

Sexual Violence and Class Inequality

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Resistance to sexual violence is increasing globally. There have been revelations of abuse in many countries, protests against rape in American universities, a riot in Delhi, and mass protests in Kolkota. It seems a tipping point has been reached and this movement will grow. This paper offers a new, and perhaps surprising, way of understanding of the roots of sexism, and sexual violence, which we hope will help take this movement forward.

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 different and unequal. 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.

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 and gendered inequality. 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.

This paper sets out these ideas and offers a radical approach to understanding the roots of sexism and sexual violence. Together these ideas can make sense of, first, the ugly variety of sexisms and sexual violence we face; second, the cover-ups which allow sexism and sexual violence to persist; and third, the popular resistance which is now exposing the scale of this oppression.

Our theoretical argument starts from the top, from class privilege. We begin with four short examples, before explaining our ideas at greater length.¹

Four examples

Our first two examples come from our own experience.

¹ This paper was given at the First International Symposium of Men and Masculinities in Izmir, 11-13 September 2014, in the Institute of Development Studies lecture series at the University of Sussex, 13 November 2014, and at the International Gender Studies Centre, Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford, 22 January 2015. An earlier, extended version of the argument is Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale, *Class, Gender and Neoliberalism*, 2014, at <http://rs21.org.uk/2014/01/04/class-gender-and-neoliberalism/>. Many people have helped us think through these ideas. For this version, we owe particular thanks to Nick Evans, Joe Hayns-Worthington, Frank Karioris, and Ross Wignall.

Nancy remembers –

Shortly after I arrived in the UK many years ago a lecturer (call him Charles) reached across his desk during a one-to-one tutorial and fleetingly touched my hand. I drew back and said nothing – I was actually unsure what had happened. I never mentioned the incident to anyone, but neither did I ignore it. Later I always made sure I kept at a distance when we met.

Thirty years later I told an old friend about the touching. She said, ‘You were lucky. You didn’t have to have much to do with him. He became notorious. After all, behind him was the Head of Department. And what a leech he was.’ My friend grimaced and made little slurping noises like Golem.

Sometime after this I had tea with Charles, now an Emeritus Professor. I was curious and asked if he remembered when we first met, and whether or not he’d meant to come on to me. Old and doddering as he was, he knew exactly what I was talking about. There was no hesitation – ‘Yes.’, he said, and looked rather pleased with himself.

Jonathan remembers –

Forty years ago, in London, my flatmate met a man in a pub. It was the week before Christmas. He was pleasant enough. They had a drink and came back to our house. They stopped in her room for a moment. He leapt on her, raped her, and ran straight out the door.

She came upstairs to the kitchen. Controlled, a bit shaky, she told us what had just happened. I offered to go to the police station with her. We never even sat down when we got there. We just talked to the officer on duty across the transom. I explained what had happened. The police officer told us that without a witness there would never be a case, and he just watched us as we left to go back to the house.

We all had Christmas dinner in the flat that evening. I still have the card she gave me. She and I both felt the police had failed us. I no longer think they failed. Rather, I now think they did their job. They are still doing the same job today.

Today the British police may treat women more politely, and take more time. But only 7% of rape complaints to the police end in a conviction. And the great majority of women, and men, who are raped never go to the police. This means that one rape in a hundred ends in a conviction.²

The usual understanding of sexual violence is that men do it, and then the authorities and the police fail to do act properly. We start with the fact that the police, lawyers and judges decide what crimes will be punished, and which will not be punished. Then some men rape in the knowledge that they will almost certainly get away with it. What we are saying is that the problem is not men, it is the criminal justice system.

But not just the criminal justice system. When abuse occurs, many women and girls complain to the social services, the head of the care home, the dean of students, or to their work supervisor. And they are told, sometimes

² The National Crime Survey in the UK does a house-to-house sample survey each year asking people questions about what crimes they have been subject to in the last year. For 2011/12, that survey showed that about 13% of rape survivors (women and men) went to the police. The police recorded 15,670 complaints of rape. Of these, 1,070 led to convictions. In other words, 7% of survivors who took cases of rape to the police saw their attacker convicted. But if you take the total number of rapes, reported and unreported, about 1% ended in a conviction (*An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales*, Ministry of Justice, Home Office, & Office for National Statistics: Statistics Bulletin, 10 January, 2013, pp.5-6). In the year ending June 2014 the total number of rapes reported rose to 17,096. This was probably because Operation Yewtree and other investigations of historic abuse encouraged people to feel that their evidence would be trusted and acted upon (*Crime in England and Wales, Year Ending June 2014*, Ministry of Justice, Home Office & Office for National Statistics: Statistics Bulletin, 16 October 2014, Table 8A). About 60% of prosecutions end in conviction – the problem is that the police and prosecutors take such a small proportion to court.

gently, sometimes with contempt, to go away. The problem is not men. It is how our all our institutions work, and how the people who run those institutions behave.

Gang abuse in the UK

Our third example concerns the gang abuse scandals recently exposed in Britain. In Oxford, for instance, seven men were convicted in 2014 of raping and prostituting girls between 2004 and 2012. They began controlling the girls when they were between eleven and fifteen. Most were particularly vulnerable children, many of them desperate for love and attention, who felt that was what they were getting.

Six young women testified in court. The police estimated that fifty girls were involved, but most were too afraid to testify. The *Guardian* reported:

Girl C said her adoptive mother went to social services in 2004 to beg for help. She said: ‘Mum wrote to all the key people in social services, called her own case conferences, invited agencies and got them sitting around the table, but they just passed the parcel between them – and all the while, I was getting increasingly under the power and influence of the gang.’

Two years later council agreed to put the girl in a temporary care home, but by then Girl C said: ‘It was too late: the grooming process had run its course. I was completely under [the gang's] control.’

Shortly after she was trafficked from Oxford to London for the first time, Girl C said, she had tried to talk to staff at the care home but was told the conversation was ‘inappropriate’.³

³ Sandra Laville, Ameila Hill and James Meikle, ‘Oxford child sex abuse ring: social services failed me, says victim’, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2013. See also Sandra

Many of the girls reported what was happening to social workers and to the police. However, nothing happened until Detective Chief Inspector Simon Morton, became concerned in 2010 about the large number of girls who were disappearing in Oxford only to reappear, and then disappear again, over and over.⁴

Simon Morton was an exceptionally decent man. He was also part of a struggle. Things were changing. The struggle was between the abused and those who covered up. But it was also happening inside police forces, and news rooms, between those who favoured the status quo and those who wanted change.

A similar gang had been finally convicted in Rochdale in 2012. In 2014, Rotherham Council issued an independent report into abuse there. The report told a similar story, and estimated that between 1997 and 2013 some 1,400 girls had been abused in a town of 250,000 people.⁵ All comment assumed that similar stories could be told about many places in Britain.⁶ We return to the topic of gang abuse below.⁷

Military rape

Laville and Alexandra Topping, 'Oxford gang skilfully groomed young victims then sold them for £600 a time', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2013.

⁴ Sandra Laville, 'Oxford child sex abuse ring: how police overcame past mistakes to jail gang', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2013.

⁵ Alexis Jay, *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, 1997-2013*.

⁶ As sadly seems to be proving the case. See Randeep Ramesh, 'Rotherham abuse scandal is tip of iceberg – police chief', *The Guardian*, 16 October 2014, p.1, 11; Helen Pidd, 'Child sexual exploitation is the norm in parts of Manchester, MP warns', *The Guardian*, 30 October 2014, p. 8; and, for example, Steven Morris and Claire Hayhurst have since reported that a 'Judge jails 13 members of child sex abuse ring' in Bristol, *The Guardian*, 29 November, 2014, p.25.

⁷ See p.41, n.53 and p.51 ff.

Our fourth example concerns the institutional support for sexual violence in the military. There are many examples of the simple proposition: generals decide whether or not soldiers will rape. By which we mean that, while in any army there are always a few soldiers who rape, systematic rape, on a large scale, only happens when commanders encourage it.

It is now well-known that in 1945 the Soviet Red Army raped hundreds of thousands of German women. The Soviet generals wanted to terrify the German population.⁸ By contrast, in the Second World War, the American generals wanted the support of the civilian population in France, Italy and Germany as they fought their way to Berlin, and this meant the American armed forces raped few women in Europe.

Yet different wars lead to different decisions. Consider this series of reversals.

In the American War in Viet Nam, the American armed forces raped very large numbers of Vietnamese women between 1965 and 1972. This time the generals wanted to terrify the civilians and drive them out of the countryside.⁹

By contrast, in the 1980s, the Soviet army fought in Afghanistan for seven years. This time the soldiers raped almost no one. This was not kindness – the Soviet army killed between half a million and a million Afghans. It was because the Soviet generals knew the rage against wide scale rape in the Afghan population would be so great that the army would lose control of the cities.

Now, in the American oil wars and occupations in the Middle East of the early 21st century, American soldiers have raped very few civilian women in

⁸ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, London: Virago, 2011.

⁹ Gina Marie Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010. For the background see Jonathan Neale, *A Peoples History of the Vietnam War*, New York: The New Press, 2004.

