

The Gender Institute Launch Event
21 January 2021
Professor Raewyn Connell
“Feminist Thought and the Political Economy of Knowledge”

Transcription by Emily Gee

LS: Officially, welcome to the first of the Gender Institute’s launch events and thank you for supporting the Gender Institute at Royal Holloway, University of London. The Gender Institute was founded in 2020 with seed funding from the British Academy and it looks to become a hub for the study, teaching and learning and activism about gender and sexuality on campus. The Institute has three primary missions: to support faculty in student research and research collaboration around the study of gender and sexuality, for the teaching and learning around gender and sexuality, and to produce research that’s for community engagement and impact around gender and sexuality, and we hope this launch event is an introduction to all of those. We’re excited to launch the programming of the Gender Institute with the talk by Professor Raewyn Connell. Raewyn Connell is the Professor Emerita at the University of Sydney and a life member of the National Tertiary Education Union in Australia; she became well known for her research on large class dynamics and how class and gender hierarchies are made and remade in everyday life in schools. She subsequently developed a social theory of gender relations, which emphasised that gender is a large scale and dynamic social structure, not just a matter of personal identity. Her studies on masculinity have been widely cited and widely used in classrooms and universities across the world. She’s been an advisor to UNESCO and a wide variety of other policy initiatives relating to men, boys, masculinity, gender equality and peacemaking. As of 2017, her book, *Masculinities*, has been cited over 15,000 times and has been translated into 10 languages. In addition to her work on gender, Raewyn has worked on Southern Theory and on understanding contemporary university structures and politics. Her long career in academia and activism can be seen as a model for current and future generations. Please help me welcome her talk at the Gender Institute’s inaugural launch event about feminist thought and global political economy and knowledge. I’m going to turn the floor over to Raewyn. Thank you everyone for coming and I look forward to the talk myself.

RC: Thank you very much, greetings to everyone. A small pause while I engage in technology, I will attempt to share my screen with a PowerPoint display [PowerPoint loads onscreen]. Now, is that coming through? Are we getting this?

Yes, that’s fine.

RC: Excellent, so now going full screen, there’s a little program here that tells me what to do. And hopefully we’re now all set up! Stop me if I do anything wrong. But here we go.

Anyway, first of all, congratulations on the launch of the Gender Institute, that’s terrific. And I’m very honoured to be here in this session. With the beginnings of any new program, one of few basic tasks obviously is to define the agenda, and that is what I hope to make a little contribution to today. I’m speaking to you from Sydney in Australia, a country whose name literally means ‘the south land’, it’s a settler colonial country, which is relevant to some of

the story I'll be telling today. I come from a particular generation, too, a generation which grew up intellectually and politically in the 1960s and 70s. Here's Australian feminism in 1975, International Women's Day, I published my first paper on gender the year before, in 1974. It was a pretty terrible paper, but at least it was on some of the right topics, and it was learning at the time that feminism and the new sexual politics were dangerous ideas, folks. As I think they still are. And [it was] dangerous for intellectual work, intellectual workers, too. In fact, I came to learn and argue, that the new analysis of gender and sexuality implied in fact a revolutionary transformation in intellectual life. And in several different ways. Firstly, it saw new historical subjects coming onto the scene, as the point was put by Julieta Kirkwood, the pioneering feminist theorist in Chile, where the mobilisation of women created a collective identity, a new kind of politics based on a new form of oppression which had not been much recognised in political processes and democratic politics before. The new politics also implied new themes for investigation in the humanities, social sciences, and in the natural sciences, though it's often forgotten. And it acquired new concepts, concepts like patriarchy, one of the central ideas of women's liberation, the notion of the gender order (slightly later theorising) but understanding those not as abstract philosophical ideas but as very concrete social structures. As the site of conflict, as the site of oppression, and as the site too of dynamic changes and shifts in history, which the women's liberation movement itself epitomised and theorised. Now for someone like me, an academic worker, these changes in consciousness and politics, new forms of mobilisation, also opened new research agendas, and I just want to illustrate this with a collective, co-operative research project that I was involved in in the 1970s, published in the 1980s in a book which I'm still very proud of and I'm glad to say the research team are still friends forty years later – how's that!

