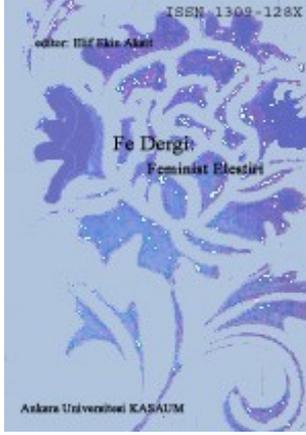


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Gökçesu Akşit, Berfin Varışlı

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Studying men and masculinities critically in Turkey as part of feminism: An interview with Jeff Hearn on transnational approaches to men and masculinities

Gökçesu Akşit* ve Berfin Varışlı**

This interview took place during 1st International Symposium on Men and Masculinities, which was held in İzmir, between 11th and 13th of September. Keynote speakers of the symposium were Professor Jeff Hearn (Örebro University, Sweden; Hanken School of Economics, Finland; University of Huddersfield, UK), Professor Serpil Sancar (Ankara University), and Dr Elijah Nealy (Columbia University, USA). We took our cue from the idea that there is a need for Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM). As one of the founders of CSMM, we interviewed Jeff Hearn.

fe journal: In general there is an urgent need for studying men and masculinities, besides or in addition to Women's Studies. What are your opinions on the subject?

Jeff Hearn: I would see studying men and masculinities, critically, as part of the feminist project. I don't see it as a separate thing at all. And if you look at feminist work, at least feminist work that I know of, mainly in English language, but also some may be in Nordic languages as well, I think feminist work is very often indeed also partly about men and masculinities. Even feminist work that has been focused on women or girls, I think it also has often been, at the same time either explicitly or implicitly about men and masculinities. Some of the most important work that has been done on men and masculinities has been done by feminist women. So I don't see men and masculinities as a separate area. As I mentioned in the keynote address,¹ I don't see men and masculinities and feminism as separate areas. I am personally against the idea of them are separate areas. I am also really against the term "Men's Studies"; I think it is a very bad term, even if it has been used a lot. You can say a word is only a word, or two words, but two words can express the idea of there is a separate field of Men's Studies, which is different than Gender Studies or Women's Studies, or Sexuality Studies. I don't think that is the way as it should be. I think it is actually very dangerous. And that is partly why I prefer to call it Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities, CSMM in short. But and it is also, I might say, a small point why I don't want to say it is a field, and why I use the term sub-field of CSMM located within, the field sometimes called Women's Studies in 1970s and 1980s in the Anglo world. Now you can call it Gender Studies, I don't know how you name the field here. But Gender Studies to me is very very broad. Or you could call it as Feminist Studies as well. In Örebro University, in Sweden, where I work, we also use the term Feminist Studies or Feminist Social Sciences. Those terms, Gender Studies or Feminist Studies or Feminist Social Sciences, are very broad terms, like an umbrella. So within them that there are obviously different sub-fields: sexuality studies, queer studies, critical study on men and masculinities, and so on. I think it is an important issue in terms of academia, and in terms of university organization, it is important as well. To be honest, I don't know how things are in Turkey, I have colleagues in Turkey but I don't know the situation here in Turkey – *you* know it, I am sure. But I would be really against creating a separate department of Studies on Men. Because in one way, almost all of academic work and research has as over the years and centuries actually been mainly studies on men and of and about men, but not called explicitly that. For example history as a discipline has often been prioritizing men historians, studying men's achievements, men's battles whatever.

fe: HIStory you mean...

Hearn: Yes ... I am talking about the past. So that is the classic example, so you know I mean libraries, university libraries are full of studies about men ... Actually ... But they are not usually explicit.

fe: So we already have it.

* PhD., Maltepe University, Lecturer

** PhD Student, Maltepe University, Department of Sociology, Research Assistant

Hearn: In one sense yeah, it is a bit like saying, again I don't know how it is here, creating men's groups, meaning men's consciousness raising (CR) groups.

fe: There are those kinds of groups in Turkey.

