension of 'identity', we can better locate men's struggle with politicising the personal against internalised 'Male identification', and to highlight how intersectionality is lived also in men's personal identity. This is crucial to understanding not only the multiple identity negations of certain women, or anyone who challenges hegemonic ideals of masculinity, but also to appreciate the depth of the often conflicted and contradictory internal dynamics for men, rooted in their/our internalised and intersectionally shaped identities and political inclinations.

The epistemological dimension of knowledge, or 'knowing', remains crucial in explaining what can be seen and spoken about as 'meaningful', in the sense of invisible 'knowledge-power' giving rise to registers of meaning and evidence through the disciplinary light

Figure 1 Dynamics of patriarchal inequity in four elementary dimensions, revealed through the fifth element – or dimension – of knowledge-power
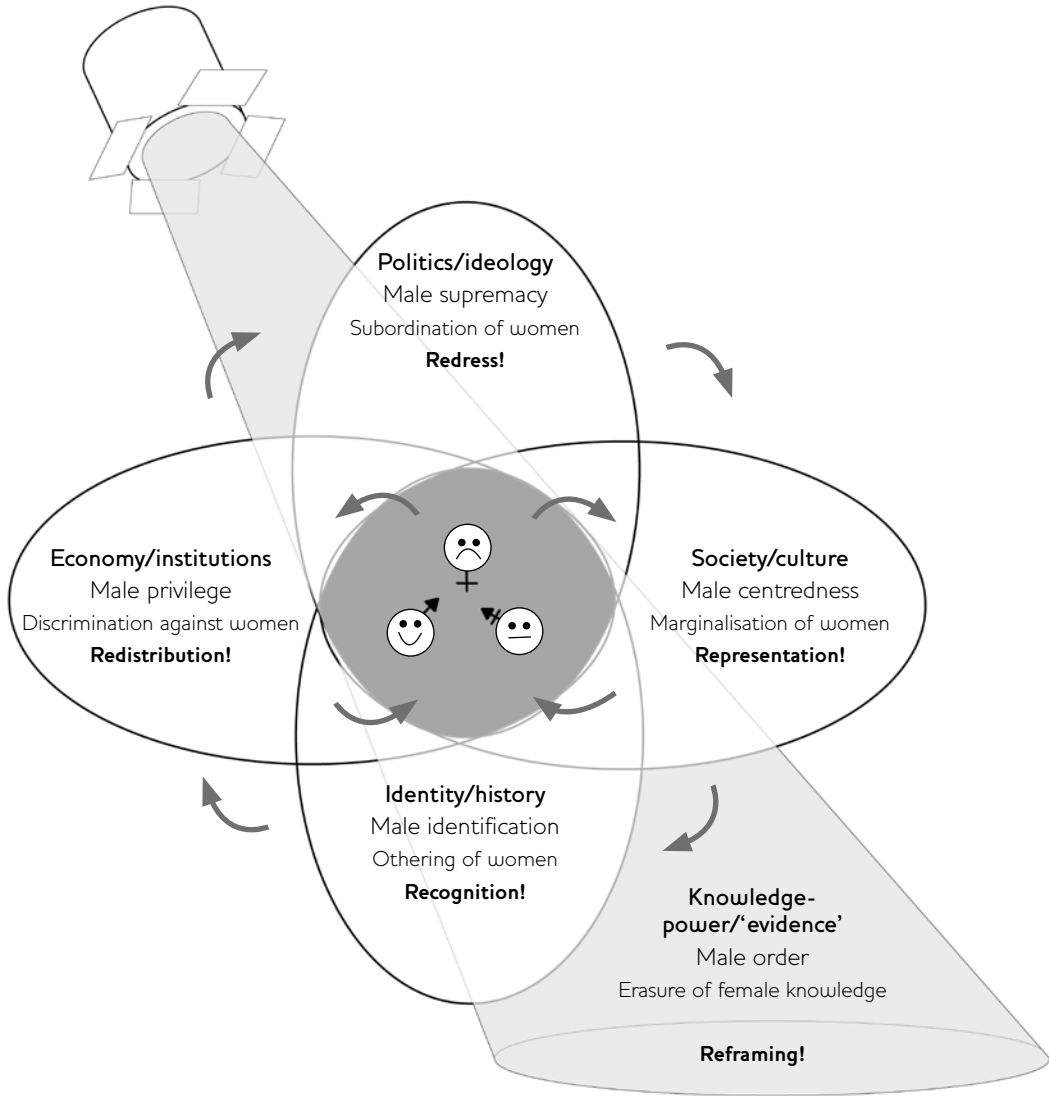
Source Authors' own; adapted from Figure 1 in Edström *et al.* (2015a: 18).

