Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

English Language and Literature Programme

FATHERS AND SONS: MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY BRITISH NOVEL

Zübeyir SAVAŞ

Ph. D. Dissertation

Ankara, 2024

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KABUL VE ONAY

Zübeyir SAVAŞ tarafından hazırlanan "Fathers and Sons: Men and Masculinities in the Contemporary British Novel" başlıklı bu çalışma, 18.12.2023 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Doktora Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Yukarıdaki imzaların adı geçen öğretim üyelerine ait olduğunu onaylarım.

Prof.Dr. Uğur ÖMÜRGÖNÜLŞEN
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Zübeyir SAVAŞ

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ETİK BEYAN

Bu çalışmadaki bütün bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar çerçevesinde elde ettiğimi, görsel, işitsel ve yazılı tüm bilgi ve sonuçları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduğumu, kullandığım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadığımı, yararlandığım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduğumu, tezimin kaynak gösterilen durumlar dışında özgün olduğunu, **Prof. Dr. Aytül ÖZÜM** danışmanlığında tarafımdan üretildiğini ve Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Yazım Yönergesine göre yazıldığını beyan ederim.

Zübeyir SAVAŞ

To our lovely son, Yusuf Çağan…

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the extensive and challenging process of pursuing my doctorate, I have been accompanied and supported by a distinguished group of individuals whose contributions have been vital to the successful completion of this thesis. Their collective wisdom, support, and encouragement have been the bedrock upon which this work stands.

First and foremost, I am grateful to my advisor, Prof. Dr. Aytül ÖZÜM, for her exceptional expertise, understanding, and patience that guided my research. Her influence was significant throughout my academic odyssey. Similarly, I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Mine ÖZYURT KILIÇ who would always encourage and support me during such a demanding and challenging process. Besides, I extend my gratitude to committee members—Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alev KARADUMAN, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zeynep Zeren ATAYURT FENGE, and Assist. Prof. Dr. Aslı DEĞİRMENCİ ALTIN—for their astute feedback and rigorous scrutiny, which have significantly contributed to my research.

Secondly, I want to sincerely thank the esteemed professors who have significantly influenced my academic path. The foundational guidance and lasting inspiration from Prof. Dr. Mehmet Ali ÇELİKEL, who has been a mentor and a friend beyond measure, has been a cornerstone of my scholarly formation. The wisdom imparted by Prof. Dr. Burçin EROL, Prof. Dr. Deniz BOZER, Prof. Dr. Huriye REİS, Prof. Dr. Hande SEBER, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sinan AKILLI, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şebnem KAYA, and Assist. Prof. Dr. İmren YELMİŞ have profoundly enriched my intellectual fabric.

The camaraderie and shared intellectual pursuit with my fellow scholars, especially Cansu ÇAKMAK ÖZGÜREL and Hüseyin ALHAS, have been sources of comfort and joy in this often-solitary journey. The spirit of collaboration and the consistent support provided by research assistants Alican ERBAKAN, Arzu ÇEVİRGEN, and my academic colleagues Assoc. Prof. Dr Başak AĞIN, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zümre Gizem YILMAZ, Assoc.

Prof. Dr. Kerimcan YAZGÜLER, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Baysar TANIYAN and Dr. Şafak HORZUM have been indispensable throughout my investigative endeavours.

Furthermore, the unwavering support and understanding from my family have been the cornerstone of my perseverance and success. To my wife, Hatice, whose love and encouragement have been my constant motivation; to my mother-in-law, Münüre, whose sacrifices have paved the way for my achievements; to my parents, Fatma and İrfan, who have provided endless support; and to my brother Oğuzhan, who has always believed in me—your collective strength has been the source of my resilience. I must also express my profound thanks to Assoc. Prof. Dr Murat GÖÇ-BİLGİN, whose guidance and patient teaching have been instrumental in navigating the academic rigours towards the completion of this thesis.

I am immensely thankful for your significant contributions to my growth and scholarly work. Your impact has been immeasurable to all who have been a part of my academic odyssey.

ÖZET

SAVAŞ, Zübeyir. “Babalar ve Oğullar: Çağdaş Britanya Romanında Erkekler ve Erkeklikler” Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Bu tez, çağdaş Britanya romanında babalar ve oğulların farklı temsillerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda John McGahern’in *Amongst Women* (1990), Nick Hornby’nin *About A Boy* (1998) ve Maggie Gee’nin *The White Family* (2002) adlı romanlarında göze çarpan baba/oğul ilişkileri eleştirel erkeklik teorileri perspektifinden ele alınmıştır. Her ne kadar feminist literatürde Adrienne Rich’in *Of Women Born*’u ve Elaine Showalter’ın *A Literature of Their Own*’u gibi anne/kız ve anne/oğul ilişkilerine dair çok sayıda eleştirel çalışma bulunsa da, edebi eserlerde babalar ve oğullar arasında cereyan eden ilişkilere dair sorgulamalar genellikle gölgede kalmıştır. Öte yandan son otuz yıldır, erkeklere/erkekliklere dair disiplinlerarası ve eleştirel bir profeminist yaklaşım geliştirilmiş olmasına rağmen, eleştirel sorgulamalardan azade olan çeşitli erkeklerin/erkeklik hallerinin otorite ve iktidar ilişkilerinde süregelen ayrıcalıkları hala büyük ölçüde gözlerden uzaktadır ve erkekleri ve erkekliğin kurumsallaşmış hali olan babalığı eleştirel bir gözle incelemek edebiyat araştırmalarında henüz yeterince ilgi görmemiştir. Bu tez, çağdaş Britanya romanında babalar ve oğulların farklı temsillerini analiz ederek literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma boyunca ele alınan romanlardaki babalar ve oğullar arasında süregelen çatışmalar neticesinde tarafların farklı ihmal ve şiddet biçimlerinin failleri ve mağdurları oldukları gözlemlenmektedir. Böylece tarafların birbirleriyle, diğer erkeklerle, kadınlarla ve çocuklarla daha uzun ve sağlıklı ilişkiler kurma ‘yetersizliği’ hayal kırıklıkları ile sonuçlanır. Romanlardaki erkek karakterlerin giderek artan düş kırıklıkları Thatcher sonrası Britanya’sının sosyopolitik ve sosyoekonomik şartları bağlamında tekrar yükselen ‘erkeklik krizi’ söylemlerinin belirli özelliklerini yansıtmaktadır. Böylece, çalışmaya konu olan romanlardaki baba ve oğul figürleri arasındaki çatışmaların, geçen yüzyılın son birkaç on yılında yeniden inşa edilen modern ve geleneksel erkeklikler arasındaki çekişmeyi ve erkeklerin yitirdiklerine inandıkları iktidarlarını geri kazanma mücadelesini yansıttığı öne sürülmektedir. Araştırma, bir yandan geleneksel aile yapısının ve süregelen hegemonik erkeklik ideallerinin aile içi çatışmaları önlemek için yeterli olamadığını ortaya koyarken bir yandan da neoliberalizmin başat ideoloji haline geldiği günümüzde çağdaş aile, (yeni) baba ve (yeni) erkek kimliklerini benimseyen erkeklerin diğer erkeklerle, kadınlarla ve çocuklarla olan ilişkilerinde ilerici bir tavır takınmaktan ziyade yeni tahakküm biçimlerini inşa etme çabasında olduklarını iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Babalar ve Oğullar, Erkekler ve Erkeklikler, Erkeklik Krizi, Çağdaş Britanya Romanı, *Amongst Women*, *About A Boy*, *The White Family*

ABSTRACT

SAVAŞ, Zübeyir. “Fathers and Sons: Men and Masculinities in the Contemporary British Novel” Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2024.

This dissertation aims to explore diverse representations of fathers and sons in three contemporary British novels: *Amongst Women* (1990) by John McGahern, *About A Boy* (1998) by Nick Hornby, *The White Family* (2002) by Maggie Gee from the perspective of critical studies on men and masculinities. Relationships between mothers and daughters and mothers and sons in literary studies have already been widely discussed in feminist scholarship, most particularly in Adrienne Rich’s *Of Women Born* and Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* while affinities between fathers and sons have often been overshadowed. Men as sons and fathers have remained out of critical interrogations; thereby, men’s ongoing privilege in their relations with authority and power has been hidden in plain sight. Nevertheless, with the emergence of critical theories on men and masculinities in varied interdisciplinary fields, men have become the object of interrogation. Even so, scrutinising men and fatherhood as an institutionalised form of masculinities has yet to catch enough attention within literary studies. This thesis addresses this particular gap by analysing peculiar representations of fathers and sons in the contemporary British novel. Throughout this study, it is observed that there is an ongoing conflict between fathers and sons whereby they are both the perpetrators and victims of different forms of violence and neglect. These men’s ‘inability’ to form longer and healthier relationships with other men, women, and children ends in disillusionment. A growing sense of disenchantment among men in the novels reverberates specific attributes of the ‘masculinity crisis’ in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic context of post-Thatcherite Britain. It is further argued that the conflicts between fathers and sons reflect a broader struggle between traditional and modern notions of men and masculinities and the battle for regaining their (lost) power in the last few decades of the previous century. While the traditional family structure and enduring ideals of hegemonic masculinity are not sufficient to prevent family conflicts, it is argued that contemporary notions of family, (new) fathers, and (new) men, as defined in the current period when neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology, seek to construct new forms of domination rather than a progressive stance in men’s relations with other men, women, and children.

