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## **ENTANGLED MASCULINITIES – MASCULINITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CRISES**

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**JOHANNES KORAK**

**Entangled Masculinities – Masculinities in the Context of Global Crises**

**1. Introduction**

On January 20th, 2025, Donald Trump, as 46th president of the United States, signed Executive Order 14169, “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid” (The White House 2025). This directive led to a drastic overhaul and the subsequent dissolution of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Gedeon/Tait 2025). While this agency’s role as being part of the United States geopolitical soft-power strategy has been viewed critically (Attewell 2023: 423ff.), the breakup of this central actor of the development industry entails possible far-reaching consequences. Cavalcanti et al. (2025: 290) estimate that the cuts to humanitarian assistance and development aid could lead to more than 14 million additional deaths by 2030. In addition, given USAID’s role in HIV/Aids prevention through the “U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief” (PEPFAR), which has thus far reduced mortality by around an estimate of 65% (ibid.), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2025) assumes that, with the defunding of this programme, around 2,300 additional people will be infected by HIV daily. In July 2025, journalists (Sherman 2025) reported that, as part of the dissolution of USAID, unused contraceptives to the value of \$9.7 million USD will be destroyed, underlining the gendered consequences of the dissolution of this development agency. In addition to constraining reproductive rights, Executive Order 14169 further exacerbates unequal gender relations. HIV/Aids prevention programmes also provided room to conduct violence prevention workshops to raise men’s awareness of their role within heterosexual relationships, and to question the unequal distribution of reproductive

labour (Cornwall et al. 2011: 1, 4). Thus, Executive Order 14169 negatively affects the lives of women and LGBTIQ+ persons across the Global South, while intervening in gender relations at local, regional and national levels.

When researching the causes for this directive – specifically, which social and cultural structures, powers, or agent’s actions made it possible – the Critical Study on Men and Masculinity (CSMM), with its focus on masculinities in the context of unequal gender relations, provides a rich source for critical analysis. On the one hand, the role of a particular political masculinity that Kathleen Starck and Birgit Sauer conceptualise as a “masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by ‘political players’” (Starck/Sauer 2014: 6), including individual politicians (Löffler et al. 2020: 4), could be of interest for research into the conditions that made Executive Order 14169 possible. For instance, Trump’s speeches, gestures, and social media posts construct a specific political masculinity, embodying a certain celebrity-entrepreneur, which is also characterised by misogynist violence as well as antifeminist positions expressed through disdain for women’s rights and rights of LGBTIQ+ persons – much like other authoritarian leaders across the globe (Löffler 2025: 143; Mellström 2023: 158). On the other hand, masculinities, gender ideology, and gender relations are crucial to the social and political forces that enabled a far-right political project centred on Trump. In the years leading up to Trump’s first election victory, Michael Kimmel (2013: 11) identified that *white* men on the political right and far-right felt an “aggrieved entitlement”; a *sense* that the American Dream was no longer attainable for them (Manne 2021: 11f.). This feeling, Arlie Hochschild (2018: 138) further explains, is intensified by the belief that diversity and inclusion programmes would give an unearned advantage to women, LGBTIQ+ persons, refugees, and immigrants in the pursuit of the remnants of the American Dream.

Thus, whether regarding the public sphere of masculine politics or the political forces at the base, masculinities matter when analysing the reasons and conditions for Executive Order 14169. Cavalcanti et al. (2025: 291) assume that the directive will contribute to the “global polycrisis”, which, according to Lawrence et al. (2024: 2) can be thought of as the “*entanglement of crises in multiple global systems*”. However, this special

issue of the Austrian Journal of Development Studies (JEP) is concerned with a different entanglement – namely the practices and positions of men and masculinities that contribute to myriad crises that entail far-reaching consequences for women, LGBTIQ+ persons, other men and masculinities, and thus for gender relations in general. As the contributions to this special issue and the introduction at hand illustrate, CSMM, combined with queer-feminist and anti-racist perspectives, or with approaches from political ecology, offers tools and frameworks to engage in this task.