8:38

So, in this project, which involved us interviewing hundreds of kids in high schools, their parents, their teachers, visits to schools and so on and so forth, quite an intensive piece of work. I learned to speak in that project of the gender regimes and institutions. It was very clear once, when I saw it in front of your nose so to speak, how one school differed from another in the way that it handled gender issues. In that project also, I became very much aware of the existence of multiple forms of masculinity, often in the same institution, in very definite relationships with each other. That project in fact was where the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was first formulated and where I saw the empirical evidence for patterns of hegemony in relations among masculinities and femininities. And we also saw in that project, very concretely, a project of change in gender relations because we were doing this at a time when schoolteachers were in fact a very important group in feminism – as I think they still are. And many teachers, whether or not they were connected formally with the women's liberation movement (one could hardly be connected formally) but whether they were active participants in the movement, were nevertheless undertaking projects of change in gender relations, in the vocational preparation of girls, in the attempt to shift oppressive gender and sexual patterns in school life itself. These things were happening at the grassroots level, in the institutions at the same time as mobilisation on the larger scale was happening in the society at large. That was a really important set of learnings for me, on which I guess I have built ever since. And although the language in which I now speak of this is somewhat different from those early days, I think it was then that I really began to understand one of the most important facts about gender, is that it is cultural all right, but it

is also embodied and those things work together in gender relations, in the forming of particular patterns of gender and personal life and gender relations in everyday life. In the process of historical change that grows out of existing patterns transforms them and creates new realities of gender and gender relations. That's a kind of process that I now call – using a bit of philosophical jargon – 'ontoformative' social processes. Basically, summarising the fact recognised throughout gender politics, that gender relations are created through time, they're not fixed, they're not prior to human social life, they are created in human social life and change over time.

12:26

Now when we begin thinking about the historicity of gender – that's another way of saying what I'm talking about – we have to think also about history on the large scale, and as I mentioned at the start of my talk, I live in a settler colonial country that is a product of European colonisation and its contemporary social structure is largely product of European colonisation over the last couple of hundred years. And if the society I live in is part of a larger history of the expansion of global empires, the colonisation of, just in one form or another, it's just about every other part of the world, and the creation of colonial societies. That is one of the crucial parts of human history over the last half millennium.

13:40

Here is a nineteenth-century artists impression of what that was like in Australia. This comes from a nineteenth-century Australian magazine. They're a little out of order in their picturing of the Aboriginal warriors, but the fact of a violent conflict and of the process of violent destruction of colonial populations and societies is absolutely characteristic of imperialism everywhere. So, the recent history of humanity to a very, very considerable extent is the story of the creation of colonial societies, then of struggles for decolonisation, the creation of post-colonial societies, the creation of the global markets, which now largely replace the old, formal political empires, and the development of global communication systems, global corporations, and so on. Now, once we recognise that, then we should also recognise, and this is much less recognised, that colonisation, the growth of empire, the creation of colonial societies was itself gendered. So, empire was a gendered project from the start. It was largely undertaken by colonising workforces, which were strongly masculinised, and the process of colonisation itself constructed and transformed masculinities of both the colonisers and the colonised. This is a point that is made in a brilliant book by the Indian intellectual, Ashis Nandy a very interesting psychologist, cultural analyst and cultural historian. He wrote a tremendous book back in the 1980s called *The Intimate Enemy* about the interplay of masculinities among the colonisers and the colonised in British India, in the Indian Raj. But it's not just, of course, about that interaction, the impact of colonisation on gender orders basically tore apart many existing gender orders, this certainly happened in Australia through the rape of indigenous women, in Africa and the Americas through the institution of slavery and the massive Atlantic slave trade. These too were gendered processes which reshaped gender relations in very, very dramatic ways. We can even say that race, which is a very characteristic social form, constructed in empire, in colonial societies and in empires as a whole, is one of the characteristic social divisions that is woven in with gender in the story of imperialism and coloniality.

17:22

For instance, in the work of Uma Chakravarti, the Indian feminist historian, who is on the left in this picture of one of her classes, Uma has written very interestingly about caste, arguing that the hierarchies of caste, which the British colonisers crystallised and used as techniques of rule, were almost a form of gender in themselves. They were very centrally bound up with gender relations and of course transformed gender relations as the caste system evolved.