Key Words: Fathers and Sons, Men and Masculinities, Masculinity Crisis, Contemporary British Novel, *Amongst Women*, *About A Boy*, *The White Family*

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INTRODUCTION

Every single human being has been destined to have a father. Whether caring, devoted, tender, benevolent, charitable, kind, violent, brutal, cruel, abusive, absent, present, or distant, owning a father is indispensable. The history of humanity is bursting with stories about fathers and sons. However, when scrutinised in detail, a considerable number of these stories embrace hatred and vengeance. Zeus tricks Cronus and kills him to survive; Adam discriminates between his sons, Abel and Cain; Noah shames Ham; Abraham intends to sacrifice Isaac for his God; Jacob leaves Joseph at the mercy of his other notorious sons; Icarus denies his father's word and flies higher to his death; and, Jesus's God remains a mere spectator when he is crucified.

Besides, the history of literature is also bulging with stories that revolve around conflicting relationships between fathers and sons. Oedipus kills his father, replaces his throne and marries his mother. To some extent, in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, misfortunes are portrayed as the outcomes of the perpetual rebellion of a prodigal son against his father. Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is the story of a patricide. In Herman Hesse's homonymous bildungsroman, Siddhartha leaves his father in desolation and can find peace only after letting his defiant son go for his way. The hatred and violence between the father and the son hardly dissolve when Troy, the angry father of Cory Maxon, dies in August Wilson's play, *Fences.* In Arthur Miller's post-war play *All My Sons*, Joe Keller is responsible not only for his son's death but also for leaving families of the whole generation with a sense of despair due to his never-ending greed. Composed of five semi-autobiographic novels by Edward St Aubyn, the *Patrick Melrose* compilation narrates the accounts of an abused son. After falling victim to David Melrose's long-lasting abuse, Patrick becomes a disengaged and violent father figure for his children. Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* simultaneously takes patricide and filicide as its core themes. Once he leaves his surrogate dad to his death, Cem ultimately becomes a victim of filicide.

Suffice it to say that mythological narratives and literary cults seldom mention merciful and obedient parental relationships, yet they frequently accommodate brutal fathers and rebellious sons. For this reason, such complex and perplexing relationships between fathers and sons can be observed in contemporary literature. Particularly in the second part of the twentieth century, the historical roles attributed to men and fathers metamorphosed due to profound changes in the family institution resulting from rapid political and socioeconomic developments. Still, the renowned clash between the punitive father and the disillusioned son prevails significantly in various literary works.

Accordingly, this dissertation aims to assess diverse representations of fathers and sons in three examples of contemporary British novels: *Amongst Women* (1990) by John McGahern, *About A Boy* (1998) by Nick Hornby, *The White Family* (2002) by Maggie Gee from the perspective of critical studies on men and masculinities. Considering that each novel comprises either violent or neglecting fathers and disillusioned sons, this study explains that different forms of violence and disillusionment in these novels stem from particular masculinity traits. It is argued that the renowned yet erratic conflict and hostility between fathers and sons accentuate the clash between traditional and modern norms of masculinities and reflect particular discourses of ‘masculinity crisis’ prompted by complex, unstable, and obscure power relations. The vicissitudes of traditional masculinity norms might not help mitigate the ongoing conflict between fathers and sons. Along with the metamorphosis of the values associated with masculinity, fatherhood roles have tangled in new forms of abuse due to the construction of the ‘new man’ and the ‘new fatherhood’ as a product of the neoliberal condition in Britain.

In particular, investigating fathers requires defining men, and “[a]ny study of fatherhood must also be concerned with masculinity” (King, *Family Men* 5). Fatherhood, often acclaimed as a crucial, lifelong role for men, is a prominent signifier of manhood and masculinity. Prevailing over its biological definition, fatherhood denotes the institutionalised form of manhood. Yet, defining man is a complex phenomenon as “the more anthropologists, sociologists, and historians explore the meanings of being a man, the more inconsistent, contradictory, and varied they become” (Stimpson xii). Despite being a relatively new phenomenon, research on the role of men as fathers has received

substantial attention since the 1970s. This period marked the emergence of second-wave feminism and the women's liberation movement, which introduced critical terminologies and concepts relating to gender dynamics and the unfair distribution of social responsibilities between men and women (Connell et al. 1). After Simon de Beauvoir's influential statement as "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (*The Second* 330), a considerable amount of literature has been written by liberal, Marxist, and radical feminists to question the position of women and men's oppression and violence against women in Western societies. To name a few, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*[1] (1963), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*[2] (1969), and Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex[3]" (1975) disputed over inequalities and segregation between men and women and problematised men and masculinity in broader aspects during women's liberation movement.

Beyond those theoretical explanations, the women's liberation movement of the twentieth century arose out of a broader political agenda, including the rise of the New Left, the

[1] In her seminal work, Betty Friedan epitomises the current position of women in the United States. She argues that women find themselves unexpectedly broken, subsided, and depressed despite the irrefutable achievements of first-wave feminism. She mainly focuses on the false image of the happy, white, middle-class woman stereotype created in the 1950s in the United States. Friedan discusses an apparent disparity between the idealised norms for women and their daily lives. She calls such discrepancy "the feminine mystique" and further assumes that it ends up a "schizophrenic split" for women. Thus, focusing primarily on the marriage institution and any married women's oppressive tasks, Friedan calls for "a much larger sex-role revolution" (370).

[2] According to Kate Millett, family is the smallest part of the socialisation process wherein men often perpetuate the ostensible submissiveness of women. However, inferiority is not the biological reality of women, but rather male imposition. Millett simply assumes that sexual relations are inherent in power relations and male supremacy is indeed a fallacious argument. Referring to a number of literary texts, in *Sexual Politics*, Millett lays bare the prevalent, systematic violence of men to control women throughout history.

[3] In her well-known work, Gayle Rubin maintains that women have long been the objects of systematic power relations. She questions the neglect of women in Marx and Engels' formulation of exploitation. She rejects structuralist views about men, women, and culture, coining an influential term called "sex/gender system" to interpret women's historical subordination, which inevitably causes disparities among all people. Rubin also denounces Marxist readings of class struggles as both Marx and Engels ignored women's invisible labour and overlooked the ramifications of gender hierarchy in social inequalities. She further objects to Claude Lewis Strauss's theories on kinship. To Strauss, humanity owes its culture to the incest taboo, as a result of which men exchanged women and enhanced kinship networks. In contrast, Rubin asserts that Strauss' arguments are "exegetical" rather than a universal truth. She insists that "there is an economics and a politics to sex/gender systems which is obscured by the concept of 'exchange of women'" ("The Traffic in Woman" 205).

Civil Rights Movement, and the Vietnam War protests (Burgin, "Understanding Activism" 19; Kent, *Gender and Power*, 261; Krolokke and Sorensen, "Three Waves of Feminism" 8; Murphy, "Introduction" 9). During the 1960s and 70s, as a social and political movement, women's liberation gained momentum through uprisings and riots in the United States and student upheavals in France and third-world countries. Because the significance of the mutual relationship between individual experiences and politics was deciphered, many women struggled to gain equal rights in distinct spheres of society. The popular jargon of sex roles helped raise novel questions against the aspects of gender-based roles to eliminate segregation in public and domestic spheres.

Meanwhile, consequent reverberations of women's liberation among distinct men and male groups were immediate. Men from diverse groups in the United States and some European countries responded to women's achievements in theory and practice. These groups reacted towards women's liberation in disparate ways. The most visible disparity among these perspectives is related to their proximity to the problems regarding gender equality and sexism in a given society. However, those approaches emerged from a single movement, namely the men's liberation movement.

