

The politics of normalising gendered violence: feminised austerity and masculinised wealth creation

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Abstract

According to UN data, 1 in 3 women worldwide are subject to violence. Yet male sexual violence often fails to be part of public discourse. To explore this relative silencing of discussion is to consider how media narratives normalise male violence towards women. Using the UK austerity measures as an illustrative case study, we explore how mediated political discourses keep masculine wealth out of our 'imagination'. Connecting the language of violence to policies which harm women, discursively reinforces the notion that violence and women are intimately linked. We further maintain that restoring gendered language to our discussion enables us to make visible underlying power structures, which are premised in violent relations of gender. The article's key contribution is to argue that it is the structural embeddedness of neoliberal hegemonic masculinity, and its mediation in political discourse, is what enables violence towards women to be both so ubiquitous and yet unremarkable.

Introduction

Between 2009 and 2015, 3 women every week were killed by a man in the UK (Women's Aid, 2018). Despite legislation (e.g. The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act [2004]), prohibiting violence against women, according to the Office for National Statistics (2018a): over 1.3 million women experienced domestic abuse in the last year; Police recorded 599,549 domestic abuse crimes; and that these reported crimes represent an increase of 23% on the previous year. The structural context is significant in framing the ways in which publics are positioned in relation to gendered violence. Scholars have explored the role of legislation (Kennedy, 2018), news reporting (Carter, 1998) entertainment programming (Projansky, 2001) and the music industry (Hill & Savigny, 2019) in perpetuating and normalising violence against women. Routinised male violence towards women receives scant media attention (Soothill & Walby, 1991; Carter, 1998; Boyle, 2015). In mainstream

media, stories of male violence towards women often *fail* to become news; this kind of violence is deemed unnewsworthy (D'Aprix, 2017). We also witness relative silence about the normalised violence that affects women's daily lives (Dekić, 2017). The role of media in positioning the ways that we as citizens and publics think about gender (Van Zoonen, 1994) and politics (Street, 2001) is crucial. Media frame how we understand our role as citizens in the world 'out there' and provide the context through which we make sense of policy (Entman, 1993). Media set the context for our understanding of societal and cultural norms and values. And media provide the context through which we think about what is and is not possible. In essence, media set the 'limits of our imagination' (cf. Lewis, 2013)

What we want to reflect on in this article is, how and why male violence towards women is so common place in its occurrence in everyday life, and yet, so discursively unremarkable in and through our media? This lack of remarkability, we argue, is a consequence of the gendered symbolic violence upon which our political media and social structures are premised. These power structures are reliant on systems of domination and subordination, which in themselves constitute a form of symbolic violence (Spivak, 1989; Bourdieu, 2001). In this article, we trace the ways in which these symbolically violent gendered power structures have been translated in to structural and symbolic violence in the 'real world' of public policy. In particular, we explore how the underlying assumptions about how our political systems and structures work are embedded within notions of 'hegemonic masculinity'. We show how this hegemonic masculinity takes a particularly neoliberal form and reinforces not only masculine superiority but the problematic positioning of women, and reinforcement of gendered structural and symbolic violence in mediated political processes. Once we make these structures explicit, we contend, we can see how neoliberal ideological process, informed by assumptions of gender, serve to reinforce gender structural violence, rather than challenge or 'undo' them. What we want to argue is that critically unpacking the gendered nature of the austerity era, enables us to a) expose underlying violence within gendered power structures; b) reflect on the ways in which masculinity is interconnected with neoliberalism and c) understand how structural and symbolic violence is normalised in our mediated political discourses. This is illustrated through discussion of both austerity as a UK government series of recent policies and the dominant discourses around wealth creation, showing how they are positioned as feminised and masculinised. In failing to acknowledge the violence of, and indeed existence of, gendered power structures, we argue that media narratives serve to reinforce the violence of gendered power structures. In so doing, we suggest, they normalise and legitimate, rather than challenge, structural and symbolic gendered violence.