18:05

Turning to South America, this is Mara Viveros, a remarkable feminist theorist and researcher from Colombia in South America, who has traced this kind of process up to the present in the multiple forms of gender politics that emerge in the different racial groups that have been created by the colonial history of Spanish-speaking South America and in the postcolonial societies and politics that have developed since independence in the early nineteenth century. We can even see the colonial connections between gender and race in the present, in the Anglosphere, in the rhetoric of the late and lamented Trump regime with its attempt to stigmatise marginalised ethnic groups, particularly those of Latino origin, as rapists, as sexual offenders and as threats to white American women. So, gender is, I would argue, interwoven with the story of empire and colonial and postcolonial societies in very deep and powerful ways. And why I'm telling this story, is that I think these connections, the connections between empire and gender also work in the construction of knowledge, in the materials that we work with in the academic work, the concepts we use, even the kinds of projects that we undertake and what we think is worth researching. And I want to make that point, just by going back one step and arguing that the modern economy of knowledge, the dominant knowledge formation on which university curriculum is built is shaped in a global economy with a very significant resemblance to the extractive and exchange economy created by empire and now developed in new ways in the global capitalist economy of our day. One of the crucial features of this economy in the realm of knowledge, is the relationship between the global metropole, the imperial centres of North America and Western Europe and the colonised world, the rest of the world, where the imperial centres send out expeditions to engage, basically, in data mining parallel to what was happening in the realm of natural resources and here is an illustration of that which is connected with one of the most important gender theorists of the nineteenth century.

[New slide] 21:40

This is a British Royal Navy vessel called *The Beagle*, which many of you will recognise the name. It's shown in front of a famous mountain in southern Chile, where it had got to in its three-year data gathering voyage around the world. Although you can't see him onboard the ship, at this time was a young biologist by the name of Charles Darwin, and the data that he brought back geological as well as observations in biology were part of what went into the evolution revolution in biology which kickstarted the whole of modern biological science, so it's not a trivial episode that we are seeing here, but it was multiplied hundreds of times as data was collected around the colonised world for just about a full range of disciplines from linguistics to astronomy, natural science, medical science, social science, sociology's deeply involved in this type of process. Data flows developed from the colonised periphery back to the imperial centre where they were theorised so that the imperial centre became the site, if you like, of the theoretical moment in global science, including methodology, formal theorising and the aggregation of data, and that is still a function

which is principally performed in the global north as the role of the global south is still to a very large extent the role of supplying data, even in areas like climate change, where the data gathering is increasingly automated, that geographical and social relationship still actually dominates the global economy of knowledge. And one has to say, that gender research is no exception, and this is also true if we go back into the history of what we now might call gender studies or studies of sexuality, a significant part of that history is colonial data mining and this is done by people who are very significant figures in our era, significant feminist thinkers such as Margaret Mead, whose professional occupation it was of course, that of an anthropologist, and who brought back from her several trips to the colonised world, what became very influential data, arguing for social constructions theory of gender. So, although most of the well-known theorists in gender research and I think this is also true of sexuality research to the extent that they are separated, do come from the global north, do come from the global metropole, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and so on. Nevertheless, the discipline as a whole has grown to a significant extent, on flows the information to other parts of the world. So, we too, in gender research, for all the revolutionary potential that I was speaking of before, are still part of the dominant economy of knowledge, which works in very unequal ways on a world scale.

25:48

Now that might sound rather depressing, and it's certainly something that can be a bit of a shock when you come in touch with this argumentation for the first time. There are books of gender theory that I'm familiar with, for instance, which really have no reference to any thinkers outside the global north, except perhaps a few white theorists in settler colonies like Australia. Basically, the intellectual production of what would have been 70-80% of the world is absent from many representations of what theory is about in gender studies. But this doesn't have to be, and this is an argument now which is increasingly made, not just in gender studies of course, but in the humanities and social sciences more widely, and is even heard from time to time in the natural sciences and rightly so. So, I know that there are decolonising movements already in global north universities in Britain. For instance, the 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' movement, or the current debates about decolonising the curriculum. In the United States, for quite some time now, there's been significant attention to Black feminist thought in the global metropole itself and in its connections, especially with African thought. And that points to the existence of other frameworks for knowledge, other knowledge formations as I would put it, which are alternatives to the research base knowledge formation which is dominant in the university world. For instance, indigenous knowledges, which have not been wiped out by the destruction of colonisation, or certainly not been wholly wiped out and are currently undergoing significant cultural revival. There are forms of indigenous knowledge which are specifically gendered, for instance, in Australian Aboriginal culture, there are ceremonies and forms of knowledge, as well as forms of labour that are socially assigned to women, and which are in parallel with men's rituals and forms of knowledge and are just as complex and elaborate. There are alternative universalisms: indigenous knowledges are typically connected with a particular place, with the land, as Australian Aboriginal people put it, but there are also universal forms of knowledge which are not tied to a particular place or land, and claim that like research-based knowledge, a certain degree of universality. For instance, the knowledge that is embedded in Islamic jurisprudence, which is itself an elaborated and complex system of knowledge and practices, with its specialists, with its complex and elaborate literature and

with its feminist wing, too, because there is Islamist feminism and feminist arguments in Islamic jurisprudence. There is also argument, although people in the Anglosphere really know this, about trans issues in Islamic jurisprudence, and Iran, since the Islamic revolution there, bringing a Sh'ia regime to power, is one of the few places in the world – countries I suppose one could say - where trans existence is not only legalised but has religious authority behind it. That is something really worth pondering about given the common views of the gender politics of Islamic thought.