Men's liberation movement has triggered specific enquiries on men and masculinities. Men's self-questioning about their position of authority and power concerning women was not arbitrary. Instead, many men focused on the unequal distribution of gender roles, as the women's liberation movement significantly impacted men. As a consequence of feminist documentation of gender inequalities, the historical power of patriarchy was opened to debate, and men, for the first time, became the object of critical enquiries, thereby launching their liberation movement since any dispute over patriarchy and criticism of asymmetrical sex roles[4] would concern men as well. Several consciousness-

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[4] Throughout the introduction, the terminology of 'sex roles' and 'gender roles' are not used interchangeably. Instead, they are deliberately emphasised in some parts to highlight the notions among distinct movements and approaches towards men and masculinities. Several activists and scholars of the men's liberation movement and men's studies borrowed the jargon of 'sex roles' from the earlier enquiries on men and women triggered by the first and the second waves of feminism. However, along with the emergence of third-wave feminism, queer studies, and gay and lesbian studies, critical theories on men and

raising groups of men paved the way to male liberation in the United States during the 1960s and 70s (Messner, "The Limits" 256). Those groups enabled many men to meet in male-only gatherings and express their individual experiences of being a man and their implications for women in contemporary Western societies. Through distinct enquiries and arguments, some male liberationists perceived that while "the 'female sex role' had oppressed women, […] 'the male sex role' also harmed men" (Messner, "Forks in the Road" 8). The mutual point male liberationists tended to underline was the idea that liberating men was distinctly more than understanding the male oppression of women, as men were also oppressed and victimised by their roles. Following women's liberation and its achievements, men's endeavours focused simultaneously on "freeing men from the patriarchal sexual dynamics they now experience with each other" (Pleck, "Men's Power" 64). Accordingly, the essential purpose of male liberation groups was to identify the harm men cause to women and figure out how they could overcome the burden of their inherited roles. Highlighting the commitment to rigid male roles such as being the power holder, ruler, policy maker, breadwinner, decision maker, and adventurer, and due to the implicit impositions and harms of those roles upon women, children, and other men, male liberationists sought for liberation, a sort of refinement for the betterment of social life in general. Encouraging men to develop healthier relationships with women, children, and other men, the fundamental motivation behind men's liberation was to diminish sex-role stereotypes as they "limit their ability to be human" (Sawyer 170). To mediate a more liberal, equal, and fair social order, sex roles were to be questioned.

However, the men's liberation movement's basis for gender equality is controversial, as it is in the sex-role paradigm. Male liberationists revolved around the idea that a certain amount of amelioration in men's and women's conditions could be achieved by rectifying men's 'burdensome', 'oppressive', and 'detrimental' roles in a given society. It is recognised that men assume instrumental tasks by creating a false symmetry in role

masculinities have avoided using 'sex role' jargon and approached relations between men and women and among different men through the lens of social constructionism rather than biologic essentialism. For further details about the emerging fields, terms, and distinct approaches towards men and masculinities, see Joseph H. Pleck's essay, "The Theory of Male Sex-Role Identity: Its Rise and Fall, 1936 to the Present", and Harry Brod's essay, "The Case for Men's Studies" in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (1987).

sharing, wherein expressive tasks are often feminised. Men frequently benefit as these instruments include financial and institutional power. Being identified with instrumental roles which required rationality, men disdained to be emphatic for women's conditions. They diminished their culpability in using assumed power by overemphasising their roles' financial, emotional, and physical burdens[5]. Eventually, men "maximised the potential gain that [they] might expect from liberation" (Messner, "The Limits" 261). Hence, one might observe that male liberationists mainly concentrated on the difficulties of men's and boys' experiences. They did not pay sufficient attention to women and their mutual problems with men, thereby overshadowing the political implications of male power in gender relations[6]. Even some major male liberationists overlooked the unequal distribution of gender roles and were inclined to claim sexist assumptions for the remaining problems regarding gender relations and offered their solutions to the benefits of men.

A further problem with the men's liberation movement is that it stimulates a particular focus on the white, middle-class men, their burden for the breadwinner role, and their practical difficulties with their female partners. Not only the gay men but also the black, the poor, the macho, and the unemployed are discarded from their attention (Messner, "The Limits" 264). Hence, the men's liberation movement, deliberately inclining towards monolithic, limited, excluding interrogations with essentialist and partly sexist

[5] Questioning detrimental features of male roles for men, or subsequent cultural impositions of traditional masculinity norms, some male liberationists documented particular struggles that men often experience in their personal lives and reached accusative conclusions against women. In this regard, Marc Fasteau, one of the leading figures of the Men's Liberation Movement, indicated men's difficulty in displaying their emotions and inclined to accusative claims on feminist achievements. To Fasteau, men indirectly suffer from feminism since feminist ideals enable women to liberate, help them communicate and express their inner feelings with each other easier, whereas "[t]here is nothing among men that resembles the personal communication that women have developed among themselves" ("Why Aren't We" 20). Indeed, men are curved by social restrictions, which complicate emotional displays. Fasteau further points out that women achieved a certain degree of intimacy in their relationships. At the same time, "men [have been] taught not to communicate [their] personal feelings and concerns" ("Why Aren't We" 20). For these reasons, Fasteau concludes, men are incapable of developing deep relationships with their peers, and the ultimate responsibility rests with women and feminism.

[6] For a more detailed analysis of the men's liberation movement, see Michael A. Messner's essay titled "The Limits of 'The Male Sex Role': An Analysis of the Men's Liberation and Men's Rights Movements' Discourse", Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer's "Men's Power with Women, Other Men, and Society: A Men's Movement Analysis" in *Feminism and Masculinities* edited by Peter F. Murphy.

assumptions in gender relations, overlooked the inequalities among distinct men and their relationship with peculiar women and children. Consequently, in less than two decades, the movement was divided into two opposite fractions, namely the sexist and the anti-sexist approaches, regarding their reaction towards feminist movements and fundamental differences in their perception of masculinity.

As mentioned above, since the early 1970s, feminist movements have polarised men's reactions, considering their stance on gender equality. The men's rights movement represents the sexist wing of the enquiries about men and men as fathers. Defenders of the men's rights discourse advocate male supremacy and voice concern about the victimisation of men. Their arguments revolve around contemporary problems that some men experience, such as the slaughter of men in wars all around the world, the shortness of overall life expectancy of men to women, and the sharp increase in unemployment rates among men owing to women's inclusion to the workforce soon after the emergence of contemporary feminist movements[7].

In men's rights discourse, gender equality is unnecessary for the mutual benefits of a given society. Even if gender equality is necessary, feminism "is anti-equality and seeks to privilege women over men" (Jordan, *The New Politics* 195). Pillars of men's rights mainly argue that feminism, exceptionally liberal feminism, caused inequalities, and men need to regain their lost rights. They hinge on "the fundamental premise that men as men are subject to numerous generally unrecognised injustices of a legal, social, and psychological nature" (Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives* 61). Supporters for

[7] Herb Goldberg and Warren Farrell are famous men's rights movement authors. Once an outstanding figure among the male liberationists, Farrell's ideas vacillated to the essentially sexist wing afterwards. In 1993, Farrell published *The Myth of Male Power* (1994), claiming that male power is a myth and is nothing more than a feminist falsification. In the same vein, Herb Goldberg, in his best-seller book *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege,* argues that being a male in modern societies is hazardous, women are more privileged in the contemporary world, both imposed sex roles and the related laws work against men. Although their arguments are irrelevant to this dissertation's main point, it is crucial to grasp opposite claims for further discussion. For a full-length criticism of the men's rights movement in profeminist discussions, see Michael A. Messner's *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (1997); Kenneth Clatterbaugh's book *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society* (1990) and Bob Connell's essay "Men at Bay: The 'Men's Movement' and Its Newest Best-Sellers" in *The Politics of Manhood.* Ed. Michael S. Kimmel (1995).

men's rights are inclined to equate opportunities that men and women have in common in the public and private spheres. Although similar issues have already been mentioned and questioned in the men's liberation movement, supporters of men's rights differ in that they withdraw entirely from gender symmetry, and their "discourse most often display a blatant disregard for widely accepted sociological, economic, and psychological studies" (Messner, "The Limits" 266) that have long revealed bias and segregation of women.

Moreover, the men's rights perspective often goes to extremes to wink at remarkably diverse inequalities among the sexes. Pillars of this perspective even reject and manipulate the reality that the sexual and domestic violence of men victimises women. Although some members in these groups allegedly defend gender equality, the men's rights supporters mainly propose that the inequalities aroused by the second-wave feminists not only burden men with overwhelming responsibilities but also cause them to suffer from economic and psychological problems, as women disrupt men's domination in professional life in contemporary society. Therefore, the primary target of those groups is to provoke men unaware of their 'disadvantageous' position in their families during marriage and post-marriage. They advocate the 'rights' of men and men as fathers in various concerns, such as divorce, alimony, and custody issues. Although there are some different fractions among those groups, for most supporters, gender equality is not a sincere aim, and their standpoint is, to a great extent, a backlash[8] against feminism and feminist achievements.