There is extensive debate as to the definition of gendered violence/male violence towards women/women as subjects of violence (for overview see Boyle, 2018). Following Boyle's (2018)

thought provoking theorisation of the ways in which we conceptualise male violence towards women/gender based violence, to reflect a continuum definition of violence (Kelly, 1988), which emphasises its fluidity and context and agent specificity. In so doing, we also use the terms ‘material’ (actions and physical effects) and ‘symbolic’ (cultural patterns and experiences) violence. But we take this work in a slightly different direction. We argue that violence is not only fluid and constituted in an through material and symbolic means, but that *it is relational, structural and contingent upon existing layers of symbolical violence through existing gendered positioning within power structures*. We argue that in the UK, the ways in which we talk about austerity, and wealth creation, reflect a particular form of neoliberal ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (cf. Connell, 1987). We have seen how hegemonic understandings of masculinity have been linked to financial crises (Enloe, 2013; Griffin, 2015). However, literature has yet to unpack how this hegemonic masculinity is located within, and operationalised through, neoliberalism. By making the link between neoliberalism and hegemonic masculinity, we argue it is possible to explore how gendered relations are discursively embedded within our political structures. A neoliberal emphasis upon individuals and their capacity to create wealth, obscures the conditions by which that wealth creation was made possible. Similarly, the neoliberal focus on rational ‘man’ serves to obscure the underlying inequality of gendered power relationships. Economic inequalities are illustrative of underlying power structures that are reliant upon relationships of subordination and domination. Masculinised success is reliant and contingent upon a system of exploitation and oppression.

Gendered power structures: women and politics

Literature on women and politics has highlighted the ways in which formal political power structures are intensely gendered. There has been a rigorous debate as to the extent to which descriptive representation in legislatures translates, or not, in to the substantive representation of women’s interests (e.g. Bochel & Briggs, 2000; Lovenduski, 2001; Dahlerup & Friedenvall, 2005; Celis et al, 2008; Childs & Krook, 2009); the intersectional nature of this (Mugge & de Jong, 2013; Ward, 2017); and the representation of women’s interests by political activists (Evans, 2016; Mendes, 2015). In public policy, gendered mainstreaming provides a conceptual framework from which to evaluate the extent to which public policy functions to reduce gendered inequality (Lombardo, 2005; True, 2010). It has also been well demonstrated that media play a role in reinforcing structural and cultural biases against women in politics (Sreberny-Mohammdi & Ross, 1996; Childs, 2004; Childs & Campbell, 2010; Murray, 2010; Garico-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Harmer & Wring, 2013; Higgins & Smith, 2013; Ross et al, 2013; Yates, 2015; O’Neill et al, 2016; Ward, 2017). The argument here is that these representations are premised on a specific form of understanding gendered roles and expectations

within the contemporary neoliberal context essentialist in nature. At the same time, violence towards women is a 'real world' problem which despite policies and legislation, still persists.

Gendered power structures: Neoliberal hegemonic masculinity

Debates in political science (cf. Smith & Lee, 2015) legal (cf. Crenshaw, 1991) and feminist theory (hooks, 1981; Butler, 1999) have long encouraged us to move towards understandings of gender rather than essentialised conceptions of biological sex (Butler, 1999). This move beyond essentialised understandings of biological sex as having inherent features draws our focus instead to the ways in which gender is socially constructed. Butler (1999) argues that not only is gender something which is socially constructed by the world around us, but it is something that is reinforced by its performance, and in this way, gendered power relations are inscribed in and through our bodies. There is nothing inherently natural about man or woman as categories, and these categories do not have their own ontology. Rather gender is something which is learned, performed and meaning generated through its repetition, which in turn serves to both represent and (re)construct gendered power structures and relationships. In this sense we are reminded that gender is a *political*, not a neutral feature.

While Butler's work predominantly focused our attention on issues of gender, femininity and sexuality, Connell's (1987) work on hegemonic masculinity asks questions about 'how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance' (Carrigan et al, 1987: 92). At first glance this may be thought of as an issue of descriptive representation (cf. Childs & Krook, 2009). However, Connell goes on to argue that it is not only about numbers: Hegemonic masculinity is not assumed to be statistical, and indeed it may well be that only a minority of men enact it (Connell & 2005: 822). This draws our attention to the notion that it is *particular versions* of masculinity which are celebrated and privileged, rather than a feature or attribute of 'all men'. The hegemonic component of masculinity draws our attention to ways in which these particular, privileged, versions of masculinity are reified and celebrated as the meaning of the 'masculine'. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) is thus 'performed' (cf. Butler, 1999) and valued when conforming to a particular type. In the West this hegemonic privileged notion of masculinity is broadly translated as in the interests of white middle/upper class, heterosexual, able bodied men (which, as suggested below, takes a particularly neoliberal form in the UK context). It is a masculinity premised in a sense of entitlement that is derived from a structural positioning of white wealthy male privilege (Savigny, 2020).