30:57

Well in fact I'm going right on to speak about feminist movements in colonised and postcolonial societies and I want again to go back in history to Islamic majority colonies, in this case the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia. This is the only surviving photograph, about 150 years old now, of Kartini, whom most feminists in the Anglosphere, regrettably, don't know about but who is a national heroine in Indonesia, and a kind of patron saint of women's organisations in Indonesia. She was a feminist thinker particularly concerned with women's education, the author of a bestselling set of letters which included extensive discussions of the issue of changing women's position through education, and which became something of a classic of colonial literature, unfortunately after Kartini's own death at a very sadly young age.

[New slide] 32:27

Moving to another part of the Islamic majority world, to Egypt, at the time basically a British colony under indirect rule, but effectively a British colony. This is Huda Sharawi, the organiser of the Egyptian Feminist Union, an important figure in the development of gender-based activism in the colonised world. And I could go on, you know, quite extensively, I'm sure some of you could, too, adding to the story of things of political movements, of the work of intellectuals of colonised societies as resources for understanding gender dynamics. And what is true of feminist movements, I think is now also increasingly true of trans movements.

[New slide] 33:37

Here I am indulging in an autobiographical moment. This is a photograph of a meeting I had some years back with a trans support group in Brazil, in Sao Paulo, which illustrates very obviously the diversity of trans organising in that part of the world. And what I learnt through my discussion with this and other groups about the different agendas, the different political concerns, the trans women in global south locations, global south societies, are likely to have compared with trans activism in the global north, the different policy priorities these groups might have, the different problems that are faced in practical life of poverty and violence, and the kinds of knowledges that might be generated from that experience – it's a very, very illuminating and exciting experience for me which I have now begun to try to crystallise and begin to publish some thoughts from. So, from that example you can see that I am highly interested in what gender dynamics and sexuality in global south contexts might have to feed into a more genuinely inclusive and participatory gender studies and sexuality studies on a genuinely world scale. The genres of work might be different, from the classic global north referee journal, which has been, I have to say, my principal genre of publication, which I like many others in this meeting I am sure try to move beyond. There are different genres, and there are very certainly different agendas, different priorities, in

feminist thought in global south contexts, too. And I want to bring these very general observations to some concrete points by introducing four people that I regard as among the really interesting feminist intellectuals who should have global reputations, and at least one case does, but who should be high on the reading lists and attention of gender analysts today.

36:59

The first is someone who's thought hard about the point I was making earlier, about the violence of colonisation, the enormous destruction of colonised cultures and societies, resulting from the violent advent of colonial rule. This is Amina Mama, an African feminist thinker, now I think working in the United States, who has written very effectively about exactly this issue, about the significance of colonising violence for the disruption of pre-colonial African societies and the connections of that colonising violence and disruption to the patterns of gender-based violence that exist today. It's a connection that is not actually visible in some global north thinking about gender-based violence, even that which uses an intersectional frame. But when we think about gender-based violence on a world scale, that issue is tremendously important, not only for Africa, but for stories in Latin America, in South Asia, in the Pacific and in East Asia, as well. That is an issue that gender studies on a world scale must treat as a really major problem, and we owe that to people like Amina Mama for articulating issues as strongly.

38:49

The second issue that I think comes out very strongly from global south work on gender is the significance of regional gender histories and what we might call the macro structures of gender, the patterns of the economic and large-scale institutional structures of gender. Now this has been a particular concern of Teresita de Barbieri feminist theorist from Uruguay originally, although she had to leave Uruguay at the time that the dictatorship came in there. She moved to Chile and then eventually to Mexico, where, very fortunately, I met her not long before she died. Teresita, I think, is almost uncited in the Anglosphere, and I don't think much of her work has ever been translated. So, it has to be accessed in Spanish or through Spanish, but it is an extraordinarily sophisticated, social science-based synthesis of issues about economic change, about race, about class dynamics, issues that are massively important in progressive social thought across Latin America. But in her work very particularly is brought to focus on the construction of gender. She is in fact one of the first important gender theorists, I think, to see the significance in issues about masculinity and build that in a strong way into her theorising of continent-wide social processes. So, I have great respect for the work and have learnt a great deal from it.