Eventually, it might be safe to assert that the men's rights perspective is based on several manipulative assumptions and over-generalisations in the name of liberating men from their alleged burden and threats that they confront, such as lower life expectancy, higher suicide rates, anxiety and stress disorder caused by the breadwinner role, more significant numbers of killings in wars in comparison to women, and briefly the premise that more compelling tasks have been historically given to men. The men's rights perspective,

[8] Susan Faludi, in her *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Woman,* defines backlash as "an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" (Faludi, Backlash, 2006, p. 9-10).

however, often tends to avoid the nature of unequal gender relations and unfair share of power, which have long been constructed for the benefit of men, as "[m]en do hold most of the power in society […], generally control governments, armies, corporations, professions, political parties, and social movements" (Connell, "Men at Bay" 75). As can be seen from the examples regarding men's frequent dominance in decision-making mechanisms and their hegemony of accessing economic resources in comparison to women both at the global and local level, assumptions for the ostensible sufferings of men might not be relevant for most men.

Considering these developments, men also organised several support groups as fathers due to the emergence of new thoughts and perspectives about gender since the "shifting relationship of the state and individual also raised questions relating to the family and fatherhood" (King, *Family Men* 200). The father support groups have functioned efficiently in creating public opinion and enacting laws concerning family, divorce, custody, alimony, and rights for fair contact arrangements[9]. As experienced in the men's liberation movement, fathers' groups and organisations flourished in distinct strains regarding their attitudes towards major social problems such as gender inequalities, racial discrimination, and economic barriers that fathers occasionally encounter. Hence, they developed into mixed fractions under the umbrella title of the Fatherhood Responsibility Movement (Flood, "Backlash" 261). The difference among several organisations and groups crystallises in their perception of parental rights, responsibilities, and gender equality.

Highly influential in Britain during the 1990s, the fathers' rights groups launched several initiatives that provided volunteer assistance to separated husbands and biological fathers. Those initiatives later transformed into a movement. Three essential claims behind the formation of the fathers' rights groups and men's retreat therein are tedious and severe struggles inherited by separation or divorce, the loss of connection with children, and the

[9] Richard Collier's *Masculinity, Law and Family* (1995), Richard Collier and Sally Sheldon's *Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study* (2008), Susan Boyd's "Demonizing Mothers: Father's Rights Discourses in Child Custody Law Reform Process" give full accounts of the contemporary debates on Father's Rights Groups and their effects on legal procedures in Britain, Canada, and the United States.

economic instability of fathers caused by custody laws. This particular movement of fathers corresponds to the men's rights movement and indicates a genuine backlash against former achievements of feminist activism. However, some fathers' rights groups refuse such accusations regarding them as anti-feminist women haters. Taking an alleged gender-neutral approach, those groups insist on the assertion that "fathers are deprived of their 'rights' and subjected to systematic discrimination as fathers and as men, in a system biased towards women and dominated by feminists" (Flood, "Separated Fathers" 235). Although this argument seems to have few conceivable features, it mainly fails to capture inequalities and opportunity gaps between men and women at the intersection of professional life, domestic labour, sexualities, and reproduction. The men's support groups ignore that there are still several structural inequalities between men and women in public and domestic spheres.

For example, when fathers leave their partners after or during pregnancy, their condition is generally far better than women. Numerous women still possibly suffer from social oppression, lack of security, and economic difficulties with their children after separation. Moreover, one should interrogate men's institutional power in familial relationships to understand structural inequalities between men and women. Individual stories and experiences of men regarding suffering after a break-up are not always valid to recognise inequalities since "there are as many differences among fathers as there are among men and among fatherhoods as there are among fathers" (Jordan, "Dads Aren't Demons" 421). Therefore, noticeable enquiries about fathers need to focus more on the construction of fatherhood than victimisation and crisis discourse of men in family relations. During the last few decades, the women-hating men's rights movement and the sexist father's rights groups were not the only reactions of men who assumed their 'rights' to be in 'crisis' due to the novel conditions that appeared in Western societies. Political discourses that develop on men and men as fathers in the wake of feminist achievements are prevalent in another sexist approach, the mythopoetic men's movement.

Contrary to the men's rights movement, adherents of the mythopoetic men's movement do not assume themselves to be male supremacists, as they concede an unequal

relationship between men and women[10]. However, displacing and omitting women, the movement is "a world of and for man" (Ferber 35). The mythopoetic men's movement was triggered by small gatherings and retreats in the United States during the 1980s. In those gatherings, held either in the woods or at convention centres, many men danced, played the drums, chanted, wrestled, spoke aloud, roared, and cried along with symbolic initiation rituals. With the influence of new age movements that emphasise a return to 'the roots of the inner self' and ancient narratives, those men seek to find 'the core of their masculinity' in themselves. In less than ten years, those retreat groups spread across the States and "thousands of men—most of them white, middle-aged, heterosexual, and of the professional class—had attended mythopoetic events" (Messner, "Essentialist Retreats" 17). Diverse therapeutic and spiritual methodologies were implemented during mythopoetic gatherings to rediscover and nurture 'genuine masculinity'. These events also rendered myth and poetry potent instruments for self-discovery and individual growth. Thus, mythopoetic gatherings, Messner argues, brought about "a collective ritual structure within which individual men can explore, discover, and reconstruct their inner selves" ("Essentialist Retreats" 18). In their perspective, such ceremonies and rituals enabled them to explore their feelings and emotions as men and to understand each other better since they perceived masculinity as 'a collective inner truth'. Adherents of the mythopoetic movement sought to foreground masculinity as the core of their maleness and claimed their right to enact masculinity in their inimitable manner.

Rather than focusing on legislative, legal organisations and academic studies, the mythopoetic men's movement tends to bring a spiritual perspective to masculinity and "embraces a traditional, and conservative, rendering of psychoanalytic theory" (Kimmel and Kaufman, "Weekend" 22). The mythopoetics consolidated men's historical yet allegedly decaying power by premising the nature of masculinity in Jungian psychoanalytic theory and the archetypes. The mythopoetics mainly dispute that masculinity is recently in crisis. To overcome such a crisis, men must procure their

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[10] For detailed enquiries, discussions and debates on the Mythopoetic Movement, see *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetics Men's Movement and the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer* Ed. Michael S. Kimmel.

'genuine masculinity', which has long been lost, particularly after the modernisation of family life. According to the mythopoetic adherents, men have been 'softened' in the post-industrial era due to the changing production and consumption means, thereby losing their genuine bond with the conceivable roots of traditional masculinity and other men simultaneously.

The Mythopoetic Men's Movement peaked with the publication of Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Man* in 1990, the national best-seller nonfiction for months in the same year. In his book, Bly refers to several ancient stories and myths and notably focuses on the well-known German fairy tale, the *Iron John*[11]. He uses *Iron John* as a metaphor for the condition of modern men and men as fathers, who had already lost their bounds with the 'true essence of masculinity'. To Bly, modern men have particular difficulties perceiving their masculinity, and the Industrial Revolution is responsible for this flaw. He further suggests that owing to urbanisation and industrialisation, numerous men as fathers lost their close affinity with their sons, as they had to spend long hours in factories or mines.

Bly emphasises that owing to the harsh conditions in the realm of heavy industry, the rigorous demands of the work often resulted in a distancing from the communal lifestyle once enjoyed by large families. Previously, extended family units, including fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, often resided under one roof, fostering more significant social interaction. Working on the farms, hunting, and doing local sports often allowed them to "spend much time with younger men and brought knowledge of male spirit and soul to them" (Bly, *Iron John* 16). However, due to the substantial change through urbanisation,

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[11] Iron John is a tale of an eight-year-old prince who lives happily with his family in a castle. Once, an intruder brings about some difficulties in their town as he spreads fear and terror by killing the king's hunters one by one in the wood. The king does not give up, calls for the best-ever hunter and sends him to catch the brute. It is found out that the intruder is a long-haired and bearded man who lives in a swampland. They drain the swamp, see the man, and then cage him in the castle. After several events, the adolescent prince cannot resist his instinct to help the caged man, steals the keys under his mother's pillow and sets the wild men free. When they go into the wood together, the wild man promises the prince the greatest treasure ever on the condition that he will never see his family again. After several comings and goings, the wild man repeatedly tests the boy's loyalty. The boy fails several times and gets a wound for each failure. Throughout the tale, the boy is initiated to adulthood or 'manhood' by the wild man, finds his princes, saves his country, becomes the king and lives happily with his family.

either extended families declined, or men in those families started to work far from home, resulting in younger boys losing their opportunity to acquire the skills of former generations.