Afghanistan and Iraq. Like the Soviet generals, the American generals knew this would be a mistake.

This is not because the American generals have grown kindly. They continued to tolerate sexual violence within the American military. A semi-official online survey found that 5% of service women and 1% of service men reported being sexually assaulted in the previous year. Rates were higher in the navy and the marines, and higher in combat zones. We can assume that these figures under report the actual rates for both men and women. So a conservative estimate would be that at least 10% of American service women in Iraq and Afghanistan were sexually assaulted each year.¹⁰ Their commanding officers tolerated this, understood it, and effectively enabled it.

Sometimes the decisions generals make can be complicated. The American historian Mary Louise Roberts has written an important history of the sexual lives of American soldiers in Normandy in 1944, right after D Day. *What Soldiers Do* tells a complex story, carefully.¹¹

Roberts describes how before D Day the American officers and press had told their soldiers that French women would be easy, and grateful for liberation. In practice it was not that simple, and there were a significant

¹⁰ The RAND survey was *Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military: Top Line Estimates for Active-Duty Service Members from the 2014 RAND Military Workplace Study*, National Defence Research Institute, 2014. This was based on a large sample, but not a random one. However, people are often reluctant to answer questions about rape and abuse in surveys. This will apply particularly to men, though it is worth noticing that this study produced an estimate of 14,000 American servicemen sexually assaulted each year – 38 a day. There is a great deal of coverage of abuse in the military now. You can start with Lindsay Rowenthal and Lawrence Korb, *Twice Betrayed: Bringing Justice to the U.S. Military's Sexual Assault Problem*, Center for American Progress, November, 2013; Nathaniel Penn, 'Son, Men Don't Get Raped', *GQ*, www.gq.com/long-form; the brave first-person accounts at www.mydutytospeak.com; and the moving photos in Mary F. Calvert, 'Photos: Women Who Risked Everything to Expose Sexual Assault in the Military', *Mother Jones*, 8 September 2014.

¹¹ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in WWII France*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

number of rapes. Many French people in Normandy were also outraged by the prostitution around American camps. Some local French mayors complained.

The senior American officers did not want trouble with French civilians. They quickly came up with a creative solution. They swiftly tried and hung 25 African-American soldiers for rape, and 4 white soldiers.¹² This was not a mass trial, but a series of different trials. Roberts looks at the cases in detail, and concludes that some of the black soldiers hanged may have been guilty, and some would certainly have been found innocent in a fair trial. The American army staged the hangings in public, and put notices in the local press inviting French villagers to attend.

This solution drew on a rich American tradition of lynching black men for rape. It gave a clear message to all American soldiers, while not provoking the kind of backlash back home that hanging more white soldiers would have produced. There was little rape after that by American soldiers in France, and very little in Germany

Starting with class society

How do we make sense of our four examples? Running through all of them are the ways that people with power at the top of society make sexual abuse and sexual violence possible. To understand why, we need to look at the way sexism and violence are entangled with class.

The best way is to start, not with capitalism, but 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, that is when class inequality began, and with it began systematic gendered inequality too.

Before class societies, there were of course gendered differences which were marked in a wide variety of ways. But there was no systematic or

¹² Roberts, 2012, pp.195-254.

enduring gendered inequality. Indeed, gender equality is a notable feature of the small classless societies of foraging and hunting people that we know about from the first accounts of anthropologists, missionaries and explorers.¹³

However, most societies with settled grain agriculture, where people farm the same land from one year to another have been class societies.¹⁴ In class societies some people are fed all their lives by the work of other people, and they are able to pass this privilege down to the next generation. And it is with the rise of class society that we see the rise of gendered inequality.

Let us mark the logic of this argument. It is important.

¹³ For an introduction to a wide literature, start with Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus, *The Creation of Inequality*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013; Martin Jones, *Feast: Why Humans Share Food*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Richard Lee, *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; and Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Myths of Male Domination*, Chicago: Haymarket, 2008.

This is not to say all hunting and gathering societies were egalitarian. Slavery and class could, and did, develop in some places where it was possible to control great concentrations of resources, like the salmon runs on the northwest coast of North America. We also have descriptions of farming communities which ‘slash and burn’ their fields and move on every few years. Some slash and burn communities tolerated considerable inequality, but people did not usually pass their unequal status down to their children. And many of these communities were egalitarian. Joanna Overing’s excellent account of Piaroa communities in Venezuela is of particular interest here, because there gendered differences were highly marked, but men and women were equal.

See Joanna Overing, ‘Men Control Women? The “Catch 22” in the Analysis of Gender’, *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies*, 1, 2: pp.135-56; Joanna Overing, ‘Styles of Manhood: An Amazonian Contrast in Tranquillity and Violence’, in Signe Howell & Roy Willis, (eds.), *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp.79-99; and Joanna Overing Kaplan, *The Piaroa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975. Also see Marilyn Strathern’s *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, an astonishing extended account of how the unexamined assumptions of Western anthropologists and feminist scholars pervade and have distorted Melanesian ethnography.

¹⁴ On the transition to grain agriculture and the rise of class societies and the state, see Flannery & Marcus, 2013, and Jones, 2007. James C. Scott too is now focusing on ‘How Grains Domesticated Us’ (School of Oriental and African Studies, London, Food Studies Centre Distinguished Lecture Series, 11 December 2014).

Patriarchy and sexism – the systematic patterns of inequality between women and men in any particular setting – were around long before capitalism. So we cannot explain sexism in terms of capitalism alone. And explanations that blame men simply can't work, because there are men in non-class societies, but no systematic gendered inequality there.¹⁵

¹⁵ Neither type of explanation works historically, and in effect both explanations accept mainstream ideologies of gender difference. For instance, Victoria Browne, seeking an explanation for the sexual abuse which seems rife in Britain, urges a revival of the 1970s radical feminist focus on men and patriarchy. See 'The persistence of patriarchy: Operation Yewtree and the return of 1970s feminism', *Radical Philosophy*, 188, Nov/Dec, 2014, pp.9-19.

The usual socialist feminist explanations don't work either. They explain sexism in terms of women's separate unwaged domestic labour in the home. But these explanations only work for capitalism. They don't work for thousands of years of unequal class societies where women and men worked together in the fields, no one was paid a wage, but still women were unequal. See for instance, Tithi Bhattacharya, 'What is Social Reproduction Theory?', *RS21*, 18 March 2014: <http://rs21.org.uk/2014/03/18/what-is-social-reproduction-theory/>.

Another problem with this socialist/Marxist 'social reproduction' argument is that, ironically, it relies on a model of what Marx called the 'bourgeois family', the very family form he set out to critique. This also means the theory ignores the fact that household and family units and the work done by men and women all varies enormously across class societies, past and present. We have written elsewhere about 'social reproduction theory' and the range of problems associated with abstract, unitary ideas of 'the family': see Nancy Lindisfarne & Jonathan Neale, 'The Trouble with Social Reproduction Theory', *RS21*, 20 March 2014: <http://rs21.org.uk/2014/03/20/the-trouble-with-social-reproduction-theory/>. And see p.28 below.

Recently, the phrase 'social reproduction theory' has also been used to refer in a very general way to the conditions which allow for human reproduction. David Camfield has commented favourably of these ideas, though they seem to beg far more questions than they answer. Camfield writes,

'This makes capital dependent on, to quote Sue Ferguson and David McNally, socio-historically located 'biological processes specific to women – pregnancy, childbirth, lactation.' This 'induces capital and its state to control and regulate female reproduction and ... to reinforce a male-dominant gender order.' I think this is important because it helps us understand how gender oppression is reproduced in capitalist societies (though there's more to it than what capital and state power do — we also have to analyze what men of different classes do). But it doesn't tell us anything about the origins of gender oppression or the forms it takes in pre-capitalist societies. (*RS21*, 24 March 2014.)

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.¹⁶

Violence and arbitrary class power

Clearly if the rise of systematic gendered inequality is association with class society, this is the place to begin. By class society, we mean that there is a ruling group who live for most of their lives off the labour of others. 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 things are more complicated, but almost all of us still work for them.

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 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

¹⁶ Jane Collier described the problem clearly some thirty years ago. She wrote 'To understand conceptions of gender, we cannot look at what men and women are or do, but rather must ask what people want and fear, what privileges they seek to claim, rationalize, and defend. To understand gender, we must understand social inequality. And, if gender conceptions are idioms for interpreting and manipulating social inequality, then we should expect notions of femininity and masculinity to change when one organization of inequality gives way to another.' ('From Mary to Modern Woman: The Material Basis of Marianismo and its Transformation in a Spanish Village', *American Ethnologist*, 1986, 13, 1, p.101)

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 in turn 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. We have argued at length elsewhere¹⁷ that sexism too is probably 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. 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, this makes them likely enforcers – as bodyguards, soldiers, or domestically – in any particular unequal society. There was violence by feudal thugs and henchmen. Nowadays there is the violence of class enforcers like the police and the army, but also by 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. Žižek's idea of distinguishing three types of violence – direct violence, anonymous violence and symbolic violence - is a useful way to start.¹⁸

¹⁷ Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale, *Class, Gender and Neoliberalism*, 2014, at <http://rs21.org.uk/2014/01/04/class-gender-and-neoliberalism/>. And see R. Brian Ferguson, 'Pinker's List: Exaggerating Prehistoric War Mortality', and 'the Prehistory of War and Peace in Europe and the Near East', in Douglas P. Fry, ed., *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp.112-131 and 191-240.