Also, the word crisis is a key point of reference within CSMM – albeit in a specific sense. As Jeff Hearn (2022: 6) recounts, in the 1970s the widely diagnosed ‘crisis of/in masculinity’ was a prominent subject of research, later becoming a discursive figure within political discourse (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 840). During the 1980s, the term ‘crisis’ was used to describe crisis tendencies of patriarchy itself, and, simultaneously with the emergence of postcolonial critique, CSMM scholars also elaborated on such tendencies in relation to gender and gender relations (Hearn 2022: 5f.). More recently, as Hearn (ibid.: 6) states, men, masculinities and gender relations are analysed in the context of (primarily) material crises, such as the global ecological crisis, the crisis of social reproduction and the crisis of liberal democracies, in an era that can be described as “global authoritarianism” (IRGAC 2022: 13). The present JEP special issue on *Entangled Masculinities – Masculinities in the Context of Global Crises* joins this stream and heads Hearn’s call that CSMM should be tasked with inquiring into “how men and masculinities are involved in *producing, and complicity implicated in, global and transnational crises* – often *multiple, intertwining, engulfing, holistic crises for the whole planet*, albeit with uneven effects on men, masculinities and further genders” (Hearn 2022: 13).

However, after introducing CSMM in section 2, I depart from Hearn’s (ibid.: 2f.) understanding of crisis in section 3, offering a slightly different conceptualisation. Here, I also introduce the global ecological crisis, the crisis of social reproduction, and the crisis of liberal democracies, all from a CSMM-perspective, as well as the various contributions to this JEP special issue that engage with men, masculinities, and gender relations within these crisis-ridden contexts.

## 2. Engaging with the critical study on men and masculinities

CSMM is a sub-field of gender studies and thus indebted to, shaped by, and advocating for queer-feminist perspectives and political struggles (Gottzén et al. 2020: 1; Hearn 2015: 9). Men and masculinities are analysed from this normative position and within the context of unequal gender relations. Furthermore, the most recent and far-reaching theoretical developments within CSMM emerged in the context of, and are closely tied to, queer-feminist debates and politics. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, it was feminist and gay researchers that first started to explicitly comprehend men and masculinities as gendered subjects (Hearn/Howson 2020: 19f.). In what follows, I outline the main elements of the most recent epistemological break<sup>2</sup> within CSMM, which unfolded in tandem with queer-feminist struggles in the United States during the second half of the 20th century. In the course of this rupture, which resembles feminist debates in political activism and the sciences, the main theoretical concepts also emerged that inform the research field and, thus, this JEP special issue.

At the margins of the queer-feminist struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, fundamental shifts also occurred, both regarding the relation of men to these struggles and the question of how to theorise men and masculinity. As Michael Messner et al. (2015: 10f.) recount, a few profeminist men stood in solidarity with feminist movements and engaged in political action. While some of these men demonstrated their solidarity by being active, for instance, in anti-violence and anti-rape work with boys and men, with the aim of eliminating violence against women, the group *Men Against Sexist Violence* sprayed graffiti on sexist billboard commercials in 1978 (ibid.: 28). This was at a time when the structural violence women face was conceptualised not only with the term ‘patriarchy’ but also with role-theory: namely, the notion that women and men would enact gender roles, with the women’s role containing oppressive elements (Barrett 2014: 11). Some men embraced this notion of gender roles being oppressive, decontextualised it from social structures, began to proclaim that they were oppressed too, and appropriated the feminists’ call for liberation (Kimmel 2013: 103). The resulting, so-called ‘Men’s Liberation Movement’ advocated for recognising the gendered discrimination men face in various institutional settings, with the contemporary masculinity at the time seen as

being ‘toxic’ to men – a term that has characterised debates over recent years (ibid.: 104; Harrington 2021: 3; Pease 2025: 29f.).