Connell's argument is further developed in highlighting the ways in which hegemonic masculinity are dependent upon the subordination of women. And it is the identification and recognition of these

practices that enable us to explore and render explicit the ways in which power becomes inscribed and legitimated in practice (and in its performance). As Connell argues '[m]asculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition' (Connell 1995: 44). This relational conception of gender means that to understand how women are discursively 'othered' we need to understand the ways in which the notion of 'man' is also discursively constructed. Also worth noting is how the notion of hegemony of masculinity refers to both social categories and collective/individual social agents - in other words the categorisation itself acts upon our subsequent agency as 'men' and as 'a man'.

This discursive construction of gender is currently being performed in a neoliberal political context, which shapes the way in which hegemonic masculinity is constructed, and iteratively, the way in which gender is performed. Neoliberalism has formed the central ideological underpinnings of British government since Thatcherism (Hay & Farrall, 2014). Neoliberalism (grounded in the works of Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, and Friedrich von Hayek) is premised on two key assumptions: 1) that markets provide efficient solutions to societal (and political) problems because 2) individuals are 'rational' and will operate to maximize their own self-interest. As a result of these two assumptions, neoliberalism promotes the idea that if a competitive market is established, the 'best' (efficient) outcomes will be achieved. Putting aside the problematic assumption that all individuals have equal access to the marketplace, this ideological project is premised on the assumption of 'rational' behaviours. Rationality has long been conceived of as a 'masculine' trait, in contrast to the assumption of 'emotionality' as the binary opposite 'feminine' trait. (Longino, 2010; Wacjman, 1991). The binary opposites of rational/emotional traits as masculine/feminine have historically been used as a justification to exclude women from the realms of the public (Aristotle) education (Rousseau) and so on. And we have a political project premised on the assumption that for our economic sphere to work efficiently it must be 'rational' which by extension privileges masculinity and the traits associated with it. Hegemonic masculinity helps expose how the embedding of masculinised assumptions are at the very heart of our neoliberal economic and political system. Neoliberalism attacks state paternalism as dependency culture, constructs notions of 'I' that subsume notions of 'we' generating what Fraser (2009) calls an 'elective affinity' that is anything but women friendly. And so, underpinning neoliberalism we witness a version of masculinity enshrined in its first principles.

It is in this neoliberal context, which is reliant upon gendered relations of subordination and domination that policy is not only pronounced, but constructed in and through mediated discussion. To illustrate the ways in which the structural subordination of women, is relational to the reification of the neoliberal hegemonic 'man', we use the era of austerity in the UK to illustrate this out in more

detail. Restoring women, and men, to the analysis, enables us to make visible the ways in which gendered power structures work.

Austerity as violence

To operationalise this exposure of structural gendered violence, when we think about how women are positioned structurally we need to ask political questions: who wins and loses in this positioning? Who benefits from the systems, policies and processes that are in place? In our case study of the recent era of austerity in the UK, we build on work which positions austerity as a process and policy as inherently violent (Cooper & Whyte, 2017) in material, symbolic and relational terms. Therefore to ask political questions about the nature of we need to understand austerity in relation to its wider economic context, where wealth is created. To ask these political questions is to ask who benefits: and if a diversity of women form the main bearers of the consequences of government spending reductions (as discussed below), then where are the men, and where is the wealth? Who gains and who bears the costs of these gains, in the austerity context? And how is this legitimated in our media discourses? (We use the term discourse to refer to and reflect the process by which dominant ideas become hegemonic, normalised as 'common sense'; so regularly accepted that we no longer notice them, rather these ideas are accepted a 'just the way things are' [cf. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012].)