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence (Big Ideas)*, London: Profile, 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 anybody. Who is responsible for the drones which kill women and men in Afghanistan? Which British soldiers, which squaddies, which officers and which British politicians, are responsible for the murder of Baba Musa in an Iraqi jail? And third there is symbolic violence. Star wars. Jesus on the Cross. Bullying. The manipulation of fear.

Resistance

In the same way that violence is central to arbitrary class power, so too is resistance central to understanding the limits of arbitrary class power.

Resistance is the other side of the equation. Resistance and power must be treated in tandem. They are aspects of an ongoing process and struggle which is the very essence of the class divide.¹⁹

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 commonalities between themselves and other people. A notion of 'common humanity' lies at the heart of all the

¹⁹ See in the first instance the outstanding work of James C. Scott, *The Weapons of the Weak*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; and James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland South East Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

world religion traditions, and everywhere there are always other available popular ideologies of fairness.²⁰

Such universalizing discourses share much history and common ground. Because they emphasize sameness and can appeal to the majority of the people at any one time and place, they are powerful ways to contest authority and confront power. 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 on.²¹

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.²²

²⁰ Aspects of Islam and Christianity downplay difference, emphasize similarity and the equality of weak, vulnerable human beings before God. Other popular ideologies of fairness, including Marxism, derive from Enlightenment accounts of human potential. These latter focus on the materiality of human lives – on human needs for food, sex and shelter. And they rely on notions of rationality, secularism and democratic forms of government. There is also another, unnamed, universalizing discourse which allows people all around the world to shrug and say, ‘There are good people and bad people, all kinds of people everywhere, but in the end, we are all human beings’. This offers scope for great decency in human relations.

²¹ For a case study which develops these ideas, see Nancy Lindisfarne, ‘Exceptional Pashtuns?: Class Politics, Imperialism and Historiography’, in Benjamin D. Hopkins and Magnus Marsden, eds., *Beyond Swat*, London: Hurst, 2012, pp.119-134.

²² 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. See Spencer Ackerman and Julian Borger,

Sexism, the ultimate ideology of divide and rule

However violence alone is never enough to confront ideas of sameness and the disposition of ordinary people to favour, and fight for, human equality. To keep inequality in place, the ruling class also needs ideologies which naturalize difference and inequality, ideologies which divide and rule, ideologies which make inequality seem normal and right.

When something is ‘naturalized’, it is made to seem natural, as if it is God-given, ‘meant to be’, as something hard-wired, in biology or in our genes or built into the physics of our planet. When something is successfully ‘naturalized’, it seems wrong or impossible for ordinary people to challenge it or want change. The class hierarchy is naturalized when we feel it is right and proper that the royals should live in palaces, and it doesn’t 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, nationality or 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. And, of course, to understand that in practice we experience the harms of gender, race, class, sect and other inequalities simultaneously.²³

‘Torture: The Stain on America’, *The Guardian*, 10 December 2014, pp.1 and 6-7; and Natalie Nougayrède, ‘CIA Torture: Europe Must Admit Its Own Complicity’, *The Guardian*, 30 December 2014, p.35.

²³ Anne Ferguson, in *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, makes the point well: ‘Analysis foregrounds a complex, dynamic interaction of race and gender. Sex is a powerful marker of difference as well as race. While the concept of intersecting social categories is a useful analytical device for formulating this convergence, in reality we presume to know each other instantly in a coherent, apparently seamless way. We do not experience individuals as bearers of separate identities, as

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, marking it 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, do. And we suggest that sexism does this ugly job better than racism because it creates a distance between each of us and every one of the people we love. It is new, and useful, to see sexism in this light.

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.

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

gendered and then as raced, or vice versa, but both at once. The two are inextricably intertwined and circulate together in the representations of subjects and the experience of subjectivity' (pp.22-23).

energy and the thrill of sexual desire and pleasure. We know this, yet consider also how both 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. 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. And while surely you love your little girl and your little boy equally, 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?²⁴

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, muscles, our metabolism, our DNA, the organization of our nervous systems, 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 linked to a presumption that men are more equal than women. Gender is marked in all those moments – from a fleeting gesture, a word to egregious sexual 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.²⁵ Gender marking comes into play when a class elite want to hide their privilege

²⁴ *Nancy has another example* – Jonathan and I have been working on these ideas this past year, trying to think our way through these intellectual tangles. And at the beginning, when the going got rough and we couldn't agree, our arguments immediately became gendered in stereotyped sexist ways. If he refused to listen, to see my point, or agree with my analysis, I thought he was an arrogant prick. And if I dared to suggest as much, he would turn on me and say I was being hysterical, 'a difficult woman'. We've broken this habit now, but only just, and not always, because that is how deep the contradictions of love and inequality go!

²⁵ We return to the idea of gender marking below, p.23 ff.

by encouraging us to focus and fight among ourselves. Because sexism confuses us, by twisting our love and all that we like about ourselves – our compassion, our empathy, our concern for other people – with inequality, it serves to naturalize all inequality incredibly well.

The sexist conundrums, whether about parenting, romance or writing, are charged with emotional and intellectual confusion. They are also the enormously rich material from which the ruling class shapes and fashions various sexism to fit their purpose. We experience inequality in bed, or over the breakfast table, or when looking after our children – think of all those niggling, and sometimes nasty arguments – about whose turn it is to cook, clean, change a nappy, or relax with friends or in front of the TV. When inequality is always intimately there, then it is much, much more difficult to question inequality at university, at work or anywhere else in our lives.

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.

This means 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.²⁶

²⁶ Cross-culturally, these rules vary greatly. But everywhere they clarify what are acceptable behaviours between close kin, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Other rules clarify what are acceptable behaviours between possible sexual

In class societies, however, confusions between love, attraction, excitement and desire simultaneously threaten class control and offer another means of class control. When class boundaries are blurred and rules are broken, what happens depends on who exactly is breaking the rules and who is charged with enforcing them. There are always questions of interpretation and relative power and resistance. 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 control.²⁷

Sexism and lies – Six rules of thumb

To make sense of sexism, and begin to escape its tyranny, we need always to keep in mind a simple series of rules of thumb useful for asking questions.

First, it is important to understand that we are making an argument here that challenges every hint of essentialized sexual identity. We are saying there are no universals, no uniform or homogeneous category ‘Woman’ which supposedly includes all ‘women’. And no universal, uniform or homogenous category ‘Men’, which supposedly includes all ‘men’. In practices of course we all know that all ‘women’ are not the same, nor are all ‘men’, which tells us

partners: who it is okay to fall in love with, to have sex with, and to marry – and who not. And yet other rules define class boundaries.

²⁷ Consider how until quite recently in the UK and the US, licit sex was strictly marked by wedding rings and wedding rituals. ‘Fallen’ women (but almost never their male lovers) were shamed, and often terribly punished for conceiving a child out of wedlock. Such was the story of Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel *The Scarlett Letter*, and the real and terrible fate of the young girls in Ireland banished to and enslaved in the Magdalene Laundries. And see p.24, n27 on the ways politicians use homophobia, and systematically target gays and lesbians, make claim political legitimacy.

that when such boxes, and their labels, are being used, these are acts of sexism and the labelling is a tool of class power.

Second, it is useful to understand that the labels used most in Europe and the Americas are ancient. They are stereotypes which have been around for at least 3,000 or 4,000 years, since Sumer in ancient Mesopotamia. They are in the Bible.

They are the binaries we all know well:

Men are to women,
as strong is to weak,
as active is to passive,
as rational is to emotional,
as public is to private and domestic,
as productive is to reproductive,
as upper class is to working class,
as white is to black,
as the West is to the East,
as Christian is to Muslim,
and so on, and on, and on.

These binary contrasts are powerful and confusing. It is almost impossible to avoid them, or think outside them, or past them.

Often the logic works such that if women gain, men lose – and if men gain, women lost. But the logic can also work as an add-on, without limits. Then it becomes easy to imply that there are no bounds to women's foolishness, or men's aggression.

Moreover, the clever ways these labels work, and the boxes they create, mean they can attach to our bodies, but also to the way we talk, the clothes we wear and the cars we drive. These contrasts can be used to gender every single

thing we touch, and everything we do. Indeed, the slippage between the binary contrasts can account for absolutely any social configuration you might want to describe.

Remember gender is marked all the time in those very moments 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.

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 an unthinking 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.

Every ruling class has an enormous investment in gendered labels and boxes, and in the divide and rule tactics they make possible. But, the labels and boxes are lies, just plain lies, whether they are about gender or about race or religion. Our bodies are not differentiated in categorical ways. We are not all 'real men' and 'real women'. There is no simple black and white, and no simple male and female.