41:04

Third issue, though, I want to raise, is one which is also almost absent from many forms of social theory in the global north, practically absent from my theorising in my discipline of sociology, but which is absolutely central to processes of colonisation, and to thinking about the nature of colonial society populations and gender relations. So, the person who is front and centre in thinking about this is an Indian feminist development economist, Bina Agarwal whom I'm sure many of you will know as she has a very considerable reputation in development economics and in feminist thinking about environmental issues. [name]'s great work is called *A Field of One's Own*, a deliberate take on Virginia Woolf, of course, but

it's about land and land ownership of land rights, in relation to gender, particularly women's access to uses/ownership of land, how this plays out in families, in local politics, and then in a policy level and larger political structures. It's a stunning piece of work, I think it's one of the great works of modern feminism, and [full name] to my mind is perhaps the most important feminist theorist of our time. It's very, very impressive, grounded in enormous amount of empirical knowledge investigation and it's only one part of her work. Stunning stuff.

43:15

And finally, not to leave the men out. I want to come to issues about masculinity, and the tendency in a great deal of popular discussions to assume that when we talk about traditional masculinity, we're speaking of patriarchal masculinity, of abusive, of aggressive, domineering types of masculinity. And here I think it's really important, anyone interested in these kinds of issues really needs to read the work of Kopano Ratele, a South-African psychologist, who is one of the most interesting writers about questions of masculinity today, and has written brilliant analysis on exactly this issue of traditions in masculinity, and made the, to me, completely convincing argument, that traditions in masculinity are not just patriarchal, there are also democratic traditions, in the lives of men, in men's enactment of gender, and indeed the history of feminisms will give some important clues to that. And there are negotiations around the meanings of masculinity and the uses of traditions which can be put to new and progressive use in the present. So Kopano, in one of his papers, tells the lovely story of a couple of gay men in South Africa who used the absolutely traditional forms of marriage with the assent of family and community to celebrate their marriage, their partnership, in what was both a highly traditional and a very new way. It's really terrific work and I strongly recommend it to you. And those are only four of the recent theorists, and there are many, many more. So, there are rich resources out there for gender studies on a world scale, which are not always easily accessed through bibliographical aids, in academia, but with patience can be found.

45:57

So, I want to bring my remarks to a close now, having made that case, and I hope, given some examples which will interest you. I want to come right to the present and make the compulsory mention of the Covid-19 epidemic, which is why I'm here and you're there, which is why we're not in the same room at the moment. Covid-19 to me, is above all a social disaster, it's an embodied social disaster. And it has an important gender dimension, as I'm sure you all know. The care workers who look after the patients in the hospitals and in outpatient care working with Covid-19 sufferers are 70% women, that's a broad global average of the gender division of labour in healthcare. That's one important part of the gender aspects of the pandemic. We all know, I think also, the now very widespread documentation in the rise of domestic violence that speaks to the dynamics of violence when people are confined to patriarchal households. We've seen, perhaps this is less proclaimed, but there's also very considerable evidence of rising economic precarity on the part of women and women-headed households as a result of the way the pandemic pans out and its economic consequences have been handled by corporations and governments. Women have been marginalised in much of the decision-making and that is something, I'm sure, you're just as familiar with as I am. It struck me, in fact, that the official responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have strikingly missed what were important learnings from

epidemics, the HIV/AIDS epidemic for instance, before the advent of hard antiretroviral medicines, the effective response was basically a community response, a change in sexual practices, the development of the safe sex strategy which largely occurred within gay communities initially. The Ebola virus, too, although this is less well-known, the communities affected by the Ebola virus in West Africa largely worked out that the epidemiology of Ebola themselves, and their own collective responses to handling the epidemic, and in particular burying the dead in ways that prevented further transmission of a highly infectious virus. So, gay networks and women's networks, in Ebola's case, were very central in evolving responses to epidemics. Unfortunately, in the government reactions to Covid-19 insofar, there's been very little attention to collective action from below. The very techniques that feminists and gay activists had been strong in developing, and I think as the Covid epidemic, in some sense, normalises, and the limits of the vaccines become clear, that collective action will be absolutely needed and it will be in our heritage that some of the resources for that can be found.