In response to the 2007/8 financial crisis in a competitive marketplace, in 2009, David Cameron , argued that Britain was 'entering in to an age of austerity' (Cameron 2009). This paved the way for a raft of state restructuring through social and economic policy and state/local relations (Gray & Barford, 2018). For some this has been positioned as an agenda with ideological underpinnings (e.g. Crouch, 2011). For others a technical response to a technical problem (for summary see Anstead, 2018). Media and popular culture have played a key role in the ideological work required in generating public support for austerity policies. We see media narratives of classed and gendered 'shaming' of welfare recipients (Allen et al, 2014). Anti-welfare sentiment becomes normalised through mediated culture as 'common sense' (Jensen & Tyler, 2015) where recipients are politically and culturally stigmatised and scapegoated (Tyler, 2013). Cooper and Whyte (2017) argue that austerity has also functioned as a means to inflict violence upon the most vulnerable in society. For them this violence takes a routine form of bureaucratised violence. This violence impacts in the most everyday ways, through the removal of the state as a buffer with the most devastating of consequences for the most vulnerable in society (2017: 3-4). As has also been argued, austerity is highly gendered not only as a policy but as a process and in its 'everydayness' (Hall, 2018).

The 'everydayness' of this gendered process has resulted in what Abramovitz (2012) terms the 'feminization of austerity'. According to the TUC, policies pursued under the austerity agenda have resulted in rising levels of female unemployment; public service sector cuts which hit women's employment particularly hard; and increasing numbers of precarious employment contracts for women (Stewart & Syal, 2011). From 2010, the Government Equalities Office, which funded the Women's National Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission had year on year decreases in its budget so that it received 38% less in 2014-15 than 2010 (Gov.UK, 2018). Signalling further marginalisation of political investment in this issue, this office was moved to the Home Office in January 2018. Austerity governance has clearly been 'informed by assumptions about gender' (Whitworth, 2006: 96) and yet those assumptions remain implicit (Griffin, 2015). These measures have meant women are being returned to the home (Jupp, 2016). This serves as a backlash to the advancements of feminist theorising and activism. Women are being rendered invisible in the processes of austerity (Jupp, 2017). In this sense, taking gender seriously in our analysis of the ways in which policies are communicated, means thinking about how narratives of austerity serve to position men and women as a visible part of the political process, as citizens and not just as elite political actors.

Public profligacy has replaced malpractice in the financial sector as political explanations of the problem (Rubery, 2015: 1; Pearson & Elson, 2015; 6). And women are bearing the costs of this political positioning. Combining job losses in the public sector (where more women are employed) and reducing the income support that the state was providing, has led to a number of reports which detail the financial burden that falls disproportionately on women (Women's Budget Group; Hall et al, 2017). The government have been challenged in court for ignoring its statutory requirement to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment when drawing up austerity measures (Fawcett Society, 2013; Pearson & Elson, 2015: 14). The Fawcett Society (2014) also estimates that UK women rely on benefits for an average of 20% of their income compared to 10% of men. UK lone parents, most of whom are women, have borne a large share of income cuts (Browne, 2011). As Rubery observes, this kind of denial of state income support increases vulnerability of women, with the further risk of exposing them to violence (Rubery, 2015: 7) not only in structurally positioning women as dependent on relationships that they are no longer part of, but in the physical reduction of support mechanisms for women experiencing material and physical violence. Under the austerity measures Rape Crisis centres have been closed, and rape crisis remains chronically underfunded and under resourced, where the demand exceeds supply by 300% (Women's Grid, 2018). These data all reinforce the notion that the

economy is a 'gendered structure' (Pearson & Elson, 2015). And as discussed below, this gendered economic structure is both embedded within and serves to embed symbolic structural violence.