of different 'sciences'. The various dimensions to our interactions and power transactions typically get reduced and fragmented into apparently unrelated monodisciplinary explanations, framing inequalities in economic, political or social terms, whilst the problem of intersectionality itself gets obfuscated by reducing analyses into binary categories or distinct hierarchies of social stratification. Whilst there is not enough space here to elaborate these ideas more fully, Figure 1 attempts to interrelate the ideas schematically and hopefully obviates the need for another 1,000 words.

So what can a stronger focus on intersectionality add? Crenshaw famously suggested that intersectionality may be useful to mediate 'the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics' (1991: 1,296). Distinguishing the concept from the (related) view of 'anti-essentialism' (questioning the category 'woman'), she argued that the fact that there are many kinds of women (or men) who are privileged or disadvantaged on many other grounds than gender, does not mean that these categories are not real or politically important. To ignore the fact that men as a group are typically advantaged simply by virtue of being men is, arguably, to not see the wood for the trees. Yet, a clearer understanding of how 'hegemonic masculinity' – and the internalised expectations related to it – can get manipulated in hierarchically gendered power-orders reveals how many men (and women) are not served by such inequities, and are often harmed (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Common critiques of using intersectionality include its lack of a defined or unified methodology, the common use of 'black women' as the quintessential intersectional subject in some feminist writings (deflecting attention away from the gendered/gendering dynamics in positions of power), vague definitions of the concept itself, or questions over its empirical validity. These critiques calling for disciplinary rigour and reductive, categorical clarity can themselves be challenged as Male ordered, from a feminist perspective and by taking on Jennifer Nash's call to instead 'grapple with intersectionality's theoretical, political, and methodological murkiness to construct a more complex way of theorising identity and oppression' (2008: 1). Complex shouldn't necessarily mean complicated, but it should mean more real, dynamic and potent – both in enlightening and political terms.

Choo and Marx Ferree (2010) helpfully distinguished between three ways of understanding or theorising intersectionality, as (a) group-centred, typically focused on groups with multiple marginalised identities; (b) process-centred, seeing 'power' as relational and interactions as multiplying oppressions at different points of intersection; and (c) system-centred, understanding intersectionality to be shaping entire social systems. The latter moves the analysis beyond associating specific inequalities with ideas of static institutions (e.g. traditional households, or 'the temple') and instead describes social processes which are interactive, historically co-determining, and complex. This is useful because it allows us to connect the analysis into a conversation about the role of patriarchy as an evolving system-wide issue.

Also responding to Nash's challenge, Walby, Armstrong and Strid (2012) deconstruct a number of tensions in the literature on intersectionality, suggesting solutions by combining ideas from critical realism (ideas on ontological depth, social relations and the distinction – as well as connection – between structural inequalities and political projects) and from complexity theory (especially ideas applied to complex adaptive social

systems). They emphasise the importance of reinserting socioeconomic class in connection to gender (which has often been overlooked) and they balance a tension between fluidity in identities versus 'temporal stabilisation' (required for a structural analysis) through pointing to the idea of 'mutual shaping' rather than mutual constitution of identities. Two points to highlight here are (1) recognising individuals' identities as multiple and complex, mutually shaped through interaction in processes of power; and (2) understanding intersecting social inequalities in terms of dynamically co-adapting social systems – systems evolving through material and institutional processes, influenced by the shifting politics and ideologies of co-dependent and/or contesting groups in society.