The differences between our bodies – the shape of my breasts compared with yours, or the length of your dick compared with his – these differences are not binary contrasts at all. In reality, each of these differences lie on a continuum. And in our everyday lives we know this. We know that each and

every one of us, and our bodies, vary. And we also know that, from one to the next, our bodies don't vary very much.

Of course we are all different, but we're all mostly the same. But this 'all mostly the same' is anathema to an elite who want to claim that they are fundamentally different from the rest of us – and superior. So elites promote the stereotypes and the labels. And when the categories and labels are naturalized, they seem permanent, unchanging, and they offer a very conservative way of looking at the world.

It is also the case that elites are committed to a rigid interpretation of these essentialized categories – because that is how the stereotypes work. Things, and people, who blur the categories must be suppressed, because they show up the lies. Homosexuals, trans people, bossy, big balled women, cuckolded, henpecked men – all the people who differ from the idealized norms, are ridiculed and often punished, with violence or with exile. And they are sometimes killed.²⁸

Third, to make sense of sexism we need always think relationally. This is about logic, but it doesn't mean that the label only work as contrast sets, there can be no 'men' without 'women', nor 'straights' without 'gays'. So the trick here is not just to follow the noise and hullabaloo, but always to ask about the unmarked, but often dominant or superior, category as well. So when someone,

²⁸ Think of Annie Proulx's story 'Brokeback Mountain' in *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, London: Fourth Estate, 1999, pp.281-317. See Chase Madar, 'The Overpolicing of American Sex; Why must American Sexual Mores Lean So Heavily on Police and Prosecutors?' <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/12/sex-police-crimesoffendersregistry.html>. And see for instance Patrick Kingsley's report from Cairo on how following Sisi's right wing coup, 'Egypt intensifies crackdown on gay men', *The Guardian*, 10 December 2014, p.21. Though homosexuality is not illegal in Egypt, 'Activists speculate that the recent rise in arrests is linked to the government's desire to prove that it can be as socially conservative as the Muslim Brotherhood, which was ousted from power in July 2013'. Equally, Monica Mark reports on the Gambia, where a 'Net [is] tightening on gay and lesbian west Africans' where the autocratic president is using this crackdown to frighten people and to seek legitimacy for what is seen as an anti-Western stance. (*The Guardian*, 5 December 2014, p.38).

or the media, are banging on about ‘women’ or ‘gays’, make sure you consider the implications of what they are saying for straight men and perhaps elite straight men in particular. Just as when someone uses racist terms, remind yourself what implications the comment has for those who are white, or British, or otherwise assumed to be ‘normal’ and not ‘different’

Fourth, we need always to think comparatively and consider how ideas and practices (about marriage, or divorce, say) change over time. Looking at an institution or cultural habit which was once taken for granted, and now holds little sway, gives us an idea how ideologies naturalize particular social practices. This also allows us to think critically about causality and processes of social change.

Fifth, we need to think of relations 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.²⁹ 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.

Sixth, 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.

²⁹ See Andrea Cornwall & Nancy Lindisfarne, ‘Introduction’ and ‘Dislocating Masculinity: Gender, Power and Anthropology’, in Cornwall, Andrea and Nancy Lindisfarne (eds.), *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, London: Routledge, 1994, pp.1-10 and 11-47.

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.

In any situation some men will conform more closely to masculine ideals than others, just as some women will be judged more 'womanly' than their sisters. And this means that men who can plausibly adopt dominant masculine styles, are also likely to dominate others. Other men will find themselves in weaker social positions, as subordinates who are seen, perhaps as 'less masculine', perhaps as 'more feminine' than their superior fellows. And, of course, the same is so between women who dominate others, and those who do not.

Unequal relations between people of the same class - women and men vis-a-vis each other, among women and among 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. Sexism divides us even better than racism and distracts us from the inequalities in the system between the ruling class and the rest.

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 destroy the monasteries and steal their wealth, or enclose the common land. 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. Watching political parties in the UK or the US scramble for donations is an object lesson in ruling class manoeuvring.³⁰ We also know that

³⁰ Marriage strategies are often a key to this process – whether we consider Henry VIII, or the impoverished British aristocrats who married American heiresses, or parvenu industrialists' daughters.

And for the creation of other positions of power, see for instance Gary Younge, 'Welcome to the Greatest Charade that Money Can Buy', (*The Guardian*, 7 April 2014, p.25), who writes about how, by abolishing funding limits on campaign donations, the US Supreme Court 'has accelerated the capture of democratic politics by a wealthy elite'. While the way the three major political parties joined together to oppose the referendum for Scottish independence speaks volumes about the interests of the British political elite.

Aditya Chakraboty explains the myth of the free market as an ideology which allows states to 'give businesses their revenues and so their power', (*The Guardian*, 9 December 2014, p.37). The TTIP negotiations would allow big corporations to take national governments to court. (On the campaign against TTIP, see https://secure.38degrees.org.uk/pages/ttip_home#). And Nesrine Malik further describes tax havens and other devices which mean that 'Corporate power, in the shape of multinational corporations, has far outstripped the physical and legal capabilities of the national sovereign government.' (*The Guardian*, 10 December 2014, p.37).

hanging onto class power is a ruthless business – today, the utter disregard for threat of climate chaos is a clear measure of that.³¹

Most of the politics and history we are taught are accounts of 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 feudalism changed. Other sexist ideas justify changing forms of capitalist economy. We are all familiar with 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 mill girls 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

³¹ See particularly Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, London: Allen Lane, 2014.

top-down political project adopted by a capitalist ruling class in response to an economic crisis.³² 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. Some 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.³³ But most changes have increased inequality as neoliberal capitalists have, over the past forty years, sought to privatize the welfare state and squeeze more profit out of the system. Meanwhile debates over abortion and birth control – battles we thought were long won - have re-emerged.³⁴ And, for instance, cuts in legal aid have made women facing domestic violence even more vulnerable than before.³⁵ Even breast-feeding in public has again become a political issue.³⁶

³² Jonathan Neale, *What's Wrong with America? How the Rich and Powerful have Changed American and Now Want to Change the World*, London: Vision, 2004; and Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, London: Penguin, 2008.

³³ We discuss the gay movement further below, see p.34ff. Some apparently positive steps toward equality are more confusing. In Britain women have fought and won the right to service in the police frontline, 'in fire arms units and smashing down doors'. It seems clear now that combat roles in the British army will also soon be open to women, in spite of senior male officers insisting they 'lack the killer instinct' for close combat. (Matthew Weaver, 'Fallon backs women recruits to get combat role in British army', *The Guardian*, 20 December 2014, p.6.)

³⁴ 'American states have passed 231 laws restricting abortion, more than any time in the four decades since Roe v. Wade' ('Funds fill a Void as Abortion Clinics Close', *International New York Times*, 28 November 2014, pp.1 and 7.)

³⁵ Louise Tickle, 'Abused and afraid – and denied legal aid', *The Guardian*, 29 November 2014, p.40.

³⁶ Mark Tran, 'Mother "humiliated" after Claridge's staff make her cover up while breastfeeding', *The Guardian*, 3 December 2014, p.7; and Jonathan Jones, 'Breastfeeding in European Art: An Image of Everything UKIP Abhors', *The Guardian*, 9 December 2014, p.17.

Other neoliberal changes have had other, often very confusing, consequences for gender relations. In the universities, it is true, that women and men are more equal compared with forty years ago. Among themselves – 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 and drawn closer to the ruling class. Obama’s presidency is part of this process. Indeed, the legacy of women’s liberation and rising expectations has been a source and lent strength to the new styles of resistance to campus abuse and rape.

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 council 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, introduced zero hour contracts and much more. These changes have had the direct effect of increasing working class poverty. Now the adverse consequences of poverty for children are recast as parenting failures.³⁷ 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 and labelled ‘benefit cheats’. At the same time further Tory government proposals will

³⁷ Zoe Williams, ‘A No-Risk Business’, *The Guardian*, 6 December 2014, p.15.

mean ‘women will overwhelmingly bear the brunt of the freeze in tax credits and benefits’.³⁸

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 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.³⁹

³⁸ Nicholas Watt, ‘Women hardest hit by Osborne tax credit freeze’, *The Guardian*, 20 December 2014, p.2.

³⁹ It has been now proposed to cut funds to the police, and replace these public servants with enforcers employed by private security firms as new, less democratic, way of securing elite power. See Alan Travis, ‘Police Predict Fresh Job Cuts’, *The Guardian*, 21 November 2014, pp.1-2. The tragedy of Jimmy Mubenga’s death gives us an idea of what this may mean. Mubenga died after being restrained on a British Airways deportation flight in October 2010. Robert Booth and Matthew Taylor describe ‘Mubenga’s widow [as] ‘shocked’ as jury clears security guards on manslaughter charge’, (*The Guardian*, 17 December 2014, p.6). Yet the day after this verdict was announced we learn that the ‘Mubenga jury [was] not told of [the] guards’ racist texts’. In her report the coroner said, ‘There was enough evidence to cause real concern ... that such racism might ... manifest itself in inappropriate treatment of’ [detainees and deportees, but her report and the inquest verdict of unlawful killing were withheld from the jury of the orders of Old Baily Judge Spencer (See Robert Booth, *The Guardian*, 18 December 2014, pp.1-2; and Frances Webber, ‘The Mubenga case exposed a system in denial over racism’, *The Guardian*, 20 December 2014, p.32.)