In the 21st century, Men’s/Father’s Rights Activists promote such notions, calling for a resurrection of a traditional masculinity but also, like the mythopoetic men’s movement, searching for an essential, true masculinity every man supposedly possesses (Connell 2012: 45; Scholz 2025: 15). Based on shared antifeminist ideas in which feminism is detrimental to themselves and contemporary expectations of a masculine identity cannot be met (Bridges 2021: 672ff.), these groups aim to actualise men’s ‘masculine energy’ and to rediscover ‘the true man inside oneself’ in men-only (self-therapeutic) seminars. These settings are enabled and supported by the digital so-called manosphere, i.e. various antifeminist groups such as Incels<sup>3</sup>, Men’s Rights Activists, and Pick-up Artists, which is transforming into a “neo-manosphere”, according to Vivian Gerrand et al. (2025: 445). This analytical term points to how, via social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube, antifeminist ideologies are increasingly mainstreamed by “manfluencers” (ibid.: 448). Jordan Peterson, David Goggins, Joe Rogan, and Ryan Holiday combine their advocacy for solving everyday insecurities caused by neoliberal subjectivisation through self-discipline, daily purposefulness and neo-Stoicism, all with a distinct, underlying antifeminist message (ibid.).

Against such antifeminist positions, CSMM takes a decidedly queer-feminist stance that is committed to end all forms of violence against women and LGBTIQ+ persons (Hearn 2015: 9f.). The word ‘Critical’ in ‘Critical Study on Men and Masculinities’ emphasises this normative foundation and outlines a clear perspective when analysing men and masculinities in the context of unequal gender relations (Scholz 2025: 15). Moreover, the conceptualisation of the field’s main term – masculinity – reflects this as well, as it is indebted to feminist debates during the 1970s and 1980s. As James Messerschmidt (2018: 13ff.) outlines, the categories of men, women, and patriarchy that were advanced in particular by socialist and radical feminist groups at the time, were also being criticised for neither being able to account for historical social change, nor for the contradictory subjectivisations women and men face on an everyday basis (ibid.: 18). This was also supported at the time by the empirical findings of Sandra Kessler et al. (1985: 36ff.), who analysed “gender regimes” (ibid.: 42) in Australian

high schools. In particular, the notion of patriarchy was seen as too static to grasp actual empirical gendered subjective actions and, thus, the terms gender and gender relations came into play, focussing “on what people do to shape the *gender relations* they live in” (Messerschmidt 2018: 22). During the 1980s, Tim Carrigan et al. (1985: 555) also criticised role-theory for its functionalism and for not conceptualising gendered power relations, thus ultimately falling back onto a biological reductionism; as Raewyn Connell (1987: 50) put it, “[T]he missing element of structure is covertly supplied by the biological category of sex”. Furthermore, against the backdrop of their empirical study, Kessler et al. (1985: 35) also argue that: “Talking about gender relations in terms of roles, internalized expectations, attitudes and traits directs attention away from larger structures and focuses explanations of inequality on what is going on in the heads of the subordinated group. It is a classic case of blaming the victim”.

In contrast to role-theory and the mythopoetic men’s movement of the time, Connell (1987) conceptualises masculinity as part of a theory of gender relations. Thus, she first distances herself from understandings of masculinity as “an object (a natural character type, a behavioural average, a norm)” (Connell 2012: 71) and argues that “[m]asculinity, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (ibid.). As Sylka Scholz (2025: 37f.) points out, this approach focusses on practices which constitute masculinity but also speaks to a certain position within unequal gender relations and also refers to the structure-agency problematic. Consequently, masculinity is less centred on individual subjects and more so on particular practices within various social fields (Connell 1998: 5; Connell 2000: 29). Thus, masculinities (and femininities) are in effect “configurations of gender practice” or “gender projects” (Connell 2012: 71) that are relatively autonomous from individual women, men and LGBTIQ+ persons, but dependent upon their activity (Scholz 2025: 37f.). In addition, masculinity is untied from male bodies, but instead can “refer” (Connell 2000: 29) to them, meaning that practices coded as male but enacted by subjects situated as women or LGBTIQ+ persons can be analysed as well (Scholz 2025: 38). This allows for the anal-

ysis of possible contradictions when, for instance, women enact male practices to be successful within the male-dominated arena of politics (Scholz 2015: 138), when gay men appropriate the heteronormative symbol of the automobile as a cultural object (Lezotte 2015: 134, 136), or when men, through engaging in feminised caring practices, do so without losing their privileged position in unequal gender relations (Lengersdorf/Meuser 2022: 116; Pangritz 2023: 137).