But, given the focus on intersectionality here, why 'patriarchy', rather than 'kyriarchy'; where multiple intersecting systems of oppression interact without the one necessarily being more fundamental than others? (Karioris 2014). Without reading too much into the notion of 'fundamental' here, and without dwelling on the point that such a framework would dilute the focus on the pervasive problem of gender inequality, there are several good reasons to view patriarchy as a powerful underlying organising principle in most social systems built on inequality. As I have argued elsewhere (Edström 2014: 121), we cannot ignore patriarchy's undeniable historical resilience in outliving and adapting to – and being adapted into – successive social systems through evolving new orders, such as; warring and/or trading city states, slave economies and militarised empires, agrarian feudalism, industrial capitalism, or neoliberal globalisation; many of which overlap and coexist interdependently (and/or competing), in purer or more hybrid forms, but remaining patriarchal in different ways. Second, its incredible resilience looks to be rooted in the fact that it operates at the deepest levels of personal psychology and identity – in virtually all competing/ coexisting social systems – whilst connecting the individual to 'the system' through the systemic function of familial human reproduction and socialisation in the (evolving) institution of 'family'. Third, because of its historical evolution – with descent of identity, assets, legitimacy and power through a vertical (typically) male line – it can actually account for ethnic, economic and other social stratification far better than most other logics of social differentiation, as it vertically connects individuals into horizontally segregated groups through the male 'blood-line', over time re/distributing resources and gold in relation to belonging and blood; the very stuff of myth and reality.

So, in order to understand how patriarchal gender inequity operates intersectionally we need to:

- recognise gender as relational and socially constructed through repeated types of performances;

- dislocate men from masculinity and women from femininity to understand the diversity in our lives;

- see gendered power as simultaneously multidimensional (ideologically male supremacist; economically male privileging; socially male centring; historically/existentially male identifying) and epistemologically generated (male ordered), with a reductive gender-binary as central to its more generally reductive logic in its patriarchal form;

- see individuals' identities as intersecting and complex (gendered as racialised and classed, etc.);

- recognise identities as co-shaped by interactions in intersecting processes and structures of power; and

- understand the shaping of intersecting structures of social inequalities (gender, class and other hierarchies) in terms of dynamically evolving and co-adapting complex social systems.

3 Perspectives from men challenging patriarchy in India

In this section I describe certain common features of the two chosen approaches to working with men on gender equality and social justice in India – one with MASVAW and the other with Samajhdar Jodidar – and then reflect on specific perspectives and findings from these studies particularly relevant to the role of intersectionality.

During the last 10–15 years, the issue of gender equality has become increasingly contested in India, with some positive changes recorded set against the emergence of anti-feminist 'men's rights' organisations (Chowdhury 2014). Countering the latter trend, a growing group of men have since 2002 built an engagement for addressing gender-based violence in MASVAW in Uttar Pradesh (UP), which is ranked second among Indian states in 'crimes against women' (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2006: 130). As a state-wide campaign in UP that works at multiple levels to raise awareness and challenge institutions that uphold inequality, MASVAW is a political project and movement, grounded in feminist principles of redressing gender inequalities through critical consciousness-raising. Having spread to schools, universities and local communities, MASVAW men are active in some 20 districts of UP (and three districts in neighbouring Uttaranchal). The campaign is of particular interest, as it addresses gender inequality and violence through working with men to create change-makers in institutional settings, such as in universities and locally elected governance bodies, Gram Panchayats.

In rural Maharashtra, across 100 villages, the Samajhdar Jodidar project works with men to catalyse change at personal and political levels in order to challenge women's subordination in society and to support women's participation in public life and politics (CHSJ 2012). The Indian constitution enacted in 1992 mandated that one third of seats in India's Gram Panchayats should be reserved for women and marginalised groups; increased to 50 per cent in a constitutional amendment in 2009. However, these measures have not been sufficient to ensure effective women's leadership and participation. For example,

women are often registered as holding seats in the Panchayat, whilst being practically prevented from taking part in making decisions by relatives or elite men. The Samajhdar Jodidar project is attempting to change these practices by mobilising groups of men to engage with – and support – female candidates for election, to engage other men in communities and to support men to make personal change, support women and end discriminatory practices. Men first work through raising consciousness to transform their own practices in their homes and intimate relationships, which then provides a platform for social action in the wider community, enabling trusting relationships to be built with women to work together for political change in public spaces.