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.⁴⁰

‘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 work.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Nancy Lindisfarne, ‘Starting from Below: Fieldwork, Gender and Imperialism Now’, in Armbruster, Heidi & Anna Laerke (eds.), *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2008, pp.23-44.

On the humanitarian NGOs in Afghanistan, see Jennifer Fluri, ‘Armored Peacocks and Proxy Bodies: Gender Geopolitics in Aid/Development Spaces in Afghanistan’, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 2011, 28 (4), pp.529-536, and compare Antonio De Lauri, ‘Boredom and Crisis in the Humanitarian Realm’, *Anthropology Today*, 30/6, December 2014, p.23-25.

⁴¹ See Laura Maria Agustin, *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*, London: Zed, 2007; Christine Chin, *Cosmopolitan Sex Workers: Women and Migration in a Global City*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 2007; Kemala Kempadoo, ed.,

Perhaps most important of all, the rhetoric of ‘protecting women’ acts as a smokescreen and diverts our attention from the vulnerable women who have not been protected.

Who among the ruling class protected the vulnerable children abused by priests? Who among the elite or their enforcers sought to protect the 1400 extremely vulnerable young women from Rotherham from the rape and sexual abuse? Rather the concern of the elite and their managers has been to cover up.

And these cover ups are far less gendered than classed. Women social workers, teachers, women police officers, BBC 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 truth.

Abuse and resistance

The ruling class manipulate the stereotypes to create ideologies of gender and race to fit their needs. But it is ultimately the threat of violence keeps these ideologies in place.

We know this for race. In South Africa under apartheid police and army violence kept racial boundaries in place. In the US, under slavery and today, the violence of the master and the police keep black people in their place. Racialized abuse and violence was and is part of the system of class power.

It is the same with gender. The ideology of sexism is also backed by sexual violence. And it is senior police officers, senior managers and generals who determine the parameters of sexual harassment and sexual violence. In effect they set the rules. They decide the forms of sexism they will tolerate, allow and encourage within the institutions they run.

Of course the sexual regimes mandated by senior officers and manager are contested. People object. But the vulnerable people who are most harmed

Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights, Boulder: Paradigm, 2005; and Anna Morcom, *Illicit Worlds of Indian Dance: Cultures of Exclusion*, Londo: Hurst, 2013.

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. Often they are junior people in the institution. 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 whistleblowers are usually discredited, and likely to pay a considerable personal price.⁴²

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.

These recent struggles have their roots in the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Women's liberation and feminism, and gay liberation made it possible to talk about sexism. Gay liberation made it possible to talk about homophobia. And the American ruling class had to compromise with women's liberation. So they looked for other ways to increase gendered inequality. When AIDS appeared in the 1980s, gay liberation suddenly seemed the weak link. For the first five years of the epidemic, President Reagan refused to say the word 'AIDS' and the American government did nothing. (The Center for

⁴² See C. Fred Alford, *Whistleblowers: Broken Lives and Organizational Power*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001; and Kathryn Bolkovac with Cari Lynn, *The Whistleblower: Sex Trafficking, Military Contractors, and One Woman's Fight for Justice*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. See also the informal debates among British police about whistleblowing in Alex Varley-Winter, 'Protected: paedophile MPs and "prominent people", say police', *Exaro*, 13 December 2014, at <http://www.exaronews.com/articles/5429/protected-paedophile-mps-and-prominent-people-say-police>

Disease Control in Atlanta was the honourable exception). But gay men fought back by campaigning for safe sex, and with protests and marches demanding tolerance and drugs that worked. They also fought back just by caring for each other, by reaching out to family and friends for help, and by talking openly. There was much grief and many deaths, but politically they won. The South African fight for generic AIDS drugs was another decisive turning point for the movement. Now around the world gays and lesbians are fighting offensively, not defensively, for same sex marriage.⁴³

Because of women's liberation and the gay movement, people made more sexual choices, and did so openly and with less shame. And because both feminism and gay liberation allowed people to talk about their choices, it also became possible to talk about what was not chosen, and to talk about rape.

That began to make it possible for some brave adults who had been raped as children to begin to speak out. This took time – their oppression was deeper, and silence was central to their oppression. But by the 1980s people were beginning to talk about what had previously been unspeakable. Reports of systematic sexual abuse in children's homes, the Catholic church and other institutions began to reach the press.

This put senior managers in a difficult position. Let's take the example of one very senior manager, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In the 1980s covers ups for Cyril Smith and Jimmy Saville took place on her watch. Cyril Smith was a Liberal Democrat MP with a long history of abuse in his native Rochdale. He mainly exploited boys in care homes in the city. The current Labour MP for Rochdale, Simon Danczuk has written an excellent

⁴³ See Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On; Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic*, New York: Souvenir, 2012 (first edition, 1987); and Jonathan Neale, 'The Politics of AIDS', *International Socialism*, 93, 1991. The films *The Dallas Buyers Club* (2013) and *Pride* (2014) capture the mood of gay resistance and the heroic fight-back very well.

book about Smith.⁴⁴ Danczuk describes how several angry police officers told him of their various attempts to investigate Smith. These police officers reported that their investigations were all stopped, either by senior officers in the Greater Manchester Police or by MI5. Danczuk explains that MI5 was involved because in 1977 Smith had been key to putting together the Labour/Lib Dem coalition which extended the life of the Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan's government by a year. After that, Danczuk says, Smith was accorded the kind of protection usually provided for cabinet ministers.

Smith's abuse was widely known among Westminster politicians and national journalists. At one point Smith was exposed in *Private Eye*. There were rumours of his association with Elm House, a guest house in Barnes associated with the activities of a group of 'powerful, high-profile paedophiles'. As Laville and Halliday explain, 'After claims made by the Labour MP Tom Watson in 2012, the Metropolitan police launched Operation Fairbank into child abuse at the guesthouse. A dossier of evidence of an alleged paedophile ring, involving several MPs, including Smith, and other public figures, was handed to the Home Office in 1983 by the Conservative MP Geoffrey Dickens, who died in 1995. The 40-page dossier has since been destroyed or lost, according to a Home Office review.'⁴⁵

Margaret Thatcher would have known the rumours about Smith's abuse, and though she was not centrally involved in the cover up, neither did she do anything to stop what was going on.

⁴⁴ Simon Danczuk and Matthew Baker, *Smile for the Camera: The Double Life of Cyril Smith*, London: Constable, 2014.

⁴⁵ Laville, Sandra and Josh Halliday, 'Police are failing us, murdered boy's father says', *The Guardian*, 20 November 2014, p.14. And see Nick Dorman, 'VIP Paedophile Networks 'shut down police investigations which got too close', retired officers claim', *Mirror*, 13 December 2014.

However, Thatcher was a friend of Jimmy Saville, a disc jockey and public figure. Saville is now widely known to have abused hundreds of young teenage girls between the 1960s and the 2000s. Some were star-struck, and others he raped violently. Much of the abuse happened at the BBC, where Saville worked, but he also had the run of a many hospitals and a home for troubled girls.

Saville stayed with Thatcher for part of the Christmas vacation on several occasions. Saville was also close to the Royal Family, particularly Lord Mountbatten, Prince Charles, and Princess Diana. Thatcher wanted to give him a knighthood. Her senior civil servants repeatedly refused, and as far as one can tell from the sources, told her why. In the end, however, she got her way. One reason for her insistence was that she was cutting the health service, and Saville was a key figure in popularising the idea of raising money charitably for hospitals when their funding was cut.⁴⁶

This does not mean that Thatcher approved of sexual violence. But if she had allowed investigation of these men, attention would have turned to others, and prosecution would have created an avalanche.

Thatcher's reaction was of a piece with the way most senior managers and bureaucrats in Britain, the US, and other countries, reacted to cases of sexual abuse in the 1980s, and since. Managers knew that if abuse was openly discussed, they had a problem.

In the UK alone, it is now clear that historically there have been thousands of cover ups of systematic abuse and sexual harassment. Abuse scandals have since rocked institutions of many descriptions throughout the country - council care homes, mental hospitals, prisons, universities, schools, churches, television, radio, entertainment, sports, scouting, political parties, clinics, courts, police forces, the armed forces, the secret service, and therapy

⁴⁶ The best source on Saville is Dan Davies, *In Plain Sight: The Life and Lies of Jimmy Saville*, London: Quercus, 2014.

organisations. But the problem goes wider than that – senior managers in almost every organisation of any size have covered up sexual harassment or abuse.⁴⁷

Thus, on the same page of *The Guardian* where we learn that ‘Inquiries into Saville abuse claims extended to 41 hospitals’, we are also told that a ‘Former teacher has been jailed for sexual abuse of boys at a prep school in Holmes Chapel Cheshire in the 1970s’.⁴⁸ When cases like these only come to light decades after they occur, it is easy to think that ‘historic abuse’ is only about the past. But the grooming cases are contemporary and have also been systematically covered up.