Bly further argues that the Oedipal bounds of the boys with their mothers distracted them from the father. Boys failed to know their fathers better, as they knew them through the eyes of their mothers; therefore, the sons would “learn the female attitude toward masculinity and take a female view of [their] father[s] and of [their] own masculinity” (Bly, *Iron John* 24). Thus, he offers men to recall former initiation ceremonies and masculine practices to remember and reconstruct their manhood. As the historical father-son relationships have been forgotten, in the contemporary world, boys would only find such opportunities through particular rituals held in sports and military activities, which enable them to be partially initiated. Because these practices are insufficient to heal their ‘wounds’, therapeutic procedures of mythopoetic gatherings might help men mitigate their ‘crises’ and construct healthier relationships with women, other men, and children to reconstruct social order and overcome gender segregation in a given society.

However, more extensive than being advisory self-help discourses, there are some crucial political implications of the mythopoetic men’s movement in general and of Robert Bly’s fictive Jungian application in particular. On the one hand, Bly’s call for healing men’s ‘wounds’ stands for the desire to reconstruct men’s self-confidence in the guise of criticism against industrialisation, capitalism, lost traditions and assumed values. Still, on the other hand, he highlights the necessity of traditional masculinity norms that threatened men and men as fathers due to feminist questionings of men’s historical authority and power. Bly’s suggestions, therefore, imply an urge to resist contemporary feminist achievements and consolidate men’s historical power in gender relations. His constant references to archetypal masculinity show that he somehow clings to the masculinist ideology of the men’s rights perspective. Bly’s application of Jungian perspectives in his analyses of men and masculinity results from then-contemporary debates on sex role theories among men’s liberationists. To discern particular archetypes as ahistorical qualities of maleness, Bly goes back to ancient myths and fairy tales, and he comes “to

see these stories as offering a theory of psychological growth" (Schwalbe, "Bly" 89). In a broader context, the mythopoetics constantly cite myths, legends, and folk tales "to uncover repeated behaviour patterns that count as archetypal or universal" (Clatterbaugh, "Mythopoetic" 47). They strive to construct collective norms and ideals about being a man in contemporary societies, wherein the meaning of traditional manhood and conventional fatherhood has already been obscured due to vast socioeconomic and sociopolitical developments. Through the neoliberalisation of the previous nation-states and particular feminist achievements, men have begun to lose their privileges of the uncontested power of patriarchy and find themselves in dire crises in modern Western societies. The crisis men suffer, as the Mythopoetics argues, will not be solved unless they regain their lost 'rights'.

On the contrary, in the course of this study, it will be explained that there has never been a real masculinity crisis, yet masculinity *per se* is indeed in a plurality of crises since it could only exist on account of peculiar crises (Edwards, *Cultures* 14; Hearn, "A Crisis" 164; MacInnes 46). The contemporary discourse of the masculinity crisis is not a novel phenomenon[12]. Discussions concerning 'men in crisis' revolve around definitions of masculinity, prescribed norms, and attributing certain qualities and roles to men in a particular setting. Because masculinity (as well as femininity) and its expected qualities are subject to social constructions in historical conditions, they are open to debate

[12] In his article "The Crisis of Masculinity in Seventeenth-Century England," Michael Kimmel discerns the roots of the contemporary crisis of masculinity in seventeenth-century English pamphlets and further assumes that political chaos often results in social crises which lead to a redefinition of masculinity and men's ostensible roles in the family institution. In this regard, the alleged masculinity crisis in Britain dates to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, when dramatic social and political events such as the beheading of Charles I, the establishment of the Cromwellian Protectorate, the Restoration with Charles II, the Glorious Revolution, and the ongoing sectarian conflicts between Catholics and Protestants took place respectively. Acute conflicts followed such outbreaks in social organisations. They had severe ramifications for men and precipitated crises in the family institution, often deemed a reflection of public institutions wherein men had the top place. In the same vein, Karen Harvey informs that men were often portrayed as the household patriarch since "the vision of masculinity [was] very much about patriarchy in the classic sense of the rule of the father in the house" (298). However, many men and men as fathers did not hold the power of household patriarch, and they shared some of their power with women who contributed to the economy of their homes. Thus, "the gap between ideals of patriarchal manhood and social practice has given rise to a model of anxious masculinity in the historiography of this period" (Harvey 299). Accordingly, despite the renowned analogy between the ruler of the institutions and the father of the household, distinct definitions of masculinity emerged in early modern Britain, a period marked by a significant shift in power relations and the new definitions of fatherly roles in the family as a source of men's crises.

(Buchbinder 4; Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* 74; Kimmel, "The Crisis" 90; Tosh 19). Any crisis discourse trapped in the sex role paradigm will remain in a vicious circle due to the fluidity and volatility of norms and definitions. The traces of masculinity crisis throughout history appear, Reeser suggests, "when many men in a given context feel tension with larger ideologies that dominate or begin to dominate that context" (*Masculinities in Theory* 27). In other words, in a particular setting in history, when the privileges of men were under dire threat, divergent and often conflicting discourses on the masculinity crisis emerged for men to regain their hegemony and control over women, children, and other men.

To this end, some explicit motivations behind crisis discourses in contemporary Western societies reverberate men's anxiety about being visible in gender relations. In the last few decades, men have been the object of extensive social sciences and legal research enquiries from feminist and profeminist perspectives. Various feminist campaigns and thoughts pinpointed distinct aspects of men. They proposed multiple analyses for men and men as fathers to highlight the harms caused by men in specific contexts. Monolithic denunciation of being men and traditional masculinity has been questioned, the legal status of men's rule has been challenged, and current developments have restricted men's power domain. Feminist analyses uncovered that individual practices, politics, and policies require improvements to overcome gender inequalities. These are unexpected, rough, even arduous issues for many men to overcome, simultaneously triggering multiple discourses of masculinity crisis.

It is still safe to argue that men often hold the entire apparatuses in terms of power and privilege. Plenty of institutions and decision-making mechanisms have historically been formed, designed, and run either by men or for the benefit of men. Thus, Michael Kimmel suggests, therein lies the problem as men manage to remain invisible in these power relations. The "invisibility" of men's power, he further puts forward, "reproduces inequality" ("Invisible" 6) not only between men and women but also among other men. Hence, assuming men as gendered beings for enquiries about men in power relations is

essential to the critical studies on men and masculinities to uncover the hidden privileges of men.

Among cultural theories and critical literary studies on men, there is no monolithic identification of male power, but multiple denunciations of masculinities and proposed solutions for gender inequalities. Drawing on an extensive range of research, profeminist academics and activists around the world have focused on men's multifaceted experiences to highlight their ongoing violence, authority, and power in concepts such as hegemony, heteronormativity, homosociality, and homophobia in varied contexts (Haywood et al. 4). The mutual notion among these studies is the ultimate rejection of the conservative reductionist proposition that masculinity is biologically natural and morally necessary. All profeminist allies, therefore, assert that masculinity is culturally fabricated, not biologically mandated, yet men, assuming masculinity, have most often been the privileged party in gender hierarchies.

Earlier enquiries about men's asymmetric power over women, children, and other men in the web of power relations came under intense scrutiny in Australian sociologist and philosopher Raewyn Connell's theory of gender. "Gender," Connell argues, "is a way in which social practice is ordered" (*Masculinities* 71). Based on the perspective of Connell, the concept of gender is fundamentally flawed, as it implies that social roles are inherently dictated by human biology. Instead, Connell posits that the constructs of masculinity and femininity are purely products of societal influences and expectations. Historical, contextual, and unstable configurations of masculinity and femininity are (re)produced in particular gender relations, which depend on fundamental structures such as power, labour, and cathexis (Connell, *Gender and Power* 98-99). These structures are constituted through bodily practises, performances, and reproduction processes. Thus, masculinity and femininity are the products of a gender project, which is always subject to change, whereby men and women (re)position themselves. Neither masculinity nor femininity is independent of the indicated time and place within a given society (*Masculinities* 72). While addressing gender projects, Connell focuses on three main areas through which

men as gendered beings are to be analysed, namely global, regional, and local settings. Either global or local, a specific gender order is created by distinct material practices.

Connell further argues that in this gender order, particular gender regimes are located. Gender regimes denote clear implications and applications peculiar to specific institutions and might show variety in local settings. The comprehensive arrangement of gender regimes embraces both institutional structures and cultural habitus, wherein gender order is constructed in a broader aspect. These structures are the state, the labour market, and the family, through which reciprocal relations are obtained as gender regimes among distinct hierarchies (*Gender and Power* 120). Hence, Connell suggests that "these concepts that gender regimes and gender orders [too] are historical products and subject to change in history" (*The Men and the Boys* 29). In these historical and cultural constructions of the gender order, Connell draws attention to the plurality of masculinities (and also femininities) to analyse men's practices as gendered beings. Hence, for the first time, men become the objects of enquiries in gender relations. In her formulation, then, it is possible to pinpoint distinct typologies of masculinities at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, and age, which lays bare the idea that masculinity practices of a man of colour might be different from a white man's in terms of ethnicity on the one hand, and the other, the practices of working-class men might also differ class-wise from a middle-class man's masculinity practises.