Whilst there are some differences between the two cases (e.g. scale, focus and organisational form), the similarities are perhaps more important: both take a clear pro-/feminist approach to addressing gender inequality as systemic and rooted in patriarchy, seen as interconnected with caste/class. They also both work with men on challenging masculinity and redefining identity for personal change over time.

The following sections provide perspectives from India by drawing direct quotes from interviews and group discussions carried out during fieldwork in UP during 2014 and in Maharashtra during 2015.[3]

4 Understanding gender inequality as systemic patriarchy: seeing the system in us

A significant element for engaging men critically on gender justice for both of the approaches studied in India has been a focus on getting men to see the 'structure of patriarchy' – that is, seeing gender inequity as a systemic issue of social justice – and how this is intersectional, by recognising how it operates together with traditional feudal ideas of gendered age or caste differences and supremacy/subordination. As described to us by a female professor of social work in a university in UP, where MASVAW members are active: 'There are many inequalities and differences… When you talk about gender inequalities then the caste issue is always there'.

During the study with MASVAW, activists debated the question of just how they explain patriarchy in their discussions with men. One participant explained that they guide the discussion with simple questions like: 'who accesses and controls the resources?' and then, as he explained in more detail, 'we link from the discussion of norms [about gender roles] to relating this to power… [including]… access to knowledge, blocking this from girls.' It was explained how they explain that 'institutions and legislation are also… holding up the system of patriarchy. The issues are raised in relation to intersecting discriminations: class, caste, age. This is then related to the question of socialisation.' However, the analysis and approach is not entirely focused on 'the system' but also on men's own roles, identities, investments and often conflicted relations to this social order.

In Maharashtra, men in the Samajhdar Jodidar project also analyse and talk about gender inequity in terms of systemic features and as linking

with caste and class issues, but they also focus strongly on members' own processes of change by working on their relationships, typically with their wives or partners. Their motivations for changing gender relations are usually rooted in deeply personal experiences, which were illustrated through activists sharing 'life journeys' during the research in both Maharashtra and UP.

One activist described witnessing a lot of violence from his uncle (beating his wife and children) and how his own father, though never physically violent, was also manipulating his mother by saying 'you are lucky I am not like [him]'. He was very used to helping his mother as a child, but members of the community and of his family would tell her that 'you are raising your son like he is a girl'. Eventually he married a Nepali woman in an inter-caste marriage and had to leave his family to come to the city, an experience shared by several activists. Estranged from his family for a long time, he visited occasionally and felt a loss of emotional connection. Having a daughter of his own, he once intervened in an incident where he found some boys attacking a girl from his home-village during a ritual festival. Having saved the girl, his family were very upset because he had put his own life in danger for another's, and for a girl no less!

Another activist, now working directly with CHSJ, described having witnessed his powerful father as 'feared' in the community and local politics. This activist went through similar experiences of railing against injustices towards his mother and sister and later found work with a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) addressing violence against women and girls. To his deep disappointment, however, his close colleague who was the daughter of the organisation's director was pressured into an arranged marriage. Both MASVAW and Samajhdar Jodidar were described as supportive and life-changing spaces where these men could now work meaningfully for change, although most recognised their ongoing internal conflicts as men.

The husband of a female Sarpanch (head of the Gram Panchayat) in a village in Maharashtra, who had been supported by a local men's group, described how he also faced many pressures from others in the community whilst supporting his wife to go into local politics. However, he also explained that he still felt some internal conflict:

> I believe in gender equality and I have two daughters… and there should be no difference between women and men. If I am addressing others I can say this, but also − truly, inside − I think it would be better to have one of each. There is a pressure to carry out the heredity; an inside pressure.