In the context of Connell's (2012: 79) theory, privilege also takes the form of a "patriarchal dividend", namely the overall subordination of women that masculinities benefit from – especially those that are complicit with a specific hegemonic masculinity at a certain time and place. The latter became a defining concept for CSMM and is still highly debated (Fritsche 2024: 204ff.; Messerschmidt/Bridges 2024: 212). In terms of hegemonic masculinity, Connell (2012: 77) understands a certain "configuration of gender *practice*" (emphasis JK) – not an identity, a specific man, or a particular group of men (Beasley 2008: 89) – that possesses a certain normative force calling upon all gendered subjects to relate themselves through their practices to this masculinity, which also continuously legitimates (the reproduction of) unequal gender relations in the face of queer-feminist struggles (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 832; Howson/Hearn 2020: 44; Messerschmidt/Bridges 2024: 212ff.). Thus, while certain men might represent a hegemonic masculinity, at best only a few can replicate the practices associated with it (Fritsche 2024: 206f.). As the concept has been applied and rightfully criticised (Beasley 2008: 92; Hearn 2004: 58ff.; Scholz 2019: 423), there are also interpretations of hegemonic masculinity that tend to overlook a key theoretical element – namely (the legitimization of) unequal gender relations. Scholars within the field (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 832; Hearn 2019: 54; Messerschmidt 2018: 28, 73) repeatedly point to the importance of the latter when engaging with the concept. Messerschmidt and Bridges (2024: 219) argue, based on a re-reading of Connell's texts and aided by communication with her, how the legitimization of unequal gender relations can even be considered the "theoretical linchpin" of hegemonic masculinity.

While this concept has been in the main employed and developed by trained sociologists, CSMM – similarly to development studies – stretches

across disciplines, ranging from archaeology, philosophy, history, literary and media studies to political ecology (to mention a few) (Gottzén et al. 2020: 8; Tholen/Lengersdorf 2024: 21f.). Accordingly, the post- and decolonial critique of social science, which Connell, also (2011: 13ff.), articulates in her book *Southern Theory*, resonates within CSMM as well. Against this backdrop, Connell (2016: 305) outlines the Eurocentrism inherent within social sciences and argues that the theoretical elements of gender theory, including gender relations, have been conceptualised based on analyses of experiences, social phenomena and structures within the Global North. In a self-critical assessment, Connell (ibid.: 304) also argues that her article with Carrigan and Lee (Carrigan et al. 1985) profits from an epistemic privilege of “Northern theory” (Connell 2011: 213) and, furthermore, Connell (2016: 304ff.) cautions that concepts such as (hegemonic) masculinity need to be critically appraised in the light of their respective socio-political contexts. Within CSMM, the post- and decolonial critique contributed to the emergence of critical analyses of masculinities and gender relations within the Global South, a research perspective that is summarised as *Global Masculinities* (Kulkarni 2019: 1, 3). For instance, whereas Sneha Baldeo Makkad and Mira Sadgopal (2019: 159ff.) research the role of *huarku* (male *Dai*, or midwife) in the process of childbirth within four different Indian regions, Prabu Deepan und Lizzle Loots (2019: 117ff.) investigate the beliefs of men and women on sexual and gender-based violence and their connection to local understandings of “manhood” (ibid.: 117) within the African Great Lakes Region. Place also plays a critical role in Hearn’s (2015: 4, 90ff.) book *Men of the World*, in which he examines how “transnational *forces*” transcend certain places and reproduce the gendered power of men, leading to “transpatriarchies”. These are especially enacted through multinational corporations, political institutions, like the European Union (see also this issue’s essay by Antonijević), and the international financial system, which are all dominated by men and are characterised by their reliance upon gendered, unrewarded work at the local and the transnational level (ibid.).