Locating the notion of plural masculinities, a notion that highlights the fact that masculinity is not a monolithic, stable, historical, biological, uncontested, universal truth, but a somewhat fragmented, multi-layered, fluid, dependable construct wherein distinct men are attached, Connell mentions a disparate group of men such as gay men of colour, feminine factory workers, middle-class rapists, and cross-dressers who could represent diverse masculinity practices. Economic, social, legal, and therefore political relations among these disparate groups of men are constantly (re)arranged following the values

closely tied to hegemonic masculinity[13], which is delineated on the top of other categorisations such as subordinating, complicit, marginalised, and protest masculinities, (*Masculinities* 76). None of these categorisations is fixed; instead, they are subject to change due to the fluidity of gender relations as they are social constructions in distinct historical contexts.

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as a target achievement for all men, as she borrows Antonio Gramsci's term hegemony in the context of unequal gender relations. Gramsci formulates his theory of hegemony to demonstrate how power is legitimatised by the ruling classes. To Gramsci, two main stages, cultural direction and consent, are central to recognising hegemony's inherent acceptance. In particular, Gramscian hegemony indicates a process of moral, intellectual, and often manupilative leadership and control to seek consent of the subordinated classes during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. In Gramscian hegemony, consent is the key word since it functions for ruling classes to retain domination over the subordinate classes through complex web of mechanisms rather than coercion. Gramsci's use of hegemony cannot be understood without other concepts he develops, including those of 'State' and 'Civil Society.' While Gramsci at times uses 'State' narrowly to refer to the "governmental-coercive apparatus" (265), he also deploys a broader "general notion of State" (263) or "integral State" (267), which includes both the functions of social hegemony and political government. In this general or integral sense, "[s]tate is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities whereby the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance but also manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules" (244). Accordingly, as the term hegemony signifies, consent and legitimisation are precise principles in the construction of gender relations, particularly hegemonic masculinity, since the superiority

[13] The term 'hegemonic masculinity' was first coined in the article "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity" (1985) by Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee. Connell later extended the term in her book *Gender and Power* (1987), wherein she put forward that "hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (183). In her later seminal work *Masculinities* (1995), Connell foregrounds the idea that "masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning pertinent to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition" (43). She rejects the presence of a singular definition of masculinity but defends the existence of a plurality of masculinities. She offers to inspect masculinity typologies under four main sections: hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalised. To Connell, definitions of each masculinity typology are always fluent, unstable, and dynamic.

of some men over women and other men among gender hierarchies is seldom achieved by force, but by mutual consent and cultural dominance since "hegemony [does] not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it mean[s] ascendency achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Howson and Hearn 44). The aspects of hegemonic masculinity enable privileged men to legitimise their granted power over women and other men. More precisely, the subordination of less advantageous and less privileged men by hegemonic forms of masculinity is consolidated through the consent of other men and women at the intersection of broader power relations and particular mundane practices. However, not all men can maintain the dependant, unstable qualities of hegemonic masculinity, as it embodies values with plural ramifications of existing idealised masculinity norms, which are neither complete nor stable. Particular characteristics that hegemonic masculinity implies frequently coincide with contemporary attributions of idealised masculinity norms, such as being a breadwinner, strong, courageous, sexually potent, and progenitive.

Along with non-heterosexual men, many non-white men, working-class men, disabled men, or older men tend to remain out of the circle of hegemonic masculinity norms in a particular society. Most of these men also aspire to benefit from the patriarchal dividend[14], although they "are not militant in defence of patriarchy" (Connell, *The Men and the Boys* 31). Complicity plays a crucial role in constructing and saving hegemonic masculinity norms now that being complicit to the ongoing ascendency of hegemonic masculinity is often achieved by consensus. There is, therefore, a symbiotic relationship between hegemonic masculinity and complicity. Hegemonic masculinity norms owe their existence to the collection of beliefs and values created and defended by complicity. In other words, understanding the power of hegemony requires carefully examining the dynamics of complicity. In contemporary societies, complicit men might be respectful towards their partners, wives, daughters, and mothers and take responsibility for

[14] The term patriarchal dividend was coined by Raewyn Connell in her book *Masculinities* (2005) and developed in her following works. Patriarchal dividend refers to the idea that most men, being top of the gender hierarchy, benefit from the privileges of hegemonic masculinity. It is defined as "the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (*Masculinities* 79). Patriarchal dividend projects the historical position of men concerning women and gay men since "men as a group, and heterosexual men in particular, are not oppressed or disadvantaged" (*Men and Boys* 209).

household shares. They might not commit physical violence towards women, other men, and children. However, they do not refrain from the privileges of masculinity and keep reproducing the qualities of hegemonic masculinity and gender inequalities in a given context.

As previously mentioned, hegemonic masculinity often rearranges its fluid qualities pertinent to other masculinity categorisations and is constructed through disparities between currently dominant and less valued masculinities and femininities (Connell, *Gender and Power* 187). Among distinct masculinity categorisations, "[m]iddle-class, white, heterosexual masculinity is used as the marker against which other masculinities are measured" (Pease, *Recreating Men* 32). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity bears ascendant qualities of current masculinity norms and deliberately disparages several disadvantageous men who cannot position themselves in the most honoured hegemonic ideals. Some relatively unfavourable men remain subordinated, as they cannot open up room for themselves in the circle of legitimised masculinity norms.

Accordingly, heterosexual men's superiority over gay men is presumably most frequent since sexual orientation is one of the most striking determiners of masculine legitimacy among the hierarchies of distinct masculinity categorisations. Gay men are subordinated by heterosexual men in particular material practices such as "political and cultural exclusion, cultural abuse, legal violence, street violence, economic discrimination and personal boycotts" (Connell, *Masculinities* 78). For heterosexuality is the foremost common denotation of dominant masculinity, gay men often face the risk of illegitimacy both in interpersonal and political stances. On a personal level, gay men confront blatant disregard from heterosexual men and become the objects of violence since they are regarded as a direct threat to heterosexual men's masculinity.

Other than the subordination of peculiar sexual orientations, race, ethnicity, class, and age appear to be potentially decisive factors in gender relations. Traditional gender studies often foreground the oppression of women in gendered societies wherein men are always privileged. However, enquiries about men as gendered beings help unveil some

men's ascendency over other men. Some men are ostracised in masculine hierarchies owing to their marginal identities compared to dominant identity constructions. In this regard, Connell designates marginalised masculinity as a category of men which accentuates "gender forms produced in exploited or oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, which may share many features with hegemonic masculinity but are socially de-authorized" (*The Men and the Boys* 30-31). Masculine qualities of the marginalised men are trivialised regarding their ethnicity, race, or age, as they are incompatible with dominant features of hegemonic masculinity. As seen in Connell's definition, hegemonic norms of masculinity are eager to refute any marginalisation. Either elderly, black, rural, working-class, or Irish masculinities in this regard might provide a brighter picture of distinct enactments of marginalised masculinities pertinent to hegemonic masculinity norms in a wide variety of contexts.

Raewyn Connell's proposal for analysing men as gendered beings in varied typologies opened novel ways to recognise gender relations in general and men's enduring power among these relations in particular. Assuming men as gendered beings and scrutinising diverse groups of men in distinct contexts have provided a theoretical frame to deconstruct historical and contextual meanings of masculinities. However, Connell's formulations, to be more precise, her masculinity typologies to examine men's domination over women and other men have been contested in some ways by particular profeminist academics and theoreticians. Stephen Whitehead, for instance, suspects the legitimacy of the term hegemonic masculinity as it is "weakened once we stress the fluidity, contingency, and multiplicity of masculinities and identities" ("Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited" 58). To Whitehead, the term remains inefficient in shedding light upon "the complex patterns of inculcation and resistance which constitute everyday social interaction" ("Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited" 58). Men's distinct practices in various hierarchies might be too complicated to be categorised. He also draws attention to the abundance of misinterpretations in diverse disciplines, which may result in the oversimplification of Gramscian hegemony that deserves more sophisticated references.

