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Through the mounting volume of recent historical work on masculinities in nineteenth and twentieth-century societies, no theoretical focus has been more illuminating than that of hegemonic masculinity. This is amply reflected in the seven papers contributed to this session. All of them acknowledge some such framework, if only implicitly. Rose, in her account of Britain in the Second World War, offers a revealing analysis of a modified hegemonic masculinity in the making under the tress of war. But the papers also testify to the lack of clarity which has beset use of this concept.

Three usages may be distinguished in current work. First, at its most anodyne hegemonic masculinity may mean no more than those masculine attributes which are most widely subscribed to in a given social formation: the 'common sense' of gender as lived by all men save those whose masculinity is oppositional or deviant. Such an interpretation may be linked to the assumption that gender identification is 'above' or anterior to other social categories, and that it moves according to a slower historical tempo (a gendered variant of la longue duree, as it were). Secondly, hegemonic masculinity may denote the masculinity which is prevalent in the politically dominant class, with the implication that many of its features will be imposed on other classes, either by compulsion or through the pressure of social prestige. This definition draws attention to the fact that hegemonic masculinity is not merely a code of conduct, but a cluster of inter-related values expressed in civic ideals and national traditions (of the kind analysed by Dudink, Smith-Rosenberg and Pisani). At the same time this interpretation is not easily distinguished from the reductionist line that sees masculinity (and femininity too) as no more than the gendered face of class. Thirdly, in the analysis developed by R.W. Connell, hegemonic masculinity is centrally related to social control and cultural 'othering' since its rationale is to maintain authority over women and over subordinated masculinities (especially those defined by their sexuality). This is a model of conflict and instability which has breathed fresh life into the notion of patriarchy and has provided the history of gender with much of its internal dynamic.

These distinctions are highly relevant to the overall purpose of this strand to explore the bearing which the history of masculinities has on 'general' history. That task is at present inhibited by a de facto separation of two levels of scholarly engagement. On the one hand political historians have made of masculinity a familiar tool for the analysis of political discourse: its canon of virtues and vices is correctly interpreted as an expression of gender hegemony, in both metaphorical and literal

senses. On the other hand, social historians have demonstrated how hegemonic masculinity has structured and defined social relations along the axes of gender, sexuality, age and ethnicity. The first approach takes the field of politics seriously but is only tenuously connected with actual gender relations; the second approach reflects something of the historical complexity of gender relations but tends to keep its distance from the realm of politics and war.

Hegemonic masculinity offers a way out of these limitations. In Connell's view, the content of hegemonic masculinity is not to be explained by saying that it is what the generality of men subscribe to, or by treating it as the gender practices of a ruling class. It is rather the assemblage of behaviour and belief which, in a given historical conjuncture, best serves to maintain patriarchal relations. In terms of developing an overarching theoretical approach, it is important to recognize that this assemblage embraces both the private and the public sphere: the status of sole breadwinner, for example, has been central to hegemonic masculinity in industrial society. Patriarchy must be sustained through the exercise of household authority, as well as through controlling the state's resources of coercion (a point which is nicely made by Lake). Because all men have a vested interest in patriarchy, they will tend to conform to the requirements of hegemonic masculinity without demur; those who fall short of these requirements are more likely to engage in painful self-scrutiny (as in Roper's account) than to divulge their predicament; and those who defy hegemonic masculinity — be they unruly youth or exclusive (and indiscreet) homosexuals - must be pulled into line. Political parties opposed to the governing elite of the day — as in the German Social Democrats described by Welskopp - present a particularly interesting blend of hegemonic and subordinate elements.

In my commentary I will consider what modifications to the theory of hegemonic masculinity are suggested by the papers, and how far these might move us towards a conceptual framework embracing gender at the level of both political discourse and social relations.