5 Focusing on the gender–caste/class intersection to politicise men's engagement

The issue of how caste and class (and sometimes religion) intersect with gender, came up repeatedly as a pervasive and deep-rooted issue in how people saw gender inequity as an issue of social justice. Common examples included family and communal resistance to inter-caste and

inter-faith marriages, how local gender politics in the Panchayats are typically cast in class/caste terms with patriarchal elites, and how caste differences result in gendered differences in treatment or harassment at work or in education.

On the issue of marriage, not only are women legally discriminated against in a number of ways (including on the legal age of marriage), but inter-caste and inter-faith marriages are particularly castigated. One female activist from a MASVAW partner in UP – the Humsafar Support Centre for Women – explained how the judiciary and marriage courts do not generally support women's right to choose and how they will tend to support the wishes of their broader extended families. She explained that 'inter-caste, [or] inter-religious marriages, these are not accepted… You have to go to the special marriage court to register this'. And, she added, '[i]f there is going to be a marriage… then their images will be posted outside the institution, so there will be a response from the community'. A group of young (unmarried) men we met in Maharashtra also discussed this topic, pointing out that in inter-caste marriage 'there is some freedom for boys, but not for girls. There is a strong resistance to girls marrying across caste', suggesting that this cultural transgression is doubly proscribed for women. In an initial planning workshop for the research in UP, one MASVAW activist explained that 'sometimes inter-caste marriage is seen to increase the number in the religion from the men's side', adding that the 'man's religion is then the priority…'.

We came across several examples of how caste/class intersects with gender in the area of local politics and public participation. A female Sarpanch in a village in Maharashtra discussed an issue of men violently preventing her taking on the leadership position. She explained that '[w]ithin the opposition party, there are high levels of male domination', and that 'with their own women representatives, they will just put women's names on the sheet but men will attend [in their place].' The husband of another female Sarpanch in Maharashtra described some challenges he faced from others in the community because of his support for his wife's work in local politics, pointing out that the 'opposition came from rich, upper-class people in the opposition party'. He went on to explain that the political struggle in the community is 'mostly class-based' and that 'the rich are fighting back. The poor took on the gender equality agenda and the rich women don't leave their houses.' During our fieldwork back in UP, we came across this dilemma quite literally when our planned meeting with male community members and activists was 'torpedoed' by a local community-based organisation (CBO) having invited the husband of the block-level chief, or Block Pramukh (above village-level Panchayat and Sarpanch), who arrived in an expensive SUV and dressed in shining white clothes to 'lead' our meeting. Later nicknamed 'Mr White' by the research team, it was fascinating to observe this unelected local patriarchal power-broker – seating himself above the crowd on the steps of a monument, his back against the setting sun – explaining to the

villagers (all seated on the ground) and to us researchers (seated on the step in-between) how the problem of sexual harassment was really quite 'limited' locally and mainly a problem amongst the uneducated poor…

6 Working with institutions and intergenerational dynamics

In the work at universities in UP, one female professor of social work we met explained how sexual harassment and discrimination between colleagues in the institution interlink intersectionally: 'When men and women of different castes [work together], then there is discrimination.' She added that this is not limited to discrimination and harassment between genders, but also that 'men will break down other men and women in order to get ahead and to excel themselves in the institution'. In a discussion with a group of male university students in UP, we heard that 'cases of harassment have reduced dramatically since 2003' and that '[t]he situation was very bad, with no system in place where girls could go to raise the issues.' MASVAW activists have worked to institute anti-harassment committees, which has changed the situation, but they pointed out that after 'one case went there [to the committee] recently… the case was compromised through higher caste people closing ranks.' In fact, many people we met explained how cases of reported sexual harassment against women and girls within the universities tended to get settled with 'compromise'[4] in order to protect both the family's honour and the institution itself. The female professor concluded that 'there is a push back from [the] high caste – they are not ready to accept that they are a part of this violence.'