There is now a constant struggle in the UK within police forces and other authorities over whether or not to investigate and charge abusers.⁴⁹ This

⁴⁷ The same process of exposure is occurring in the USA. See for example, Hadley Freeman, ‘How Bill Cosby’s image shielded him from claims of rape’, *The Guardian*, 20 November 2014, p.38. As Lindy West points out, ‘We only took notice of the Bill Cosby rape claims when men spoke out. When will we start listening to women?’ (*The Guardian*, 19 November, 2014, G2, p.5). But it is notable that a mainstream columnist writing of powerfully of Cosby and abuse does not go further than saying the problem ‘is a culture that enables rape. The larger problem is us.’ (Nicholas Kristof, ‘Bill Cosby, UVA and Rape’, *International New York Times*, 28 November 2014, p.9.) It is a comment that actually explains nothing.

⁴⁸ Josh Halliday, *The Guardian*, 7 November 2014, p.24.

⁴⁹ Consider one such disagreement. ‘A young woman, Eleanor de Freitas, who said she had been raped went on to kill herself after the Crown Prosecution Service put her on trial for making up the allegation ... despite being told by police that there was no evidence she had lied, and in the knowledge that she was suffering from a psychiatric illness. ... The CPS had pursued De Freitas ... after the man at the centre of the claims [who remains unnamed] spent £200,000 on a private prosecution.’ (Sandra Laville, ‘Woman who alleged rape killed herself on eve of trial’, *The Guardian*, 7 November 2014, p.8). Sandra Laville also reports that ‘Coroner asks why CPS pursued rape complainant’, obliging the head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Alison Saunders, to say she would personally investigate the decision to proceed with the prosecution (*The Guardian*, 8 November 2014, p.6). Two days later, we learn that ‘Officers defend rape ‘victim’ accused of lies’ and thus defend their own stance (Sandra Laville, *The Guardian*, 10 December, 2014, p.18). Now the young woman’s

process has produced a string of high profile prosecutions of ‘rich and famous’ men for ‘historic abuse’. But almost all those men have been disc jockeys, actors or television performers. They are not the most rich and powerful men. They are not at the top of the ruling class – that is why they can be thrown to the wolves now. But class societies are hierarchical all the way down, and they were quite high up – that is how they had such scope to abuse the vulnerable for so long.⁵⁰

Most of these managers were not, and are not, abusers. But once embroiled in cover ups, they were trapped by those cover ups, and have to cover up their cover ups, and thus cover up new abuses. What these managers have done is shameful, and often illegal. They still continue to do it, because each time a manager is threatened with a case their first instinct is to hush it up to protect the institution – and their job. The majority of cover ups are coordinated by men, because the majority of senior managers are men. But when women are senior managers, they cover up too.

In adopting this top down perspective, we are not using ‘ruling class’ as an abstract concept. We mean the senior managers of all the institutions of society, and the owners of corporations and land.⁵¹

Are we putting forward a conspiracy theory? In one sense, yes. Silence and secrets are central to enabling abuse. And where there are secrets, and a cover up, there is a conspiracy. But this does not mean that all the cover ups

father and his lawyers have called for a ‘human rights inquest in [the] death of [the] woman facing rape claim’ (Sandra Laville, *The Guardian*, 11 December 2014, p.7.)

⁵⁰ Thanks to Nick Evans.

⁵¹ There are a great many books describing the character and membership of the ruling class in Britain. The best is Owen Jones, *The Establishment and How They Get Away with It*, London: Allen Lane, 2014. See also Jeremy Paxman, *Friends in High Places: Who runs Britain*, London: Penguin, 1991; and David Kynaston, ‘What should we do with private schools?’ *The Guardian*, 6 December 2014, pp.2-4. Compare also G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* New York: McGraw Hill, 2009; and Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, London: Allen Lane, 2014.

were one giant conspiracy. It was thousands of lesser moments of collusion in which all of us are complicit in some degree or other.

Think back to our initial example of harassment. The university teacher who pestered a woman student felt safe enough to do so because there were other more senior, and more powerful, habitual sexual predators in the college. Speaking out against these men was likely to come at a price - whistle-blowing could mean victimization and putting your degree, or your job, in jeopardy. Yet each time fellow students, student representatives, the women's officer or other teaching or administrative staff remains silent, they too are in effect colluding. They are trapped within an institution just like the police officer in London who shrugged off the report of rape forty years ago, or those social workers who ignored the reports of grooming by the broken young girls, or the soldiers who understood that the rape was allowed.

A struggle about ideas

From the 1980s on, the senior managers had two strategies to contain the threat of exposure. One was enforcing silence in every way possible. A second ideological strategy was to muddy the waters and deflect the issue in various ways.

The first deflection was to say that the problem of child abuse was mostly 'stranger danger'. The media, schools and police warned children against strangers. Strangers on the street account for a tiny proportion of abuse. So 'stranger danger' confused children, and made them more vulnerable.

Stranger danger also relied on the fact that abuse was 'unspeakable'. People knew about abuse, but were afraid to speak about what they knew. For example, generations of Labour councillors in the UK had made absolutely sure that council houses would have separate bedrooms for teenage boys and girls, without ever saying why.

The second deflection was the idea of recovered memory and satanic abuse. This idea was strong in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It appealed particularly to conservative Christians, who had difficulty dealing with the idea that abuse was happening in ‘normal’ families and churches. They were happier outsourcing the problem to Satan.

This led to a good deal of witch hunting and punishment of innocent people. American police forces initially took these stories seriously. The stories told of babies and children murdered in terrible rituals. Many police forces searched for the bodies, or even a birth record, of children said to have been kidnapped or killed. They found none, and the idea of satanic abuse was discredited. Within a few years the idea of recovered memory was largely discredited too. There is overwhelming evidence that children remember very clearly the worst things that happen to them.⁵²

A more enduring deflection strategy was the idea that child abusers were exceptional monsters unlike anyone else. This again confused people, because the actual abusers they encountered were not that different from other people they know.⁵³

⁵² Richard Ofshe and Ethan Watters, *Making Monsters: False Memories, Psychotherapy, and Sexual Hysteria*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1995; and Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse*, New York: St Martins Griffins, 1994.

⁵³ And this practice continues. A huge front page headline screams ‘Only 18, but this is the face of a serial paedophile’, along with the abuser’s picture. (Joe Nimmo, *Oxford Mail*, 21 November 2014, p.1.) Readers were told that his conviction ‘is one of the first major successes of the Kingfisher Unit, set up by Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford Health to fight child sexual exploitation in the wake of the Bullfinch scandal.’

It is as if this young ‘monster’s’ arrest somehow made up for the fact that after the Oxfordshire grooming trial, ‘Senior officials have chosen not to resign over a catalogue of failings and missed opportunities which left a sex trafficking gang in Oxford free to exploit young girls for many years. The chief constable of Thames Valley Police, Sara Thornton, and the chief executive of Oxfordshire county council, Joanna Simons, said they would stay in their posts despite criticism over the scandal, [even as the] police investigation into the trafficking gang that operated in the backstreets of Oxford to enslave girls as young as eleven and sell them for sex, is

By the 2000s, though, all these defences and distractions were beginning to wear thin. More and more survivors were speaking out, and they were becoming more organised. At this point, another strategy emerged. That strategy sounded feminist, but was not. It was to say that most abuse happened in the family.

This is not true. So when experts say that most abuse happens in the family, they almost immediately qualify the statement by saying that most abusers are someone known to the family. But of course they are! That does not make them members of the nuclear family. Most families know most of the people their children encounter, except for the extremely rare cases of abuse by total strangers.

It may well be true that the majority of abusers are fathers or elder brothers. But while one father may abuse one or two children, a priest often abuses twenty, or fifty, or one hundred. So the majority of children abused suffer outside the home, and in institutional settings. And most rape is done by men who do it several times, or many times. This means that while abuse is common, abusers are much less common. Most men do not rape adults nor children.

All of these deflections and confusions were part of a struggle about ideas. The deflection strategies also depend on confusing people about different types of debate. Crucial feminist struggles created labels such as ‘marital rape’ or ‘domestic abuse’ as instances of violence that by definition happen in the family. Legal frameworks were also created around these ideas. But these labels then allow other forms of abuse to be reframed as happening in the family.⁵⁴

There are times and places when the media, managers and academics, are obliged or forced to talk about abuse. At the same time they need explanations

continuing.’ (Sandra Laville, ‘Oxford Child Sex Abuse Ring: Senior Officials Will Not Resign Over Failings’, *The Guardian*, 15, May, 2014.) And see p. 5ff and 50ff.

⁵⁴ Thanks again to Nick Evans.

that will satisfy troubled social workers, counsellors and police officers. Senior managers also need ways of coping themselves. Most often they cover up, because they have to, and they need to avoid thinking about what they have done and blaming themselves. So managers listen to each other, and follow the media, and strategies of deflection develop. But like all ideologies, these strategies of deflection have to be negotiated with an audience. The deflection has to sound reasonable to the social workers and other managers, and it has to sound reasonable to people who care.