Hearn: But there are of course thousands and thousands of men's groups existing in society maybe in politics or in government, business, factories, coal mines, as we discussed yesterday in the symposium. So men's groups are in many many places. But there are different kinds of men's groups. A few are profeminist and some are anti-feminist. I don't know if you think it is helpful but I prefer to use the term "gender-conscious", referring to what extend men or men's activities are gender-conscious.² So you have gender-conscious groups, which may be profeminist or they might be anti-feminist. So you can have different kind of gender-conscious groups. In Finland, where I live, there are various different men's organizations, a few are profeminist, or there are other organizations that are more ambiguous in relation to feminism. But the biggest gatherings of men who are gender-conscious are the religious groups. They have gatherings, Christian gatherings, and some self-consciously come together to discuss what you should do to be what they themselves might call "good Christian men". So that is a kind of gender-conscious group, but a bit different than the ones here in this conference or what are usually called men's CR groups.

fe: What do you think of masculinities in Turkey?

Hearn: This is quite a tricky question for me. I think it is very important not to pretend to be an instant expert on a country after just visiting a few days. Too many times I have heard Anglophone visitors, especially from the US and the UK, come to lecture the locals elsewhere on equality, as if they have never thought about it. I arrived in Turkey just a few days ago and spent two days in Istanbul before coming to this conference. My knowledge of academic studies of Turkey comes from meeting a small number of people basically. I have read various texts by Professor Deniz Kandiyoti on Turkey and the wider region. I think the first Turkish academic professor that I met was Professor Ayşe Gül Altınay. I have read some of her work and I was a commentator when she was presenting her keynote at the 6th European Feminist Research Conference, University of Łódź, in 2006, so before that I read that her book, "The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey" on militarism in Turkey. That was few years ago and more recently I have read some of Nurseli Yeşim Sünbuloğlu's work,³ have supervised Alp Biricik's PhD on "A Walk along Istikal Street: Dissident Sexual Geographies, Politics and Citizenship in Istanbul"⁴ and read other work of his, and also read some parts of Nil Mutluer's doctoral research.⁵ I have met these last three scholars through their time in Sweden. And I read many media, newspapers and other analyses on wars in the region and also the Kurdish issue, and so on. So these were all that I knew before coming here. As far as I can see, there are the familiar issues of men's patriarchal gender domination, but also ethnic, religious, sexual and other complexities, along with dangers in relying on stereotypes about men, especially as constructed from outside Turkey – so of course more detailed analysis should be done. This is the first point.

The second point is coming here actually, which is very interesting personally ... You want my reactions to being here in Turkey, do you?

fe: Actually we want to hear your reactions about the situation and position of men in Turkey, in general.

Hearn: As I said, I am cautious about giving an instant analysis on men in Turkey in general. I would want to ask: how do men, and which men, control the state, the economy, the military, religion, academia? What is the situation of the most privileged and the least powerful men? Who controls the Turkish internet and cyberspace? What are men's relations to sexuality, body, care, emotions, both their own and others'? What is the amount of men's violence, of different kinds? And so on. What are the effects of men's practices on women, children, and each other. I am sure you know the answers to some of these questions. And what complications do these gender orders produce for men who are the least powerful, marginalised or who do not comply with, and even oppose, dominant forms of patriarchy or neopatriarchy⁶ or neoliberal patriarchy,⁷ or some combination of these?

It is obvious that these and other issues are being taken up by your networks, you have "FE Journal" and "Masculinities Journal" established, you have Initiative for Critical Studies of Masculinities, you organized this conference and it is a very very important event and activity; I think it is an historic event. That is very good. I have been to most of the sessions. The main thing is acknowledging that there is a body of people from

different political positions and different academic disciplines who are interested in these topics. If you look at this more historically, this probably wasn't the case 30 years ago.

But now this or something similar is what is happening in many many countries. There are several groups in Spain, for instance, who are organizing similar things and a journal, "Masculinidades y Cambio Social-MCS"⁸ which is quite similar to your journal. Also I am involved slightly in a journal in Czech Republic, it is "Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum"⁹ the Czech Republic Gender Studies journal. And there is a special issue that with two colleagues I am co-editing with Iva Šmídová and Ivan Vodochodský on these issues not only in Czech masculinities but on these questions in relation to the Czech audience. And there are other things in Nordic region. So those things are happening in some parts of the world. In UK these things started around in late 1970s. And in the Nordic region there is a quite active Nordic Association for Research on Men and Masculinities and that has conferences every two years and I think there have been six conferences so far. They have a journal called "NORMA", used to be called "The Nordic Journal" but now it is called "The International Journal for Masculinity Studies". So these are the things that are happening all around the world and this is important. But, as I said, it should not be separate as a separate field.

fe: You mean in terms of nationalities?