Similar types of institutional resistance were also described in the traditional Panchayats in the communities of UP, as one activist explained during a workshop to map out the issues:

> Our traditional caste-based Panchayat… *takes the decision on the social issue…* [such as the] *sexual violence issue in the community* [which] *does not go in the legal system… This is formed to save the prestige or honour of the caste and the community. So* [it] *is working for specific interests.*

The caste/class intersection with gender was seen as pervasive, but the age–gender intersection also becomes important in these groups' work to challenge patriarchy over time, including within specific institutions. An important inroad for mobilising new members and expanding these movements has been a focus on youth: particularly visible in the community outreach work. The framing of young men as 'agents of change' involves two key aspects, namely: (1) their more open minds as to questioning traditional gender roles and inequalities and (2) a type of demographic momentum effect, as more enlightened young cohorts gradually shift prevailing norms, by numbers and over time. Other dimensions to this effect included (3) youths' better education and access to social media, or (4) tapping into a gradually changing make-up of the social institution of families, with smaller and more nuclear families becoming more possible, as compared to the traditional set-up where young families typically reside with the husband's parents, or extended

natal family. Here, again, role modelling and peer support are seen as important, as activists point to real improvements in their lives to validate their dissidence, and express solidarity in the face of resistance. In the words of a leading activist in UP: 'If we want to make a society non-violent, we have to look at power structures which are patriarchal; and, if we can change those, we can build peace. That is, if men can become "maternal thinkers" too.' He explained that this is a long-term process involving 'positive parenting, fatherhood and socialisation'.

7 Reflections

From the outset we worked with local activists to co-construct the research questions and the central focus of analysing patriarchal oppression came from within the MASVAW group and their own process of critical reflection, supported by CHSJ over the years. The research (in both studies) provided a space to interrogate this further, in order that the learning would feed back into the evolution of the two activist networks as well as to provide conceptual, practical and theoretical insights to a more global audience, generating applied knowledge together across levels and spaces.

So what does intersectionality add that cannot be achieved with a simpler structural view of patriarchal power? The lessons from India show how it can help men (and women) perceive and understand the 'structure' of gendered oppression in a deeper way, connecting it to other forms of identity-based oppressions, based on class, caste, age and religion. Walby and colleagues' (2012) insistence on the crucial importance of the gender/ class intersection (and, in this case, caste) is well illustrated in this Indian context, where it has been recognised for many years (e.g. Mohanty 1991). Understanding this can help men better understand their own internal conflicts and concerns about masculinity, which can all too easily be manipulated in the intersectional patriarchal politics of their everyday lives.

Whilst taking a structural perspective on intersectionality, the work explored in India also engages with social change in a dynamic way, which balances structure and fluidity, not only in what Walby and colleagues (*op. cit.*) refer to as the 'mutual shaping of identities', but also of institutions and projects of justice. The focus on institutions as settings and as targets for change is instructive, as is the targeting of young men in order to shape intergenerational change. There is also an intergenerational dynamic to the groups themselves, where engaging new and young members creates a need for ongoing nurture and supportive relationships between the older and younger members, as well as an evolving engagement with women and women's groups as allies for mutual accountability.

We saw how using intersectionality facilitated activists' work on men's personal change, by working relationally – engaging with the lives of loved ones, colleagues and peers – as well as building their critical consciousness by appealing and linking it to broader social justice issues of caste, religious freedoms or human rights; issues with resonance from the Ghandian movement. It also helped them strategically address multiple 'levels' in their activism, by seeing intersectionality not only

in identities and power structures but also within institutions, processes and 'projects', as pointed out by Choo and Marx Ferree (2010). Understanding the structure of intersections of patriarchal oppression in their own lives, and those of others, clarified connections and contradictions in intersecting political projects of social justice, such as for women's empowerment or sexual rights – and how they related to those, 'as men'. This helped to identify promising alliances, by revealing common – and competing – objectives with other political projects.