The gathering storm

In the last two years, 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.⁵⁵

The Saville case 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. Recently, collective organisation has begun to explode in new forms. In Delhi, there was a spontaneous outpouring of rage after the rape and murder of a young physiotherapist in 2013. The crowd, mostly women but some men,

⁵⁵ The best book on abuse in the Catholic Church is David Yallop, *Beyond Belief: The Catholic Church and the Child Abuse Scandal*, London: Constable, 2008.

moved towards the Presidential Palace to protest. The riot police met them with clubs, bamboo poles and tear gas.

In September 2014 Indian students at Jadavpur University in Kolkata protested against the refusal of the vice-chancellor to do anything about rape on campus. Students surrounded the vice-chancellor in his office, refusing to let him leave. The state government of Mamita Banerjee sent in riot police and undercover cops at night. Women and men students fought hand to hand against the cops in the dark, and the students won. 200,000 people then marched through the city.⁵⁶

There are several explanations for the strength of fury in India. One is that dominant castes in villages have long used rape to intimidate agricultural labourers and their families. Another is that powerful men in villages have traditionally been able to take lovers from among women in lower castes, and there is little that the women, or their husbands or mothers, can do. And in the cities sexual exploitation of women workers by their bosses is commonplace.⁵⁷

All this is known to everyone in India. Moreover, 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. Pal leads at least 40,000 activists.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See *Hokkolorob: Police and TMC brutality on students and protesters at Jadavpur University* on youtube for 11 minutes of film of the night time fighting; Davijot Ghoshal, *A brief history of #Hokkolorob, the hashtag that shook Kolkata*, qz.com, 9 October 2014; 'Students Protest in Jadavpur University Campus', *The Hindu*, 22 September 2014; and Tithi Bhattacharya, 'India: Students declare "let there be uproar!"', *Green Left*, 13 October 2014.

⁵⁷ The death of the Badaun girls, teenage cousins found dead from hanging, was seen as representing all that was wrong with India's patriarchal culture. There was a public outcry when investigators declared the girls had killed themselves and that 'no rape or abduction was suspected'. (Gardiner Harris, 'Grisly death of 2 Indian girls is found to be suicide', *International New York Times*, 28 November 2014, p.7.)

⁵⁸ Amana Fontanella-Khan, *Pink Sari Revolution*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2013.

There have also been smaller, but widespread student protests in the United States, particularly in the elite universities.

Let's take the example of Dartmouth, an Ivy League college in New Hampshire. Nancy taught anthropology and gender there for nine months in 1999. Her women students told her about rape in the basements of fraternities – residential clubs for men students.⁵⁹ The most elite of the fraternity 'brothers' are likely to come from very rich families indeed. When fraternity brothers assaulted women, the university management traditionally did nothing if women complained.

This remains the case now, fifteen years later. In 2012 some students joined Occupy Dartmouth protests. In 2013 some of them formed a new group, Real Talk Dartmouth. In April there was a welcome meeting for several hundred prospective students and their parents. 'Fifteen members of ... Real Talk Dartmouth ... marched through the room. They chanted "Dartmouth has a problem!" ... and described incidents of homophobia, racism and sexual assault.'⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Caitlin Flanagan, 'The Dark Power of the Fraternities', *The Atlantic*, March, 2014, pp.72-91, describes the very considerable levels of general violence associated with the fraternity cultures where sexual assaults are also common. What is striking about elite crimes of all kinds, including rape, is that they are covered up by mainstream institutions and the law. Thus, Anna Krien has written about such a cover-up in the hyper-masculine world of Australian rugby, in *Night Games: Sex, Power and a Journey into the Dark Heart of Sport*, London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2014.

Gangs of poor youths are also often involved in high levels of general violence as well as sexual assaults, and rape, but among them violence and sexual violence is policed by peers, and otherwise almost always takes place well outside the law. See, for example, Philippe Bourgeois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2002; and Nathan McCall, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Most often, working class violence and sexual violence is ignored by institutions of the state; but when it does receive media attention, however, the report usually confirms elite values by reproducing class and racialized stereotypes about the urban poor.

⁶⁰ Jon Weiner, 'Dartmouth Students Who Protested Rape are Charged with Violating School Rules', *The Nation*, 31 May 2013.

The protest was reported in national media. The management reacted by cancelling classes for a day, saying that some students hostile to the protesters had said unacceptably sexist things on social media. The management said that this could not be tolerated on campus, and the day of cancelled classes would be used for a civilised discussion of the problem.

The management was redefining the problem as bad words, not rape. This is a standard management ploy in America, and it often works.⁶¹ The next month the management of Dartmouth moved to discipline ten student protestors.⁶² Punishing sexual abuse would cause scandal and scandal would diminish the reputation of the college and the financial contributions on which it depends.

There have been protests in many other elite colleges too. There were demonstrations in Harvard. At Brown, in Rhode Island, Lena Sclove was raped and complained to the university. Her rapist was briefly excluded from the college, and then allowed to return. Sclove called a public rally at the entrance to the campus.⁶³

At Columbia, in New York, students wore white ribbons in their mortar boards to protest the rape culture on campus. That same year art student Emma

⁶¹ A Dartmouth student, Nathan Gusdorf, writes, ‘We are mired in demands for ‘constructive criticism and dialogue’ ... Set up a panel, schedule a meeting, use the time to schedule the next meeting, and on and on. .. In reality, this means that undesirable changes can be avoided by directing their advocates into endless cycles of nonsense. Clearly there are forces at play that protect and enable offenders, the structure of fraternity-centred social life is one obvious case ... Any proposal for change that doesn’t satisfy the desires of parties more powerful than rape victims will meet with little success. Other methods are needed.’ (Gusdorf ‘A defence of recent protests’, *The Dartmouth Radical*, April, 2013.) For more on the Dartmouth protests, see realtalkdartmouth.wordpress.com and thedartmouthradical.wordpress.com.

⁶² Katie Mettler, ‘Dartmouth Protestors Face Discipline’, *Valley News*, 30 May 2013.

⁶³ Tyler Kingkade, ‘Brown University Will Allow Rapist Who Choked His Victim Back On Campus’, *Huffington Post*, 23 April 2014; and Katherine Lamb, ‘U. mishandled sexual assault case, victim says’, *Brown Daily Herald*, 23 April 2014.

Sulkowicz was raped and Columbia refused to act. She did an art project – for a year whenever she left her dormitory room she carried her mattress with her to class, the library, the canteen or wherever. Soon many students understood what she did, and whenever she appeared several would rush to carry the mattress for her.⁶⁴

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.

Our final example comes from our own experience in Britain. In 2014 two women students at Oxford University went to the police and accused another student, Ben Sullivan, of rape. The police arrested Sullivan. He was president of the Oxford Union, a venerable debating society and a ruling class institution.⁶⁵ The committee of students that ran the Oxford Union voted to stand by Sullivan.

The University authorities told the officials of the student union (a separate body elected by all students) to have nothing to do with the case. But feminist women and men students organised a vigil outside a meeting of the Oxford Union at dusk. We went. There were about 250 people, almost all young, about two thirds women and a third men. The people who came were

⁶⁴ 'A Survivor's Burden: Columbia Student Carries Mattress on Campus until Alleged Rapist is Expelled', *Democracy Now* 16 September 2014; the item starts at 13.45. This clip is also on Youtube.

⁶⁵ Rowan Borchers, 'Chaos at the Oxford Union as president Ben Sullivan returns amidst rape allegations', *The Independent*, 16 May 2014. Meanwhile, various establishment figures, such as the philosopher A.C. Grayling, criticized students who urged distinguished speakers to boycott the Oxford Union until the case was resolved. See Camilla Turner, 'C Grayling hits out at Oxford Union boycott over rape suspect president', *The Telegraph*, 22 May 2013.

frightened. They had been told that what they were doing was illegal. And they were also afraid in the way that we are almost all afraid to tell the truth. They were quiet, and nervous.

One of the organisers spoke into the megaphone. She reassured us that our vigil was legal. She said that we would be orderly, and we would not sit down and block the road. Then she asked if anyone wanted to speak.

A woman from the crowd took the megaphone. She said she had been raped at this university, and had told no one, because she knew no one would believe her. It took her years to recover from that experience. But now, she said, she could see people who would believe her.

When she finished speaking, the organiser took back the megaphone back and told us all to sit down and block the road. We did.

One speaker after another, maybe twelve, maybe fifteen, got up to say she had been raped too, and had been silent, and today meant so much to her. Given the nature of the event, there must have been at least ten men in the crowd who had been raped as adults or boys. None of them rose spoke. That was still too hard. But that vigil will have made them stronger.

As we sat on the road, we cried like almost everyone else. But we felt such a joy to hear the sound of silence breaking.⁶⁶

Of course students at elite colleges are not the only people vulnerable to rape. In the UK, the key struggles have been led by working class people. Many of them were in care, or had been in care, and many were very young when they were abused.