In other respects, Jeff Hearn pinpoints that the categorisation of masculinity is flawed because masculinity typologies necessarily result in stable definitions. He agrees that hegemony might help inspect men critically. Yet, a greater focus should be made on men's practices in distinct contexts, as he notes that "the concept has generally been employed in too restricted a way; the focus on masculinity is too narrow. Instead, it is time to go back from *masculinity* to men, to examine the hegemony of men and about men" ("From Hegemonic Masculinity" 59). More importantly, Hern pinpoints the risk of overshadowing men's harmful practices in class relations as well as gender hierarchies and "suggest[s] a greater attention to the social construction of the systems of differentiations of men and men's practices rather than the social construction of particular 'forms' of men, as masculinities" ("From Hegemonic Masculinity" 60).

Finally, Demetrakis Z. Demetriou notifies that Connell's masculinity categorisations unintentionally create a duality between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. As the original formulation repeatedly foregrounds the idea that hegemonic masculinity is (re)arranged or (re)configured to impose upon femininities and other masculinities, the indispensable impact of non-hegemonic masculinities on hegemonic masculinity goes unnoticed, as they are "constructed as a dualism, as two distinct and clearly differentiated configurations of practice" (Demetriou, "Connell's Concept" 347). Hence, separate interrogations or challenges towards Connell's methodology could be assembled in five main points concerning the underlying concept of masculinity: ostensible ambiguity of masculinity typologies, peculiarly hegemonic masculinity; possible dangers of reification of the idea; the construction and representation of the subject in gender relations; and finally, the pattern of gender relations in general.

Thus, Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt reformulated some aspects of Connell's critical masculinity theory and the concept of hegemonic masculinity in a co-authored article titled: "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" in 2005. In this article, Connell and Messerschmidt respond to major criticisms made towards Connell's previous formulations of gender, power, and masculinity typologies on men and masculinities and misuses of the concepts Connell had offered to be interrogated. Although this article

mostly issued inappropriate or misleading counterarguments, they also found few relevant points and highlighted the need for reformulation and amplification. They decided to discard two features of the previous formulation that emphasise “a too-simple model of the social relations surrounding hegemonic masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 846), referring to a misleading attempt to “locate all masculinities [and femininities] in terms of a single pattern of power, the global dominance of men over women” (Connell and Messerschmidt 846) and some possible treats that might be posed by “the appeal to psychoanalytic ideas about unconscious motivation” (Connell and Messerschmidt 847). Hence, they amplified their gender theory and offered novel areas to empower research on men and masculinities by focusing more on gender hierarchy (reciprocal relations among distinct men, women, and other men), the geography of masculinities (highlighting the contemporary importance of local, regional, global masculinities), social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities.

Ultimately, Connell has paved the way for analysing men as gendered beings, and her theorisation implemented novel enquiries on gender and power. It is put forward how most men historically achieved privilege in gender hierarchies and legitimated their power through consent at the intersection of varied contexts. Perpetuating their power over women and children, most men have institutionalised patriarchal norms and values based on violence, domination, and structural inequalities. However, affinities, conflicts, struggles, combats, agonies, violence, and peculiar relations among different men have been significant for enquiries into men as gendered beings.

Accordingly, it is argued that a single man’s masculinity practices could simultaneously reveal the qualities of peculiar masculinity typologies. Because masculinities denote neither *a priori* biological reality nor fixed categorisations, they have often been constructed around artificial traits and behaviours to be achieved by men. Ideological (re)configurations repeatedly maintain fluid masculinity traits, and men’s engagement with these (re)produced masculinity practices reveals political reverberations in any personal and public space. Any man might reflect hegemonic masculinity practices as a ruling father at home; he might also be complicit in his attitudes towards a particular

political stance or subordinated by his physical weakness, bodily defect, age, sexual orientation, and also marginalised by his race or economic condition. As seen from the examples, it is crucial to denote that neither masculinity typologies nor particular men's associations with these categorisations are stable. They often intermingle, and intersectional relations constantly reproduce norms of hegemonic masculinity in distinct hierarchies.

Hierarchies among men are determined in that men must prove their 'manhood' to other men to (re)place themselves in social strata. To prove their 'manhood', men, predominantly heterosexual men, need to (re)reproduce and legitimise particular masculinity practices that are associated with maleness. Individual strength, bodily power, resistance, endurance, sexual virility, and toughness are idealised traits of heterosexual masculinities. Because traditional manhood stands for the opposite values attributed to women, despite peculiar conditions defined by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality or age, men 'become men' so long as they manage to differ from women in their struggle to prove their maleness. Any personal traits that vaguely imply unmasculine qualities might recall subordination, as implications of being 'unmanly' are prone to symbolic assimilation to femininity. These men are in need of approval from other men regarding their social, political, and economic power and sexual virility. In this context, heterosexual men tend to subordinate non-binary men due to their association with femininity. The closer men get to the assumed qualities of gayness and femininity in the traditional perception, the more subordinated they are pinpointed in gender hierarchy due to ongoing homophobia, which has wider political reverberations among contemporary societies.

Homophobia has broader connotations than a means for the oppression of sexual minorities. It implicates a significant way of regulating male relations in a political context. Often, homophobia is, in political stance, tactlessly used as a weapon and assuredly politicised as a means of adequate strategy by politicians and decision-making mechanisms either to consolidate their power or legitimate an invasion when socioeconomic stability is at stake in specific contexts. At times when political agenda is

requisite for national solidarity, at times when crises and distress peak, gayness is defined as a collective weakness to be defeated in order not to weaken traditional masculinity. For instance, particularly in the Cold War era under McCarthy's presidency in the United States, hate crimes reached their apexes due to continuous propaganda against gay men, prompted as part of the American 'lavender scare'[15], and homophobia turned into a 'witch-hunting' in security forces as gayness was nothing but a Soviet plague invading modern, western communities.

Following the USA's political pressure, the British government was constrained to introduce compulsory identity vetting for civil servants before employment during the 1980s. Hence, homophobia became a helpful tool for Margaret Thatcher to empower her conservative politics when Britain struggled with mega social and economic problems such as record-breaking unemployment rates, migration boom, and rocketing divorce rates. Official campaigns fed the hatred and hostility nurtured towards gay men and other minorities. These campaigns were a part of the Conservative Family Campaign, a bastion of male privilege under the heterosexual politics of Thatcherite Britain[16]. Thus, masculinity and the image of the ideal man and men as fathers have gained a peculiar meaning during the Thatcher era due to the special prominence given to the family institution. Thatcher's strict emphasis on the importance of families and men's roles therein remarks a quite apparent reference to a call for a turn to Victorian values in parallel with the period's influential motto of 'back to basics', denoting a serious wish to

[15] 'The term coined and popularised by the American historian David K. Johnson. In his eponymous book, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2004), Johnson documents the anti-homosexual campaign that began in the USA in the 1950s. Throughout the period, a collective fear was prompted by the State officers and the media claiming that many Soviet agents were deciphered in government, some of whom were homosexuals. Consequently, a witch-hunt commenced, and thousands of officers were persecuted. At times, homophobia easily transformed into anti-communist propaganda, when McCarthy defined it as "the psychological maladjustment that led people to communism" (Johnson 16).

[16] Martin Durham lays then-contemporary discussions about homosexuality and its possible sanctions held in the Parliament and the media in the chapter titled "The Thatcher Government and the Policing of Sexuality" (1991). And also, for further details, see Matthew Waites' article "Homosexuality and the New Right: The Legacy of the 1980s for New Delineations of Homophobia" (2000). https://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/1/waites.html

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reconstruct the 'flawed morals' of the British society. If the heterosexual family man is the idealised form of manhood, homosexual men should be subordinated.

Another significant determinant factor in gender relations is race. "Gender and race", Reeser suggests, "are so often connected and dependent on each other that it is difficult to talk about one without talking about the other" (*Masculinities in Theory* 161). Nevertheless, the relationship between gender and race had not been a significant subject for critical enquiries until the third wave of feminism paved the way towards problematising the condition of racialised women. Urging attention to how distinct women's experiences of gender differ due to their race, bell hooks, for example, foregrounded that women of colour could not benefit from white women's feminist achievements since their segregation begins with their race. White men and men of colour have dominated them simultaneously (*Ain't I A Woman* 4-5). Furthermore, Kimberly Crenshaw highlighted the importance of paying attention to different forms of inequality women, particularly black women, have faced. Coining the term 'intersectionality', Crenshaw argues that black women often "experience double discrimination" (149), as they sometimes suffer from segregation the same way white women do. In another context, they are objectified in the same way as black men. The concept of intersectionality, therefore, has influenced feminist interrogations by broadening their scope to include the experiences of marginalised groups of women, as struggles for gender equality tend to be more inclusive and better able to challenge systems of oppression. It is thus emphasised that inequalities based on race and gender continuously intersect and exacerbate each other.