Hearn: No, it shouldn't be separated from Gender Studies I meant. But the question of nationality is a very interesting point. This is partly but not only an issue of language and local context, but I do think it is extremely important to have international and transnational contacts both so that you learn from each other and so that also you appreciate different localities. I mean I have just come from a conference session, which was about South Africa and Mexico, presented by Dr Deevia Bhana and Dr Talina Hernandez respectively; basically it was about young people and violence. And actually I raised the issue, to what extent what they were describing were actually similar processes in the two countries. So I think this transnational approach, looking across and between countries, is important. There are now quite a lot of collections of research on men and masculinities that are covering several continents. There are two or three that I have been involved in myself, for example, the 2013 collection "Rethinking Transnational Men", and the 2011 collection, "Men and Masculinities around the World."¹⁰ I am currently guest editing a special issue of "Men and Masculinities" on international studies on men, masculinities and gender equality, due out 2015; I hope that these transnational researches continue to develop.

But then there is the issue of language that you have to use English language, which certainly has its limitations. And I think one issue here is in doing PhDs. For instance, in Finland and in Sweden where I know the best it is becoming more common now that when people are encouraged to do their PhD, written in English, then they are openly encouraged to write the quotations from their interviews in both the original language Finnish or Swedish, and then in English. There may be two columns of text or footnotes or an appendix in PhD theses. OK, so this is not perfect, but at least you can read the original. Translation has its limitations. But I think there should be more creativity around trying to get beyond just using English or in other words English language domination in publishing. And it is getting worse as well.

I don't know how it works here but in quite a lot of countries, including Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, there is a great pressure particularly on younger scholars to publish in English. So then the question comes, should they publish both in their own language for local consumption, I mean national consumption so that policy makers or intellectuals or politicians or the broader public could be addressed more directly ... I mean they quite probably can read in English but they probably don't want to read in English. In the last ten years this has been a real push, with younger scholars forced to publish in English language journals. And I think it is very very limiting.

fe: That's why both "FE Journal" and "Masculinities Journal" are bilingual.

Hearn: I think that is very good. But I mean the so-called top journals, so-called high impact journals, are basically all in English. And this is what they have been forced to publish in English. I am not only talking about the studies of men and masculinities I mean if you are studying any subject, this is what has been forced and it is very very limiting, I would say that science has become corrupted. It is a strong word but I am actually totally

against it. There is a trend going on this way. It may change again in ten years' time with more open access publishing.

fe: What do you think is missing in the theory of Critical Men and Masculinities?

Hearn: Well, as I said in my keynote speech yesterday, broadly there are whole areas of social life that have not been dealt with very deeply. One thing is environmental issues and climate change. How is the planet to survive? Militarism has been quite well studied now. Multinational businesses are not studied enough, international finance ... I mean there are many topics, for example, water, energy, transport, religion, refugees, foreign policy, social movements, both progressive and reactionary.