Clearly, Hearn (ibid.: 77f.; 2004: 66) analytically employs the term patriarchy and speaks of the “social category of men” (Hearn 2004: 50), which includes all gendered subjects “including those categorized, called

or identifying as men” (Hearn 2015: 4). At first sight, this might resemble a regressive theoretical step, especially in contrast with Connell’s (2012: 71) definition of masculinity, which is rather practice oriented. However, this instead points to the multiple understandings of men and masculinities within CSMM – a multiplicity that has been even further expanded by the continuous growth of analyses over the past years (Fritsche 2024: 178). For instance, while research combining CSMM with queer theory (Allan 2020: 78f.) and intersectional perspectives (Christensen/Jansen 2020: 82ff.) highlights how mechanisms of discrimination and privilege function, analyses of trans-masculinities (Aboim/Vasconcelos 2022: 44ff., 61f.) underline the importance of bodily practices and experiences for trans-men. As mentioned before, due to the inter- or post-disciplinarity (Gottzén et al. 2020: 10) of the field, research on men and masculinities as part of unequal gender relations and in various social fields is growing, with its characteristic terms, men and masculinities, being differently conceptualised, debated and further developed on a theoretical level (Scholz 2025: 57ff.). Thus, as Hearn and Howson observe: “they [masculinity and masculinities, JK] can refer variously to practices, configurations or assemblages of practices, identities, structures, institutions, processes, psychodynamics, discursive and so on” (Hearn/Howson 2020: 21). While this development comes with the risk of masculinity turning into a buzzword, as Klara Goedecke (2024: 1ff.) cautions, there is a normative foundation that such approaches – and the contributions to this JEP special issue – share. Hearn (2015: 9) emphasises that CSMM scholarship focusses explicitly, not randomly, on men and masculinities in terms of gendered entities situated within unequal gender relations. Moreover, this research is “informed by *feminist, gay, queer and other critical gender scholarship*” (ibid.), with men and masculinities being produced by social mechanisms “rather than as somehow just ‘naturally’” (ibid.) existing. I would also add that CSMM is aware of the different spatial and temporal contexts in which men, masculinities, and unequal gender relations exist, as well as of the possibility of social change that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, also, tries to account for. Thus, global crises are of special interest, as they could provide insight into how masculinities and unequal gender relations might be transformed or reproduced.

### **3. Masculinities and the crises of ecology, social reproduction, and liberal democracy in authoritarian times**

Crisis and crises are terms frequently employed within media and the social sciences. The financial, environmental, health, political, economic crisis or the crisis of the EU's migratory regime are just a few examples that are repeatedly invoked (Hearn 2022: 2). Given this context, Hearn (*ibid.*: 2ff.) aims to introduce the subject of wider societal crisis and crises – in contrast to the use of 'crisis' within the field, as in the 'crisis of masculinity' discourse – to CSMM. He proposes that "[c]rises can be understood as possible large-scale change following what seem small or short events in a narrow time window that are characterized by non-proportionality in their effects" (*ibid.*: 2). This conceptualisation puts the emphasis on certain social phenomena and their effects, connects to recent discussions on the "polycrisis" (Lawrence et al. 2024: 2) while putting less emphasis on power relations and social contradictions.