It was clear from discussions as to how the engagement with women's groups had become central. As explained in one group: 'We work with several women's rights organisations… because we are a group of men and we may not be culturally sensitive to the rights of women.' However, it was added that 'we need to be aware of the feminist organisation[s] [which] are not holding a rights-based approach…'. One activist in another group pointed out a tension in taking a broader approach: 'Ghandian human rights values was [*sic*.] on all non-violence, but this meant that women's rights were subsumed and needed to be raised separately, [just like] Dalit rights.' He concluded that when '… we are talking about [the] broader issue of equality, we need to recognise what is being left out of this discussion.' Recognising the inherent contradictions and tensions in this is essential to strengthen men's engagement with – and accountability to – both women's struggles as well as social justice more broadly. A way forward can be to keep it focused to the most crucial intersections in any given setting and linking it back to gender, but without trying to find easy solutions and instead engaging with the complexity, as also recommended by Nash (2008).

8 Practical approaches

One way of dealing with this complexity is to focus on specific projects based on everyday concerns about local class or caste inequality, shared by women and men, whilst seeing gender equality as essential to any broader justice. This has enabled men to reach out to women, build trust and solidarity in collective action to address caste and gender inequality in Maharashtra, specifically campaigning together for women's participation in local politics. By focusing on how deeply internalised class, caste and gender hierarchies continue to subordinate women and damage men, exposing such intersectionality can help in building trust across gender within these deeply patriarchal contexts.

In terms of practical action and learning, intersectionality needs to be illustrated with compelling and thought-provoking examples of the micro-politics of peoples' everyday lives, whilst also linking it to the big issues of the day. During the research, activists explained their use of case studies and situational role-plays, but also called for new simple pedagogical tools and exercises in Hindi to be developed and adapted to local situations. This should include tools that can be applied in work with more powerful men as well as youth and activists, as much of their work – particularly at institutional levels – involved engaging with (and often challenging) male 'gatekeepers'.

Speaking of gatekeepers and more powerful men and women, it would be naïve to present an analysis which paints all privileged men as patriarchs, or all people with power as compromised beyond redemption. The reality is that some powerful men have also taken progressive roles for gender equality in social reforms (Chopra 2011; Hearn 2011) and many high caste and urban women in India are (and have been) formidable feminist activists, influencing progressive policies such as laws against rape and domestic violence (Stephen 2009). A sensitivity to intersectionality can also help with building awareness in our gendered power interactions within the research process. Building on a longer history of collaboration, we established a small cross-cultural and cross-gender core team across both studies, with more local additional members in each state, and used exercises like 'rivers of life' to learn about each other and establish trusting and 'horizontal' relationships. Having a female member in the small core team was particularly important to creating open conversations with female participants and in mixed groups. Not only did the research team and local activists debate and reflect on our various privileges and blind spots throughout the process, but we also witnessed and discussed local power dynamics intervening in the research process and vice versa, as alluded to in the example of 'Mr White'.

However, some further reflection is needed on the role of 'the other/ actual Mr White' in this North–South development encounter – i.e. on me, the lead author – and on the roles of others in the team. Whilst the white-dressed local patriarchal power-broker described in the previous section no doubt acted in response to our external intervention into local gender politics, he was also (apparently) invited by the local community-based men's group supported by MASVAW, in turn likely using our visit to consolidate their own political support from block level. Taken unawares by events beyond our control, I – for one – fell into the familiar role of the white Western visitor addressing my questions to 'him', the most powerful local man present, whilst my colleagues took the opportunity to interview other men from the village on the side-lines and out of the back-lit glare of the power performance on the steps of the monument. A somewhat similar situation unfolded in an urban university, where my particular interview schedule was intercepted by the dean, as well as an assistant proctor (responsible for staff discipline). That time I 'cottoned on' more quickly and indulged their attention and perspectives, allowing my local colleagues and female researcher from the UK to engage in separate group discussions with male and female students. What was particularly important in managing this was constant check-ins with the core research team to discuss 'what happened there?' and to develop a way of working 'as a group', where different members took on particular roles, but with openness to critique, self-critique and adaptation. There is clearly a strong need for deliberately finding new ways of engaging the powerful – challenging, bargaining and so forth – facilitating explicit awareness of both internalised and institutionalised resistance along with the risks of co-option, in a way that names and makes visible gendered dynamics in power.