50:43

So, in the present, as in the past, I argue for the full development of the possibilities in gender and sexuality studies, we need the wealth of intellectual practical resources that come from the majority world, the global south, the world outside the global metropole. Now this is not a new thought. I am by no means a pioneer of these ideas. For instance, I would want to acknowledge the work of my Australian colleague, feminist sociologist called Chilla Bulbeck, who published more than twenty years ago, a very sophisticated discussion of the issues that are involved in linking feminist perspectives across continents and across cultures. So, there is a tradition here, there are resources for this too, as we try to develop global perspectives in the present.

51:58

So, those are my thoughts on the subject. I wish you well in building the Gender Institute and its projects. I hope you have just as exciting an experience doing this as I have in my time in these fields of research. These are not easy fields to work in. They can be hard, they can be tough on the researchers and involve struggle to create and keep space in academic institutions, but the struggles are absolutely worth pursuing because the knowledge that we can generate, I think, is now needed more than ever before. Thank you. And as my last gesture, I'm going to put up a slide giving the spelling of the names of the people I've been talking about.

LS: 53:05

Thank you very much. If it's alright with you, I'll field some questions.

RC: Sure thing.

LS: Okay. If anyone has questions you can either raise your hand or put them in the chat. And perhaps as people get ready to do that, I will take the chair's initiative and ask the first question, which is: How contextually has your understanding of masculinities changed over time?

RC: Good question, and immediately I have to do a little computing about earlier and later. I think early on I thought the problem was fairly simple. That there was, and I mean, this was something that we could see and we were working with collaborators in this work in the 1970s and 80s. We could see almost immediately that there were hierarchies in patterns of masculinity. They were in small scale situations like schools, large scale situations like the whole of Australian society. There were powerful, more authoritative masculinities and more marginalised ones. And then I guess was the model that I was working with in the 1980s, and that was good enough to produce the first account of 'hegemonic masculinity' and hegemonicalised masculinities. On the strength of that thinking, I launched some research involving life history interviews with different groups of adult men and that became eventually the empirical chapters of my book, *Masculinities*. And of course, as soon as you get into some solid empirical data, things become complicated. And some of the patterns that we'd sort of suggested theoretically, you know, it could be seen indeed. It could be illustrated in the data, but other things couldn't or at least we didn't initially have the means to see them. So, the model became more complicated. In the book, *Masculinities*, which came out in the mid-90s, I was suggesting four broad categories of masculinity, or at least locations in which masculinities might develop in the gender order. And I think, one of the things I was beginning to get at there was later articulated much more clearer by other researchers, including some colleagues in the United States, which was that different masculinities can hybridise with each other and that some masculinities can be constructed by incorporating elements of socially-defined femininity, too. So, there's now very interesting research literature about hybrid masculinities which is making the picture of hegemony a good deal more complex than in our first attempts to map it. The issue which I've worked on as other people took up this development, and which I guess is the biggest change in my own thinking, was working on *Southern Theory* and coming in contact with the range of intellectual workers in the global south and with literatures that I simply hadn't encountered before, working as I mostly did within the Anglosphere and in a university system in Australia which is very strongly dependent on the British and U.S. models. So, I then became aware that my own thinking was self-constrained in a colonial pattern and that I needed to break out of it. So, I've tried in some of my more recent writing in the past eight years or so, tried to bring the literature about masculinity into contact with the decolonial, postcolonial and Southern Theory arguments, and think about hegemony and gender relations as itself something that might be specific to certain situations in the whole imperial picture. And we might think of certain processes of colonisation and decolonisation as having very clear effects on hegemony and gender relations such that the very concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' might become problematic in a colonising or decolonising situation. And we might rather than think of 'hegemonic masculinity' as a fixed form or an identity, we might think of it better as a project, as something which is partly embodied in the social practices of a particular group, which is being brought into existence perhaps over a period of time, in a certain social situation where hegemony did not exist at the start. And here I'm drawing exactly on the work of the Indian subaltern studies group, who brought strongly into question the notion that the British colonial regime had hegemony in India society. Ranajit Guha wrote a whole monograph on this issue, and I think the same question has to be raised in gender relations in relation to colonisation, and that of course is a large part of world history. So, I think it's a big issue, one which is very much an open one at the moment, it's where my work has headed in recent years.

LS: 1:00:34

Thank you, I appreciate it a lot. I just wanted to let you know there's a comment in the chat, it's not a question, but the comment is that the resources were so useful that I should make sure that the Royal Holloway library has them on offer so that people can check and use them for their research and work. So, I will follow up on that to make sure that those researchers are available. Does anybody else have questions? So, here's another comment in the chat, 'thank you so much for a great talk, particularly for someone like me who explores gender in non-Western contexts. Indeed, I teach a history module in gender in Muslim societies, and include work by Afsaneh Najmabadi on the reading list, so it would be great to hear your thoughts if you have any on *Professing Selves*, the study, in which he explores the challenge for people in the west understanding where trans sexuality fits into the Iranian context.'