Feminised austerity as violence

Women in their diversity are underrepresented in the corridors of power: in Parliament (Childs & Krook, 2009), in business (Hampton Alexander Review, 2018) and as wealth holders (see table 1 below). Conversely, women are over represented as the bearers of the costs of austerity. Since 2010, 86% of the burden of austerity has fallen on women (Ryan, 2017). To use the term women as an homogenising category fails to take into account the ways in which minority women have been doubly disadvantaged (see also Emejulu & Bassell, 2015; hooks, 1981, Crenshaw, 1991). It is noticeable that Asian women are in the poorest 33% of households being the worst affected with their average income being £2,247 lower than as a result of changes to the tax and benefit system (Ryan, 2017; Women's Budget Group, 2017). By 2020 only 14% of the burden will have fallen on men, and the Women's Budget Group report also shows that as percentages of net annual income per annum, women in the 1st and 2nd poorest households are losing 6.8 and 7.4% of their annual income respectively, while men in the wealthiest 10 per cent are gaining 1% (Ryan, 2017, Women Budget Group, 2017). Not only has the cost of austerity been borne by women in terms of job cuts and increases in caring responsibilities, but direct physical violence has been reinforced by the reduction in funding to services where women are reliant on the state for protection from direct sexual violence. As funding for services such as rape crisis centres has been devolved to local governments, we see the effects of this approach to 'slashing public sector' services have direct violent forms of impact. Repeated closures of rape crisis centres have seen waiting lists extended in some areas from 3 to 14 months (APPG, 2018), one London councils funding for domestic violence services had been cut by 75% (Women's Grid, 2018) often returning women to the very violence they are seeking to escape. And so what we see here is a policy which inflicts violence upon women in three distinct ways: first in the material cuts which have real world consequences for women as bearers of these costs; second, in the loss of jobs, reduction of income and; third, in the possibility of being subject to further physical violence where state aid is no longer available. Symbolically we see the ways in which violence is reinforced through the language that is used to describe these measures.

The language of violence has featured heavily in our political and public discourse around austerity. Politicians have 'weaponised' policies and 'cuts' are extensively made. This language of violence invites us to be reminded that austerity is in itself a policy of violence, and this is more than mundane and routinised (cf. Cooper & Whyte, 2017). These linguistic choices of politicians and journalists

position us and frame 'the limits of our imagination' (cf. Lewis, 2013). And while the language of violence has been used to describe and define austerity measures, what is striking is that this language of violence refers to those who are most vulnerable to this violence. The language of violence in the ways that we discursively construct austerity, reinforces the notion that women are subjects of violence; strengthening rather than challenging this gendered structural positioning. For example, the word slash has been a regular feature of political discourse in relation to austerity. The term slash is defined in the dictionary as 'cut with a wide, sweeping movement, typically using a knife or sword'. Using a weapon to impose cuts, clearly connotes the language of violence. But, we are perhaps also used to seeing headlines which refer to women being slashed, the active recipients of violence. For example, on 24th July 2018 the *Daily Express* ran with the headline 'Woman, 20, has throat slashed in hotel horror'. In this headline the agency of the male perpetrator is rendered invisible (see Boyle, 2005 for further work in this area). But this also serves to reinforce the idea that it is *women* who are slashed. (Think of the genre of Horror films referred to as 'slasher' movies, whose *raison d'être* is to show the slashing of women).

In the public discussion of austerity we see the creation of a discourse which is reinforced through the evocation of violence. When violence is disproportionately enacted by men upon women, then this kind of violence in language, in the context of a policy that is harmful to women, simply serves to reinforce and normalise notions that violence and women are interconnected. In public pronouncements Theresa May (then Home Secretary for the Tory government) 'defended moves to slash spending on the [police] service' (*The Independent* 19/5/11). Reductions in public spending on the police services, are not only a symbol of 'violence' in relation to austerity, but have materially violent consequences for women. While the Office for National Statistics reports a decrease in violent crime across the UK in the year up to March 2018(ONS, 2018b) nonetheless, domestic violence is noted as being an area of significant increase (ONS, 2018a&b). In the public sector, where female workers are predominantly employed, their jobs are under threat, we see the language of violence reinforced in the need to 'slash the massive [public sector] wage bill' (*The Sun* 10/12/11) where 'Plans that could slash pay by up to 10 per cent for public sector workers in poorer parts of the country will be introduced within 16 months' (*Daily Mail* 8/12/11). Women tend to be hurt most when public services are squeezed, in part as they make up a larger portion of the workforce. Alongside women's employment becoming increasingly precarious, the services that the public sector provides are also subject to the same kind of approach. Councils are adopting approaches where they 'slash and save' (*The Independent* 24/12/11). Cuts in social care provision, also mean that the burden also falls mainly

on women as they are the ones who disproportionately undertake 'unpaid labour' in the form of caring responsibilities, for children, the sick and elderly (Elson, 2012; Griffin, 2015; Butler, 2018).