9 Conclusion

Political change for gender equality requires personal change in individual men, but there is also need for organisation, peer support and strategic collaboration between likeminded men, as well as collaboration with women (including in holding men to account). We have seen how groups of men in different parts of India have managed to get politically relevant in challenging patriarchy in their lives; in homes, workplaces and communities. A crucial ingredient seems to be creating spaces to analyse and address the links between gender inequality and other power asymmetries to build deeper understandings of how gendered oppression operates, which also helps to nurture solidarities across gender and class/caste lines and to work together with women to take political action.

So what further theoretical development might be needed to strengthen the analysis and provide them and us with better tools and methods? In terms of research, I have argued elsewhere that, for undressing patriarchy, we need more study of masculinities as intersecting at certain centres of power rather than just at the extremes of poverty (Edström 2014) and that this calls for a 'move beyond Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed to some interactive pedagogy of the undressed' (Edström 2015: 82) or, what Cornwall terms, a 'Pedagogy for the Powerful' (this *IDS Bulletin*). Whilst group identity may be less relevant than 'individual identity', for many people with power, identification with (and in relation to) *masculinity* is still central in driving gender dynamics and transactions. Interesting new work is now becoming visible on exploring men's lives and masculinities in relation to neoliberal individualism and its associated myth of the 'self-made man' (Cornwall, Karioris and Lindisfarne 2016). Without wanting to over-emphasise the importance of the element of intersectionality in how patriarchy evolves, it seems clear that learning how to reflectively reveal intersectionality in our own lives and places of work can be one of the essential keys to help men – and others with some power – to shed the various blinkers of privilege which block critical consciousness, and to unlock the dark patriarchal prisons within which we otherwise blindly struggle to 'get ahead', or simply stay afloat.

Notes

* Written by Jerker Edström, with comments from Satish Kumar Singh and Thea Shahrokh and based on joint fieldwork in 2014–15. I would like to express heartfelt thanks for helpful review and constructive comments from Professor Andrea Cornwall.

1 Our collaboration was built on over a decade of work by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) engaging men and boys for gender justice. In 2007, IDS convened researchers, activists and donors at an international symposium in Dakar on 'Politicising Masculinities: Beyond the Personal' (Esplen *et al.* 2008), resulting in the book *Men and Development* (Cornwall, Edström and Greig 2011) and several collaborations. For example, IDS joined up with partners in India, Kenya and Uganda to mobilise men to challenge sexual and gender-based violence within institutional settings (Greig and Edström 2012),

which later evolved into another international symposium on 'Undressing Patriarchy' (Edström, Das and Dolan 2014) as well as a number of studies on men challenging violence and gender inequality across: (1) India, with the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ); (2) Kenya, with Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN); and (3) Uganda, with the Refugee Law Project (RLP).

2 I want to flag a minor 'health warning' here in that I do not see an intersectional analysis (or strategy) as being the same as a multidimensional one. By the latter, I refer to multiple dimensions of the same situation, event or problem. For instance, a legal change – such as the repeal of Article 377 against homosexuality in the Indian penal code, or its overturning – has social, economic, political and personal dimensions to the different benefits or challenges in the life histories of women, men and transgenders, as well as for society at large. These often *also* impact differently on people at varying intersectional gender–caste–sexuality positions, and/or on the political dynamics between social movements or political projects.

3 Fieldwork and interviews took place between August and December 2014 in Uttar Pradesh (Edström *et al.* 2015a) and in late July 2015 in Maharashtra (Edström *et al.* 2015b). Please refer to these research reports for further details of research methods and context.

4 The word 'compromise' was typically used for this, which was ironic in the sense that justice was likely also being compromised. That is, it was not clear that the complainants had much voice or weight in negotiating these compromises, as the latter were apparently settled between families, or between families and the institution.

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