In contrast, Bob Jessop (2016: 94) argues for focussing on "inherent crisis potentials and crisis tendencies of a given social form" when analysing crisis and crises. Thus, such tendencies and potentials might exist undetected, given the successful management of them. However, under changing social and political circumstances, established procedures to process dynamics, conflicts and contradictions of social relations within various social fields might no longer be possible (*ibid.*: 94f.). Crucially, political struggle, existing power relations, subjective concerns, and agency are, on the one hand, crucial for the emergence of crises (Fraser 2022: 132). On the other, crisis tendencies can also be considered as a site of political struggle over the reproduction and transformation of social relations, mechanisms of subjectivisations as well as over established and future social practices (Niederhauser et al. 2025: 16). Such a conceptualisation of crisis is, I argue, especially suitable for CSMM, with masculinities being understood as "patterns of social practice that are associated with the position of men in any given gender order" (Connell 2021: 108) and with hegemonic masculinity legitimating (the reproduction of) unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt/Bridges 2024: 236).

From 2018 to 2020, the global climate justice movement politicised one defining contradiction of capitalist nature-society relations: namely

the continuation of economic growth on a planet with limited ecological resources. Practices coded as masculine (e.g. driving SUVs) that are mainly enacted in the Global North, disproportionally making use of ecological systems, are considered to be one cause of this global ecological crisis; thus, these practices have been the subject of research, theorisation and debate (Hultman/Pulé 2020: 477; Pease 2025b: 408, 411)<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, transnational fossil capital companies are also primarily led by men and characterised by particular masculinities (Connell 2021: 110ff.). In the context of these capitalist nature-society relations, which were established after World War Two, Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé (2018: 41) situate the concept of the “industrial/breadwinner masculinities”, which includes men such as executives of fossil capital companies, controlling the fossil means of production (the industrial), as well as workers (the breadwinner) employed in such industries. Thus, these “men and masculine identities [...] are bound to the pursuits of industrial growth” (ibid.: 42), they tend to articulate primary climate obstructionism, and are mostly responsible for the global ecological crisis (Swan 2025: 4). In response to processes and forces that aim to mitigate this crisis, Cara New Daggett (2018: 28f., 33) observes the emergence of a “petro-masculine identity”, characterised by an authoritarian longing for unequal gender relations expressed through misogynistic practices. However, according to Daggett, petro-masculinity “is not the only hegemonic masculine identity available” (ibid.: 33), as green capitalist forces enabled “ecomodern masculinities” to emerge, which, for Hultman and Pulé (2018: 45, 47), “represents [...] masculine identities that valorise sustainability through ecomodern notions of reform”. In the late 2010s, Elon Musk represented such a masculinity (ibid.: 49) and Hultman (2013: 85ff.; 2021: 169ff.) also traces how the figure of Arnold Schwarzenegger has been involved in a “process of ecologisation” (Hultman 2021: 179) – from embracing fossil fuels to admiring Greta Thunberg.

Such well known men often portray a certain hegemonic masculinity and symbolise the relation between masculinities and ecological systems. In his contribution to this JEP special issue, Stefan Sulzenbacher analyses the ambivalent construction of relations between masculinities and nature throughout the YouTube-series *7 vs. Wild*, pointing to the reproduction of colonial ideas of wilderness and the simultaneous questioning of the notion of a self-sustaining, autonomous male subject. This ambivalence

underlines the potential of pre-figurative masculinities that foster care for humans, non-human beings, and the environment (Hultman/Pulé 2018: 53) within the arena of the global ecological crisis. In this vein, Hultman, Robin Hedenqvist, Thomas Laurien, and Kennet Ölund in this special issue reflect the experiences of the group *Flow Feelers* in Sweden, which, by engaging with an urban brook, built non-anthropocentric relations and found a source to counter ‘macho culture’, as one participant described the experience. The relation of masculinities to the ecological crisis is also explored by Zorana Antonijević. In her essay, she examines the analytical and political potential of concepts such as industrial/breadwinner, and hegemonic and complicit masculinity against the backdrop of the conflict over lithium mining in Serbia’s Jadar Valley. Given the particular configuration of unequal gender relations in the semiperiphery and their entanglement with the political and economic transformations of post-socialist countries, this examination is of high relevance for CSMM. As the European Union is also involved in this overdetermined constellation, Antonijević considers whether Hearn’s (2015: 91) notion of “transpatriarchies” could also support such an analysis.