RC: 1:01:58

It's a book I know, really very, very fascinating, and for trans studies I think quite an important text. So I learned a big deal from it, I do have a little bit of a problem with, it seems to me, still largely dependent on global north conceptual frameworks. So, it's written within a certain episteme if you like. And that is, this is hardly a criticism, this is normal in studies of gender and sexuality, but it seems to me that the material in the book is already pointing beyond this, and that's what really excited me about it because the book has a really interesting encounter with one of the clerics in Iran, who has made a specialty of questions about trans sexuality within the paradigm of Islamic jurisprudence, which I was mentioning before as one of the knowledge systems that we should recognise as a resource for understanding these areas. So, absolutely! A book to read and learn from, I am very much indebted to the author for the understanding I have of these issues, not only in Iran but of course in other parts of the Shi'ite world.

LS:

Thank you, I appreciate it. So, let's see if there are any more questions. 'I have a question on technology and gender. How do you view the impact of technology on gender related issues.'

RC:

Wow. How many days have we got for this answer? Look, it's not a field of my own research, but I've read some fabulous work that's been done in that, including if I can put in another plug for Australian feminist scholarship, the work of Judy Wiseman, who has written great, great stuff on high-tech industry, for instance, and on gender issues that position women in that world. I've also read some absolutely fascinating work about the development of 'tissue economies', about how parts of the human body including blood, which I suppose counts as a tissue, are now subject to harvesting and trade on a world scale, so there are neo-colonial flows of blood, of plasma, and so forth in different parts of the world, and coming largely from poorer countries going to richer countries. What the gender dynamics of this part of the story is, I'm not at all sure, but one thing that excites me about that is how it can connect in a new way the analysis of the bodily processes that are involved in human society with the gender analysis of organisations and institutions because this is a world, you know, dominated by large corporations. These are trades conducted by transnational corporations with allowances and permissions and sometimes hindrance from

postcolonial states' governments. But there's a whole area of feminist organisation studies which has, you know, fascinating stuff, including work on transnational corporations and the patterns of masculinity, the relations between different forms of masculinity within the structure of a transnational corporation. The creation of gendered workforces, for instance, with women in the international garment industry and so on, and it's an exciting and really important area of research there. And this new literature is connecting that in new ways, with biopolitics, the study of the body's embodiment, and so forth. So, there's room for really extraordinary new syntheses, I think there, too. Great idea.

LS: 1:07:33

Alright, we have another question from the chat. 'What do you think the challenges are for gender studies and feminism today?'

RC:

OK. Well, let me suggest two which I think are really important on a world scale. Firstly, basically what I've been arguing for in my talk, that is, the challenge of connecting. You know, there's feminist radicalism all over the world, there's feminist intellectual work all over the world, there is sexual activist, gay and trans, other forms of activism in just about every part of the world. Sometimes, so hidden that it has difficulty getting into international discussions, but a lot of it is there for the meeting, you have to go out and meet it. Now, how we get the resources, the energy, the political will to put resources into making those connections, is I think a strategic issue for social movements now, including feminist movements. So that would be the first challenge I think: how do we not only make those connections but how do we keep them going? How do we resource intellectual work and movements in under-resourced parts of the world, in university systems for instance, where research funding is extremely difficult to come by? Or in parts of the world where most social research for instance, if it's done at all, is funded by NGOs who are basically interested in short-term results on immediate practical issues and are not likely to fund theoretical work or long-time studies? It's not part of their remit. So, that's the first challenge I point to. The second is the rise and the continued activity and new forms of opposition to feminism, to gay rights, and gender studies as a field of knowledge. And it'll be no secret to most people here, I guess, that gender studies itself is under challenge in some parts of eastern Europe. It is probably under, I mean that is open anti-feminist politics which drives that, a good deal of it connected with churches and with new-right regimes of one kind or another. But some of it is more subliminal. I think in the Anglosphere, for instance, when one hears of gender studies programs being defunded or just squeezed or merged into something else, there is a political process going on there, too. And, of course, there is violent anti-feminism, there is still violent opposition to abortion rights, there is antagonism to women's leadership in politics which can turn violent. There is violent, for instance, against feminist environmentalist activist, killings of human rights protectors, and so forth. So, I think that challenge is alive and well today. We have not moved into a post-feminist age because feminism has won, and because we are all feminists now. It's not the case at all. There are new and, I think, dangerous antagonisms to progressive work in these areas in different parts of the world, and they are not going away. We are going to have to deal with those and evolve forms of co-operation to the extent that these movements are international. Some of the anti-gender are now international, we need also international co-operation to deal with them.