More theoretically, that is more difficult to answer. One way to answer is there has become a kind of "orthodoxy" in studies of Men and Masculinities, and a lot of that has come from Connell's masculinities theory, which is very influential. I have been amazed how much people have discussed and taken up the idea of so-called hegemonic masculinity, but that is just one approach actually. And if you look at feminist theory more generally, there are many many other approaches within feminist theory, like body theory or science and technology studies (STS), postcolonial theory, certain kinds of sexuality theory, sexual difference, queer theory, so on. And I think what perhaps theoretically needs doing is looking at all the different ways that there are, different feminisms and feminist theories, postcolonial feminisms, and so on. If you like, trying to think through or research how all of these, how different ways of understanding men and masculinities, might be developed. I think that is a much bigger task and that is one thing that we are trying to do in Sweden in the last ten years. Not just like having one theory, which has become a rather a kind of orthodox theory. I am certainly not blaming Raewyn Connell for that at all. Raewyn has done tremendous work, and I think she herself is actually very open indeed, but some aspects of these theories have been taken up by other people in a very limited way, for example, without paying attention to questions of legitimacy or to patriarchy or whichever word you want to use. More specifically, I think you can have very contradictory theories as well which are both useful. I do think gender class analysis is quite useful actually. You know I am not saying all men are from one class but it can be helpful at some point to think about the relevance of sex-class and gender-class, and tensions, contradictions and fractions within that and amongst men. What I have become interested in the last ten years or so is: are we working toward the idea of abolition of social category of men as a category of power. Is that something foreseeable? Of course there are different kinds of bodies and different ways that people are positioned gender-wise, or sexuality-wise. But why are people so much stuck on protecting this category of men? Why is it so precious? And it is also very very practical policy issue, particularly in terms of conscription as here in Turkey and also how it operates in Finland, which may surprise some people. Finland is one of the rather few Northwest European countries that has conscription. So most young men go through conscription in Finland. And another issue, what encapsulates a man? Or who is seen as a real man? Who can get exemptions? So this question of the abolition of the social category of men is not a very weird approach, I think it is quite practical.

(At this moment of saying goodbye, Mehmet Bozok, one of the members of the organization committee of the symposium, asked a final question.)

Mehmet Bozok: For the readers of *fe journal* I want to add a question. What are the possible contributions of Critical Study on Men and Masculinities to feminist theory and activism?

Hearn: I have been cautious in some responses here, as I am not familiar with the context of *fe journal* and its readers. Having said that, I mean when you refer to feminist activism, and feminist theory, do you mean only women? Because why I ask is those words may have very different meanings. In the UK, when I lived there, if you said feminist, it didn't mean men. Men couldn't be feminist. That's why we use the word profeminist. In Sweden, it is different. You can be feminist, women and men ... So to answer this question is very different in Sweden and in the UK. Finland is different as well. But I won't go into that. So I don't know how this question should be understood in the Turkish context, assuming a Turkish audience. So my first question is what you meant by this? Are *fe* readers all women? I need to ask this...

fe: No, they are not only woman...

Hearn: CSMM are not just done by men. There are feminist women doing research on men and masculinities. That is part of feminism. And this is also about the issue that I did not mention in the keynote address, but one of the confusions in this terrible term Men's Studies, is it studies on men or is it studies that belong to men? Is it about men are subjects or men are objects. It is a part of feminism and feminist theory and activism!



¹Keynote, 'So what do we do next?: Key issues in studying (and changing) men and masculinities, and who are "we" anyway ...', ICSM Symposium of Men and Masculinities – Identities, Cultures, and Societies, Izmir, Turkey, September 2014.

²Linn Egeberg Holmgren and Jeff Hearn 'Framing 'men in feminism': Theoretical locations, local contexts and practical passings in men's gender-conscious positionings on gender equality and feminism', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(4), 2009, 403-418.

³For example, 'Nationalist Reactions and Masculinity Following Hrant Dink's Assassination: Reconfigurations of Nation-States and Implications for the Processes of Transnationalization', in Jeff Hearn, Marina Blagojević and Katherine Harrison, *Rethinking Transnational Men: Beyond, Between and Within Nations*, London: Routledge, 2013.

⁴Linköping Electronic Press, Linköping, 2014.

⁵For example, 'The Role of Transnational and National Institutions in Internally Displaced Men's Everyday Life in Tarlaşa in Istanbul', in Katherine Harrison and Jeff Hearn (eds.) *GEXcel Work in Progress Report Volume VII. Proceedings from GEXcel Theme 2: Deconstructing the Hegemony of Men and Masculinities*, Institute of Thematic Gender Studies, Linköping and Örebro Universities, GEXcel Work in Progress Series, Linköping and Örebro.

⁶Hisham Sharabi *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

⁷Beatrix Campbell *End of Equality*, London: Seagull, 2014.

⁸In English: *Masculinities and Social Change*.

⁹In English: *Gender, Equal Opportunities, Research*.

¹⁰Co-edited with Elisabetta Ruspini, Bob Pease and Keith Pringle, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

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