Accounts of the entanglement of men and masculinities with the ecological crisis also provide ground for debates, for instance over the viability and possible essentialism of pre-figurative masculinities (Pease 2025b: 411), a debate which resembles discussions of caring masculinity. Karla Elliott (2020: 4) contributes considerably to this concept, which is also related to questions of economy and ecology (Heilmann 2019: 188f.), while the theoretical basis, normative aspirations, and analytical viability of caring masculinity are scrutinised by other authors (Wojnicka/de Boise 2025: 340ff.)<sup>5</sup>. Whereas some (Elliott 2020: 197; Heilmann et al. 2019: 15; Ruby/Scholz 2018: 81) posit that the concept supports the transformation of gender relations towards more equality, empirical findings highlight that caring practices can be incorporated into hegemonic masculinities, thereby fortifying the antagonism to femininity and feminised practices (Lengersdorf/Meuser 2022: 116; Pongratz 2023: 147). Besides, caring masculinities as practices would have to be enacted within the crisis of social reproduction.

Social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya 2017: 2ff.; Fraser 2017: 147) maintains that the capitalist organisation of production, specifically the

exploitation of workers, necessarily depends upon reproductive work: namely, all the unwaged labour done by women, queer persons, and persons subjected to racist discrimination that satisfy the (mainly male) worker's material, emotional, and sexual needs, including the work of caring for young and old persons. Connell (2012: 71) posits that masculinities are also directly related to this "reproductive arena" where male privileges are ultimately realised (Hanlon 2012: 63). Additionally, as neoliberal capitalist accumulation financialises all activities deemed unproductive, state-based social spending is cut, limiting the resources necessary for reproducing any society, thus intensifying the crisis tendencies of social reproduction (Fraser 2022: 53, 69). The costs of this crisis are offloaded to women, racialised subjects, queer and transgender persons, refugees, and disabled persons, who are ultimately less able to participate politically (Barca 2020: 62). Apart from stories of exhausted care workers, this crisis of social reproduction is largely unfolding unnoticed, as it is often not linked to a prominent event, so receiving less media and societal attention.

Whereas in the context of this crisis, the transformative potential of caring masculinity, which should contribute to more equal gender relations, a post-growth society and a societal transformation away from capitalism, is questioned by some authors (Laufenberg 2017: 363ff.; Wojnicka/de Boise 2025: 351), when it is employed as an analytical concept, it can generate new insights into masculinities and unequal gender relations. By reconstructing practices of fathers in Germany to whom a so-called migration background is ascribed, Jelena Leoni Olga Büchner not only analyses the masculinities constructed thereby and outlines the racist discriminations those fathers face daily. Rather, Büchner emphasises that caring practices associated with a new fatherhood are conditioned by *white* privileges. Thus, the caring, middle-class father with *white* privileges figures as a hegemonic symbol of a caring masculinity – a representation which was deeply unsettled during the COVID-19 pandemic as the crisis dynamics inherent in social reproduction were exacerbated. As Amisha Bakuri shows in her text, during the pandemic Ghanaian and Afro-Surinamese migrant men in Amsterdam drew on religion as a cultural and moral resource to navigate their changing gendered position in the household, subsequently engaging in caring practices. Bakuri's proposal of a "postsecular moral masculinity" aims to expand debates on caring masculinities by empha-

sising the importance of religion, while also pointing to possible contradictions, as many religions entail antifeminist ideas.