LS: 1:12:54

Thank you. I got a direct message question that asks, 'what are some of the tools that feminism has to answer anti-gender movements?' You answered that a little bit towards the end of your answer to the last question, but I figured I would ask it explicitly in case you had something to add.

RC: Yeah. I think the big tool we've got is truth. I'm not at all postmodernist about this. I think truth is our business as researchers. Anyone who has practical experience of research knows that truth is hard to come by. But it can be come by. Good information, solid knowledge, insightful theories, kinds of things that we do try to produce in the academic world are significant parts of an answer to the distortions, lies, and misinformation that is deployed in many of these oppositional movements. Co-operation on an international scale as I mentioned is important, and awareness. This stuff is often unpleasant to work at. In one of my other lives, I was a political scientist, and my first book in political science was actually about the extreme right in Australia. So, I got used to it really early, to reading toxic materials in the course of research, it's not great fun. But we do need to be aware of what is going on, what is being claimed and make sure that the claims are answered. So, there's a function of outreach which intellectuals in our fields of work have a responsibility for, and many do very effectively. But there's still more to be done.

LS: 1:15:23

Thank you, I have one more question from the talk. 'Do you see a tension between women's rights and trans rights?'

RC:

No, but I'm very well aware of the conflict which has arisen between certain strands in feminism and certain strands in trans activism, which can be construed, I think unfortunately, as a conflict of interest or a conflict of rights. I, being a transsexual woman, I have been conscious of these tensions for a long time. The issues are articulated particularly in the United States in the second half of the 1970s by some feminist thinkers, who are genuine feminists without the slightest doubt, who constructed a fairly hostile and derogatory picture of transsexual women which became understood by many people as 'the' feminist position though it never was the only feminist view of transsexual women. And the issue's never entirely vanished since, it has flared up and died down from time to time. At the moment it seems to have flared in particular ways through mass media, where these bits were not very prominent before. I, of course, like many other trans women, are very distressed by this, and feel there must be a solution though one has not yet been found to the conflict and given the heated character of some of the exchanges, it's hardly likely to die out quickly. I don't think there's any fundamental conflict of interest here, one of the more constructive ways of thinking about it perhaps, is of recognising the contradictory character of gender as a whole. The contradictions between embodiment and social process that are involved, using a term I don't like but in the context of this debate will be recognised, cisgender lives, are also contradictory in various ways. Gender has fundamental contradictions in its constitution as a way of social life and in gender transitions, in trans lives, those contradictions take a particular form, particularly quite a dramatic form, but in other women's lives they take other forms. So, I don't see a categorical difference, if you

like, between what are now presented as polarised forms of gender. I'm sorry I'm not engaged in these polemics, and therefore I'm not a skilled practitioner in this discourse, but I do take note of it. I think there are ways of understanding at least which can bring around more connection than the polarised debates would suggest.

LS:

The person who asked the question put in the chat, 'thank you. A great answer within the context of the contradictory nature of gender.' Your answer actually made me interested in part of what you said which was that you don't like the term 'cisgender', and personally I was curious if you could tell me a little bit about why?

RC: 1:20:49

Well, I don't like stark dichotomies, EVER! And cisgender versus transgender is about the starkest dichotomy I can think of. So, as I said long before, when I was theorising in a rather simple way about masculinities and then got into the complex empirical detail, it all suddenly got very much more intricate, elaborate, and of course, interesting. So, the positions that the various forms of life that develop around, or from, or embracing gender contradictions are also very complex and I think embrace all of us so that it is simply misleading to say that there's a 'trans' group where there's contradiction and a 'cis' group where there's no contradiction. That doesn't ring true to me at all.

LS: 1:22:00

Thank you, I appreciate the answer. I don't see any more questions in the chat or any of our hands raised and we're pretty close to the time where our time together expires anyway. So I figured maybe I'd give this opportunity to break down into informal session. But I wanted to thank you so much for being our first launch speaker and thank the audience so much for being a part of this talk. We really appreciate your talk, your answers, your AMA, your interview and all of the time you've spent with the Gender Institute at Royal Holloway. Thank you again so much.

RC:

Well, thank you for having me. As I said at the start, I'm honoured to have been invited and I hope this has been a valuable experience for you as it has been for me.