Presently, the most important case in the UK revolves around Leon Brittan who was Home Secretary when the dossier of evidence about the alleged paedophile ring went missing. Three labour MPs – Tom Watson, Ron Danczuk and Jim Hood spoke up about the case in Parliament in 2014.

⁶⁶ The Thames Valley Police dropped all charges against Sullivan soon afterwards. The campaign then died down.

Eventually Conservative Justice Secretary Teresa May was forced to authorise an official inquiry into ‘historic abuse’, and the Metropolitan Police opened an investigation. May's first nomination to head the inquiry was Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss. Organisations of adults who had been in care complained that Butler-Sloss's late brother, Sir Michael Havers, had been the Attorney General in the 1980s ‘and his actions would have been subject to investigation by the inquiry’.⁶⁷ Butler-Sloss had to retire from the enquiry in July 2014. May replaced her with Fiona Wolff, a distinguished lawyer and former Lord Mayor of London. The National Association for Young People in Care and Simon Danczuk pointed out that Wolff was a family friend and neighbour of Brittan, ‘who was Home Secretary at the time of the alleged child abuse’.⁶⁸ Witnesses to a parliamentary committee said that at the behest of May's staff, Wolff had rewritten her application for the post seven times, each time telling less of her connection with the Brittans. She too had to resign.⁶⁹

As Gary Younge has written about sexual abuse in the US, ‘There is more to innocence than mere legality and the law is not alone in having eyes. The law is weighted in favour of the wealthy and the powerful. When threatened, they apply their thumbs to the scale with great pressure and great care not to

⁶⁷ Rowena Mason, ‘Abuse survivors criticise judge’s hostage claim’, *The Guardian*, 1 January 2015, p.6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ The text of the letter is on Tom Pride’s website www.tompride.wordpress.com. See also Simon Danczuk, ‘Does Theresa May really want this child abuse inquiry to see the light of day?’, *The Guardian*, 9 September 2014; Rowena Mason, ‘Fiona Wolff is urged to quit child abuse inquiry as victims meet Teresa May’, *The Guardian*, 31 October 2014; and Rowena Mason, ‘Abuse inquiry thrown into crisis as second chair quits’, *The Guardian*, 1 November, 2014, p.1. Fiona Wolff was appointed Dame Commander of the British Empire in the New Year’s Honours of 2015 in ‘recognition of her long standing commitment to public life’.

leave any prints.’⁷⁰ Or as Anna Ford comments, ‘Over 100 files containing information on alleged child abuse by members of the establishment are ‘missing’... The Home Office, that shadowy beast, will always be ruthless in defence of its own’.⁷¹

Meanwhile, British newspapers then said that May faced a difficult problem finding a third person to chair the inquiry, because all the members of the British establishment she could trust were connected in some way with the alleged abusers, or with the people who covered up abuse. Which says it all, really.⁷²

Racism and homophobia

The gang abuse cases that have come to court in Oxford, Rochdale, Rotherham and Bristol have involved men from different immigrant groups. Many people on the left have been understandably nervous about looking clearly at these cases because there is a real possibility of encouraging racism.⁷³ There is another danger as well. Some of the emerging abuse scandals involved men having sex with under age boy in the 1980s. Again many on the left are worried about an increase of homophobia if the cover-ups of the 1980s are exposed.

⁷⁰ ‘Bill Cosby’s pound cake and the politics of responsibility’, *The Guardian*, 1 December 2014, p.29.

⁷¹ Anna Ford, ‘Letters’, *The Guardian*, 11 November 2014, p.34.

⁷² It is heartening however that by mid-December 2014 more than one hundred individuals, including some lawyers and judges, had volunteered themselves as a likely independent chair for the inquiry.

⁷³ For instance, in Rotherham, racism has been rife since September, with English Defence League marches in the town centre and the EDL intimidating Asian women and girls. But three months on, ‘there are signs of a fight-back’, with community groups have been working hard to bring people together. (Homa Khaleeli, ‘September, Rotherham’, *The Guardian*, G2, 18 December 2014, p.18).

These are serious concerns, and indeed, it is quite true that the various abuse scandals are likely to lead to increased racism and homophobia. We can already see this happening in the media. And we can see UKIP and the far right using abuse scandals to increase hate and fear. But if feminists, the left and gay men avoid speaking out on these issues, we leave the field to the right wing, the bigots and the homophobes. It will become their issue, and our silence will shame us.

In countering the right-wing racism and homophobia, there are a variety of rather different points to consider.

First, it is important to start with the enforcers, not the perpetrators. Both the gang and child abuse were reported over and over again to people in authority – administrators, social workers and particularly local white police officers. We have described above how managers become complicit in systems of abuse, but there is another consideration worth mentioning. In other countries, in India, Belgium, Mexico, the United States, people would assume that the police failed to act because some of them had been paid off, or were abusers themselves. Maybe that is the explanation in Britain, and maybe not. But mostly white police officers, and white prosecutors, allowed the abuse to continue.

Second, there is now a constant struggle within police forces about whether or not to investigate and charge abusers. This means that more abusers are charged. But it also means it is still easier to charge working class abusers of colour than it is to charge white politicians. As we noted above, a similar process has produced a series of high profile prosecutions of celebrities, who are the little more than the court jesters of the elite.

Third, the media have generalized from the criminal gangs to imply all immigrant men are involved. Such an extension is a blatantly racist tactic. And curiously, such blatant racism also ignores a familiar but difficult aspect of actual migrant histories. That in many countries some migrants turn to crime

because racism blocks them from other avenues. In the twentieth century prostitution in the United States was largely controlled by Irish and Jewish gangs and the Italian mafia. This is why Tony Soprano is shown running a titty bar, and why his life is full of 'goombas'. Danczuk shows clearly that in Rochdale organized abuse of boys in care was long coordinated by a network of white men that included Cyril Smith. As Danczuk says, Asian criminals in Rochdale continued the local traditions.

Fourth, actual changes in the law of consent over the past thirty years can confuse us and add to our fear of an increase in homophobia among the right. In the 1980s, the age of consent for men was 21, whereas for women it was 16. This meant that a great deal of sex with young men was unfairly illegal. That is why in 2003 the age of consent for boys was changed to 16. This means that having sex with an 'under age' was illegal in 1984, but it was not wrong. The illegality was part of a wider persecution of gay men. Many older gay men today grew up at a time when they had to be afraid of the effect of the unfair consent laws. They also remember clearly that it was widely believed that all gay men were potential abusers of small boys. Many of them are therefore worried about a resurgence of homophobia as the cover-ups are exposed.

There are no easy answers to these concerns, but hiding from them, pretending they don't exist will not help the abuse survivors fight for justice, nor support the widespread resistance against sexual abuse and sexual violence. Instead, perhaps we could picket Theresa May wherever she goes?

Conclusions

In this paper, we link theory and method in a series of steps.

We start from the point of view of class privilege. When elites are forced to respond to economic change, they find ways to naturalize new forms of inequality by fitting new versions of sexism and racism to fit the new

conditions. The causality is directional – economic changes lead to new kinds of gendered inequality, not the other way around.

The second step is to remember that the ruling class, whether in feudal societies or the neoliberal elite now, are not an abstract entity. There are real people, who make real decisions at every level of the system. These decisions help the elite, and their minions, their managers and enforcers, to hold onto their class power by manipulating racism and sexism – and enforcing inequality with violence if need be. This is also why it is important for us to know who does what, to whom, when and how. We cannot construct a useful theory simply from general principles. We need to know the details of these decisions, and who is making them, and how to hold them to account.

Third, we need to look for moments when we can see clearly how the ideology works. When things are going smoothly for those in power, it is hard to see how the system works. So we need to look for the breach cases, the moments when things go wrong. The contradictions in the system are most visible where there is slippage and we can glimpse the exercise of class power through the cracks. Think, for example, of the Princess Diana interview. That moment of rupture did great damage to the reputation of the Royal Family and ‘denaturalized’ much of their legitimacy and class privilege.

The fourth and absolutely key point to remember is that ordinary people really don’t like inequality. We now know from the archaeological record they didn’t like it at the beginnings of class society, and struggles for equality went on for millennia. And these struggles against inequality continue today. Understanding this means thinking dialectically.

Often, resistance seems isolated and individual. It may seem to be one disaffected little woman deliberately burning the toast, but actually when you look, you will see that resistance is organized. In the 60s there were armies of women refusing to prepare someone else’s toast. Even more important have been the groups of Catholic altar boys who survived abuse and found each

other and began to agitate. Or consider the Pink Saris, who are organized groups of young Indian women who target men who are violent to women. Resistance is always there. It is part and parcel of the system. It is the system as seen from below.

We have been arguing in this paper that class inequality lies behind gender inequality, and 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.

In Britain, the risks taken and the enormous efforts ordinary people have made to stop the cover-ups and expose institutional abuse shows this very well. The weakest in society are now threatening people central to the ruling class and the British state. They are winning, and there is far more to come. The stakes are now high. The depth and breadth of abuse and harassment throughout our institutions mean that the matter will be bitterly fought, and have great consequences. 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.⁷⁴ That is why it is so hard, and why it has to be done.

⁷⁴ We take this idea from Patrick Bond in conversation.