The ways in which women are positioned in and through political public austerity discourse has both material effects (physical violence, reduction in economic security) and symbolic effects (women politically positioned as the bearers of the costs). The language of violence serves not only to reinforce the violence of austerity policy, but also to reinforce the notion that violence, like austerity, is something that is 'done' to women. This feminisation of austerity is both an act that allows individual violence and also part of the structure of societal violence towards the less powerful 'other'. While we can see that statistically women are most adversely affected by austerity, the dominant discourses that position it and wealth creation serves to de-masculinise those men who are deemed to have failed too; feminised and in the process devalued. Inter-related to this discourse of austerity is the neoliberal desire to create wealth, and a 'strong and stable' economy. Not only is strength often treated as a masculinised characteristic, but our discourses celebrate those creators of economic wealth, who predominantly are male. Following Connell (1987), our argument here is that the way in which the symbolic violence of austerity towards women is normalised, is reliant on the construction of its gendered opposite, masculinised wealth.

Masculinised wealth creation as violence

Austerity is a term which forms part of the neoliberal agenda designed to 'roll back the state'. As noted above, strategies include reducing corporation taxes and those paid by wealthy individuals (benefitting predominantly men), cutting public spending (affecting predominantly women), moving public service provision to the private sector and deregulating business and labour (benefitting predominantly male owners of wealth). The language of markets has been essential to this agenda, and the neoliberal assumption of rationality, or homo economics – notably rational man – have been the ideological underpinnings. The rational man, neoliberalism assumes, will pursue his own self-interest, thereby generating wealth. This relies on the language of empowerment but fails to acknowledge or address the structural obstacles that are placed upon those who do not conform to the category of rational 'man'. The neoliberal assumptions of 'rational man' rely on this particular version of 'hegemonic masculinity' (cf. Connell, 1987). The rational man in the neoliberal context is unshackled by government constraints, rational in the pursuit of his self-interest, competitive and by extension aggressive in this pursuit. Masculinity and the notion of 'man' of course rely on their definition in relation to binary opposites, femininity and woman. In shoring up the interests of rational economic masculinity, this serves to 'symbolically annihilate' feminine interests (Tuchmann, 1974), which takes a form of symbolic violence (Spivak, 1988; Bourdieu, 2001). Discourses of wealth creation

perpetuate a masculine version of what it is to be productive i.e. a prioritising of a masculinised version of worth and value.

To think about the ways in which wealth is masculinised, it is useful not only to consider this in the structural context of neoliberalism and its underlying assumptions, but also in the way this translates into practice. A stated aim of the then UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne’s, austerity measures was to introduce measures that ‘support a strong enterprise led recovery’ and that this economic recovery ‘must have its foundations in the private sector’ (cited in Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: 135-8). This government endorsement of the benefits of business in pursuit of economic policy has been accompanied by not only descriptive reinforcement of men’s interests but substantive affirmation too. In business boardrooms, we see a dramatic overrepresentation of men. Noticeably, in the UK, who not only are 94.5% of CEOs male, but there are more CEOs called John, than there are women (Hampton Alexander Review, 2018). This despite the overwhelming evidence which cites improved business performance where boards have a greater diversity of representation (Nolan & Moran, 2016).

A 2018 Credit Suisse report showed that the numbers of super wealthy are growing, and their wealth is increasing far faster than that of the general population: 0.8% of adults own 44.8% of global wealth (Credit Suisse, 2018). Men are still disproportionately the wealth owners; Forbes rich list counted 2,208 billionaires. Only 244 of those were female. So while women disproportionately bear the costs of austerity, men are disproportionately holding the wealth as beneficiaries of policies and discourses which enable and facilitate this. As noted in table 1 below, during the period of ‘feminised austerity’, men are also over represented as holders of wealth in the UK. (This is in a context where men are constructed as heroic holders and generators of wealth in our popular culture in films such as *The Wolf of Wall Street*¹). Over the same time period as the austerity measures analysed (2010-17), the Sunday Times top 10 rich list yielded the following data for the wealthiest in our country:

Sunday Times Annual Rich list	no of men	no of women	Top of the Rich List
2010	13	2	Lakshmi Mittal (M)
2011	14	2	Lakshmi Mittal (M)
2012	12	2	Lakshmi Mittal (M)
2013	12	2	Alisher Usmanov (M)
2014	12	1	Sri & Gopi Hinduja (M)

¹ With thanks to Candy Yates for this point

2015	14	2	Leonard Blavatnik (M)
2016	13	2	David & Simon Reuben (M)
2017	13	2	Sri & Gop[i Hinduja (M)

Table 1. Sunday Times top ten wealth holders in the UK by sex 2010-2017

Since the introduction of austerity in the political lexicon in 2010, we see that the top ten holders of wealth are 86% male. So while there is extensive descriptive over representation of men, and it is useful to perhaps briefly explore how these men were discursively positioned in this context. The top wealth owner in 2012, is presented as a generous benefactor willing to sacrifice some of his profits, in order to advance the profits of his company: *The Independent's* (1/11/2011) headline 'Mittal puts his business first with \$350m cut to dividend payout' suggests an altruism on the part of Britain's wealthiest man at that time. Wealth it seems is a product of 'meritocracy' rather than an unequal economic structure: A celebratory article in *The Sunday Times*, promoted the advantages of Osborne's policies, which had meant that 'The billionaire industrialist Jim Ratcliffe has moved back to Britain, six years after relocating to Switzerland to slash the tax bill of his Ineos chemicals empire' (*Sunday Times*, 17/7/16). In this positioning the term 'slash' is also used, but here presented as a positive trait of masculinity, a necessary measure of wealth creation and success (and indeed it did seem to indicate neoliberal 'success' as Ratcliffe was named Britain's wealthiest man in 2018). Violence is intertwined and celebrated in this neoliberal context as a mechanism through which wealth is created, predominantly by and for men. The violence of the gendered structures which facilitate this wealth creation is obscured. Rather we are presented with 'objective' (for which read structurally blind) account of neoliberal masculine economic success. This notion of structural blindness acts to deflect us from asking some of the more challenging questions about why things are the way they are and helps perpetuate a belief that solutions are located in individual and privatised agency. The privatisation of both individual agency and the public sphere; being left to the neoliberal agenda of fighting for survival, has the effect of masculinising notions of freedom by privileging self-reliance and competition over co-operation and compassion. In effect it amounts to an assault on values ascribed to female impacting on the material structures of power and 'where it should naturally' be located (Giroux 2001).

The gendered structural and symbolic violence of austerity

The people who have escaped the consequences of the austerity agenda, have been predominantly men. But to position this only as about the biological sex of those people is to essentialise and this article seeks to go further than these essentialised categories. The construction of the masculine relies on its binary opposite, the construction of the feminine, and so this is interrelated to the ways in which men and women are positioned in and through wealth creation and austerity measure, which contains the normalisation of violence. Both are also premised on relations of domination and subordination; one relies on the oppression of the 'other' for the maintenance of its privileged position in existing structures. This idea of binaries can be seen to operate as a deliberate discourse that serves to preserve current privilege; to challenge this duality is to threaten the existing foundations on which those with power gained and maintain it. This in itself is a form of symbolic violence (Spivak, 1988; Bourdieu, 2001). Neoliberal rational 'man' is competitive to be successful and aggressive in pursuit of his own self-interest; masculinity implies agency. In contrast, austerity is feminised, and agency is removed from women who are positioned as subjects of violence. In this way, interlinkage of women and violence becomes further normalised through political discourse.

Symbolic violence reflects the ways in which domination and subordination, systems of unequal power relations and exploitation are reproduced through daily practice. And through cultural actions and experiences, these relations of power are normalised (cf. Bourdieu, 2001). A gendered exploration of political discourse enables us to reflect on the ways in which women are relationally positioned in and by political discourses and within structures. Not only is violence inflicted through discourses within structures, but these structures themselves are premised on relations of violence (domination and subordination). In this sense, we have an relational interaction between power structures *as* violent, and power structures *facilitating* violence. It is in this structural context that we witness the playing out of the binary co-constitution of gender; located within and emergent from violence, it becomes more likely that where this violence is normalised, and unexposed, this becomes in turn hegemonic.