Antifeminist and authoritarian notions are also key to explaining responses to the crisis of liberal democracies in an era referred to as “global authoritarianism” (IRGAC 2022: 13). Neoliberal economic policies, such as the World Bank’s and IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programs, have not only increased (global) social inequality and contributed to the deterioration of liberal democratic processes (Viajar 2022: 268), but also co-produce neoliberal subjectivities that are characterised by precarity and insecurity and are interpellated to be competitive, flexible, and performing (IRGAC 2022: 14f.; Sauer/Penz 2023: 50f.). In specific national contexts, authoritarian political forces intervene, offering men an affective safe haven against neoliberal insecurities (Garlick 2023: 17). For instance, Sauer (2025: 3) highlights that in Austria and Germany this takes the form of a “masculinist identity politics” that is articulated via social media and partly overlaps with the aforementioned “neo-manosphere” (Gerrand et al. 2025: 445, 452). In their contribution to this JEP special issue, Yannik Markhof, Johanna Rückgauer, and Olaf Stuve scrutinise how such transnational and antifeminist narratives are reshaped to fit German-speaking contexts, thus filling an important research gap (Gerrand et al. 2025: 448). They do so by analysing TikTok and YouTube-videos published by, respectively, a masculinist political commentator, a manfluencer, a far-right activist, and far-right politician Maximilian Krah (*Alternative für Deutschland*). Based on this material, Markhof, Rückgauer, and Stuve reconstruct a right-authoritarian masculine and libertarian-authoritarian masculine discourse. Both discourses are constituted by antifeminist, anti-queer and misogynist elements but differently interpellate male subjects to respond to neoliberal subjectivisations.

Outside the digital sphere, authoritarian-masculine forces further affect everyday life, as Raina Ghosh illustrates in her contribution. Through *dadagiri*, everyday practices that constitute urban space at and around the *ghats* (large steps leading to the Hooghly River) in Kolkata, masculinities are also constructed. However, these practices furthermore figure as a field through which authoritarian projects intervene in people’s everyday lives. Ghosh identifies both a benign and a political *dadagiri*,

with the former applying more formal, institutionalised power resources and the latter enforcing state repression. While the two ideal types might overlap in concrete situations, they condition the agency and everyday lives of women at the *ghats*.

Whether in the context of Kolkata, the digital sphere, politics, the domestic domain, or in relation to ecology, the contributions to this JEP special issue highlight how masculinities are entangled with the ecological crisis, the crisis of social reproduction, and of liberal democracies in these authoritarian times. On the one hand, men and masculinities entrench such crisis tendencies, reproducing unequal gender relations and thus perpetrating or contributing to the various forms of violence women and LGBTIQ+ persons are subjected to daily – the most drastic form being femicides. On the other hand, crises offer opportunities to practise pre-figurative conceptions of masculinities which should support, stand in solidarity with, and be accountable to queer-feminist political struggles to end such violence.

- 1 Unless otherwise indicated, all italics are reproduced from the original quote.
- 2 Fuller and more adequate accounts of how CSMM emerged can be, amongst others, read in the books of Sylka Scholz (2025), Jana Fritsche (2024), or in the introductions to the research field (Connell et al. 2005; Gottzén et al. 2020). I here follow Fritsche's (2024: 3) perspective that, contrary to most other narratives, at the end of the 19th century men and masculinities were already being debated as gendered subjects within the European context. Thus, what is often referred to as the emergence of CSMM during the 1970s and 1980s rather more accurately signifies an important qualitative break as part of a longer research tradition on men and masculinities.
- 3 The term 'incel' is an abbreviation for 'involuntary celibate'. Men who describe themselves as such, feel entitled to sex with women and believe that they have been deprived of it. Incels espouse antifeminist and misogynist positions, organise themselves online and, as in the 2014 Isla Vista terrorist attack, explicitly aim to murder women (Manne 2021: 14ff.).
- 4 Coinciding with this JEP special issue, the journal NORMA is also publishing a special issue that explicitly focusses on the relationship of masculinities to the ecological crisis. The editorial by Aavik et al (2025) offers a more detailed account of this research topic.
- 5 Stefania Barca (2025: 3) opens the space to connect material-feminist questions of social reproduction with ecological issues with her work on „*environmental reproduction*“.

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Johannes Korak  
 Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena  
[johannes.korak@uni-jena.de](mailto:johannes.korak@uni-jena.de)