These narratives of austerity reinforce the notion that violence is a necessary feature of the political process. Where women are bearing the costs of these policies, the links between women and violence are reinforced not only at a physical level (and the closure of women's refuges bear testament to this) but at a symbolic and structural level. Connecting the language of violence to policies which harm women, discursively reinforces the notion that violence and women are intimately linked. Not only are they intimately linked but there is a power hierarchy here and violence is something that is done *to* women. While we see the economic reality of feminised poverty, its binary opposite, masculinised

wealth, is rendered far less visible. Political discourses of government policy keep masculine wealth out of our 'imagination'; obscuring these elite beneficiaries from public scrutiny or accountability.

The embedding of violence towards women in political structures is thus a gendered phenomenon. It relies on the construction of the masculine as the binary opposite of the feminine. In these neoliberal times political actors present us with another discursive binary: wealth is possible because of austerity. In this sense, neoliberal wealth and austerity are positioned as binary opposites; through the same processes that femininity is reliant on the construction of masculinity. And as such, both gender and austerity/wealth creation are relational processes. So how might we 'undo' this relational process?

Rainbow Murray argues that instead of talking about the under representation of women in politics, we need to focus on the over representation of men (2014). Boyle (2018) similarly argues for the importance of gendered naming practices as a way to expose gendered power structures. For her, this is a means to expose violence and limit agency to the perpetrators of such violence. Following the same logic, we argue that to restore visibility to the beneficiaries of violent political policies and discourse, serves to further expose the gendered and relational nature of underlying power structures. We have begun to do this in public discourse, where we talk about the feminisation of austerity (Abramowitz, 2012). However, we also argue that we need to restore gender politically to the beneficiaries of this neoliberal economic policy and process. We need to talk explicitly about the (neoliberal) masculinisation of wealth creation and indeed challenge the importance wealth creation is afforded within a hegemonic masculine system. Not of Osborne's 'enterprise led recovery' but of a '*male* enterprise led recovery'. We can highlight the gendered dimensions of Osborne's original austerity speech by noting that he is arguing 'economic recovery must have its roots in the *male* private sector'. Moreover, if we rename, and gender, the phrase 'strong and stable economy' as 'a strong and stable economy *as necessary to create male wealth*', we can expose how these relations, policies and discourses are inherently located in gendered relational power structures.

Conclusion

We started by articulating a problem; how can we understand and thus explore the lack of pervasive astonishment expressed towards systemic male violence towards women. At the heart of our response to this we articulated a layered argument looking at the formulation and perpetuation of relations between the pervasiveness of both symbolic and physical violence against women and the mediation of this by structural agents of a neoliberal system itself predicated on hegemonic masculinity. Dominant discourse within this work by silencing, marginalising, and reinforcing the symbolic nature of this violence; to 'other' and to frame this violence in ways that make it part of the

unremarkable everydayness we take for granted. We have used the UK Government policy of Austerity as a contemporary illustration of the relationships between the elements outlined above to help demonstrate how violence towards women is socially codified, structured and practiced in such ways that act to reinforce the status quo of gendered politics.

Our social and political structures are built on gendered power relations of violence, that is of domination and subordination (Spivak 1988, Bourdieu 2001). Much literature which looks at gender, either looks at women, or it looks at men; this article has argued that we are not able to understand the position of one, without understanding the position of the other. Further, to understand how men are positioned (and women therefore positioned in opposition) we need to understand what masculinity is. Here we have drawn extensively on Connell's term 'hegemonic masculinity' extending these ideas by connecting it explicitly with neoliberalism, and its underlying masculinised rationality. We have also recognised the important role media plays in framing how we make sense of politics through our being exposed to dominant discourses that serve to reinforce existing power structures. Using austerity, a key plank of contemporary neoliberal political policy and discourse, we reveal how underlying gendered power structures become reinforced through gendered policies and mediated discourses, which, in effect, shores up the structural and symbolic violence. The cumulative combination of these power relations serves to obscure gendered violence and therefore normalise and legitimate male violence towards women. The essence of this article's contribution is that the structural embeddedness of neoliberal hegemonic masculinity, and its mediation in political discourse, is what enables violence towards women to be both so ubiquitous and yet unremarkable.

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