Before third-wave feminism's critical interest, men of colour were not frequently considered subjects for debate regarding their masculinity practices and attitudes towards women, children, and other men. These men and their masculinity practices remained hidden in plain sight for a long time. Intersections of gender, race, and power lay bare how some men have historically tended to assume supremacy over other men by marginalisation. In a larger historical and social context, black men have often been marginalised by white men and remained disadvantaged in achieving the idealised norms

of hegemonic masculinity due to the 'visibility' of their race. Because masculinity has often been defined as 'white' by the white, "any hegemony or advantage assigned to masculinity can be attributed to the category of whiteness" (Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory* 145). Defining themselves superior, the white has marginalised men of colour through economic and political means and deliberately limited their access to financial resources and political power since the very beginning of colonisation[17].

To save their geographic, economic, social and, therefore, political privileges, the white has long assumed supremacy over men of colour by marginalising them in multiple ways. White supremacy has been perpetuated with stereotyping, focusing mainly on their bodies. Stereotyping through the physical representation of men of colour in mass media has often been pejorative and involved explicit discrimination. The constructed images of these men imply physicality, strength, and sporting and sexual prowess and enable "a site for European fantasies about black male sexuality" (Westwood 57). Hence, the heavy emphasis on men of colour's bodies in visual media such as films, TV serials, commercials, and sports events maintains the implementation of sexual deviancy and reverberates the repercussions of the ongoing colonial phantasy of the Western world.

It is suggested that the animosity between polarised communities causes masculine anxiety, as both parties see each other as threatening their masculinity. Pejorative representations of black male bodies evoke fear and hate towards these 'othered' men that accelerate in specific times and settings. Particularly in Thatcherite England, when unemployment rates increased, the income gap between the rich and the poor peaked; when the HIV/AIDS pandemic became a crucial agenda, the flow of immigrants,

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[17] In the United States, black men's alleged marginalisation could not be fully apprehended unless the history of colonisation and slavery was inspected—white men's hegemony over men of colour results from several political and economic practices. As an imposed ideology, white supremacy demonised men of colour who internalised their 'inability' to become 'true patriarchs' in time. Walter Allen thoroughly documents how whiteness is invented in particular states such as Virginia and Maryland so that sugar plantations and cotton fields could be financially controlled for the benefit of the colonisers (qtd in Armengol, "Past, Present and Future" 67). Consequently, the black has been symbolically 'feminised' and 'infantilised' by the white through physical violence and cultural hegemony. For instance, bell hooks, in her influential book titled *Black Look: Race and Representation*, demonstrates how cultural materials such as TV serials, commercials, pop songs and singers amplified the black demonising in various contexts. For further arguments on black masculinity in the context of the United States, see Robert Staples' book *Exploring Black Masculinity* (2006).

especially immigrants from African and Carribean origins, began to be questioned. In a socio-political context wherein the new right demonised people of colour by multiple nationalistic discourses, xenophobia was fed, and these groups were depicted as a direct threat to the establishment. At the intersection of sexual politics and race, the black community was collectively marginalised as the primary cause of these flaws. The political tension and dominant discourse of blame have resulted in reciprocal hatred and antagonism between the nationalist white men and men of colour.

As a result, many men of colour assumed novel constructed traits of masculinities, namely black masculinities, denoting a variety of responses and objections to the hegemony of white supremacy and its emasculating practices. For example, many enslaved men of colour would engage in "acts of violence against their wives and children as well as against other male slaves" (Orelus 70). Remaining powerless and marginalised under the violent rule of the white, men of colour also perpetuate violence and discrimination against women, children, and other men to partake of peculiar hegemonic masculinity traits. For this group of men, fashioning dominant, violent, and authoritarian masculinity traits over women and other men helped them prove their manhood as a response to their historical marginalisation and emasculation by the whites. They reflect a particular tendency to reaffirm masculinity, as their masculinity practices become more complicated when they emulate broader implications of contemporary masculinity ideals.

Marginalising the 'Other' has never been limited to men of colour in Britain. It also includes systematic bias and segregation historically impelled to the Irish. When cultural, social, political, and economic relationships between Ireland and Britain are investigated, one might discern that the former has been subordinated to the latter with a perceived inferiority in various spheres of life. Although Irish men can generally benefit from the white men's privileges in gender hierarchy, in particular, they have often been marginalised by the English men's historical domination. As can be seen in the colonial history of Ireland, Irish men were stereotyped as not 'manly' enough to rule their own country since manliness implied some essential qualities, such as authority, power, reason, and rationality.

Prevailing ethnic and sectarian differences between the dominating English and the dominated Irish are perpetuated through negative stereotypes to prompt the Anglo-Irish subject to be emasculated in popular culture and media representations. It is claimed that there have been fundamental political and economic reasons for rendering the Irish in negative stereotyping. Soon after the massive industrialisation of England, many immigrants moved to urban cities and smaller towns as a labour force, among which the Irish were often significant in number. These immigrants were of grave importance for the infrastructure of Britain in terms of housing, construction, road building, transportation, and mining. They worked in cotton mills, factories, and agriculture, and often engaged in domestic issues[18].

Such a massive migration brought about inevitable consequences for the Irish as the British found the opportunity to degrade their historical colony, thereby "a wide range of cultural markers of difference juxtaposed the dirtiness, drunkenness, laziness and violence of the Irish with the purity, industriousness and civilisation of the settled English" (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 145). Nevertheless, soon after the Troubles, when a peace agreement, namely the Good Friday Agreement between the Republicans, the Unionists, and the British, was signed in 1998, a constant shift in representation of the Irish was observed, and Irishness became more visible and seemingly freed from negative stereotyping in British society. Apart from the shifting representations of Irish men in England, it is argued that they managed to hide from the critical gaze in Ireland for a long time. However, interrogations of Irish men and masculinities accelerated throughout the last two decades. Typical among such enquiries, it has been critically put forward that the construction of hegemonic masculinities in Ireland has depended more on three fundamental factors: land, national identity, and Catholicism.

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[18] Donald M. MacRaild documents the history of Irish migration to Britain from the mid-eighteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century. In his full-length book, MacRaild digs into the economic, political, religious, and sectarian reasons behind the motivation of Irish migration. The Irish contributed to distinct areas of economic and cultural progress in Britain, and "without Irish settlers, the great conurbations of industrial Britain would still have been miserable and unhealthy places to live and work" (*Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922* 156). For the post-war condition of the Irish in Britain, also see Edna Delaney's *The Irish in Post-War Britain* (1999), wherein she revolves around the theme of leaving home and adaptation of the Irish settlers to Britain as well as the ongoing conflicts between the Irish and the British in the post-colonial context.

As it is widely accepted, being dependent on the land is a recurrent theme in Irish culture. The economic well-being of colonised Ireland has long relied on the soil, which has many effects on traditional Irish masculinity. This type of masculinity recurs among men who relate to the land and has broader implications, such as celebrating family life, morality, and farm work. It is emphasised that being a dexterous farmer had been a source of male pride and prestige for the traditional Irish men. Symbolised by "[t]he cult of the 'hard man'" (Bairner 128), Irish farmers, in their representation, appeared to have shaped their land and their soil; in return, they have been shaped by their land.

Other than the landscape, Catholicism has also been a prevalent factor in the construction of Irish masculinities and retained the cult of the 'hard man'. The highly conservative politics and moral teachings of the Roman Catholic church have had a profound influence on Irish society and culture, as it constantly (re)shapes state institutions as well as everyday practices of the Irish (Dillon 114-115; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 151; Liston 203; Quilty 51). More precisely, the Catholic church has interfered directly with personal issues such as sexualities, reproduction, marriage, and domestic roles for a long time. The strict impositions of moral values by the Catholic church made the people of Ireland remain silent about sex. Even among husbands and wives, sex was not explicitly mentioned. Various sanctions were made to control sexual behaviours. Associating its primary aim with reproduction, sex for pleasure is regarded as immoral, and thus, contraception has been restricted by the Catholic church.

The popularity of the Catholic church has begun to fade away, not demised, though, as a result of a significant loss of faith in the morals of this institution. The disclosure of numerous child abuse scandals accelerated the decadence of faith in the Catholic church. Heavy emphasis was placed on the correlation between celibate priests and child abuse in mass media, and discussions peaked when the famous scandal, the Father Brendan Smyth affair, broke[19]. The mutual consensus after public discussions was that the child

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[19] Brendan Smyth, the Catholic priest, was revealed to have abused seventeen children for thirty years after a successful investigation. Nonetheless, it was later disclosed that these child abuse issues had already been known yet covered by the media with the help of the state. These media disclosures generated "a profound crisis in the Catholic Church and raised doubts about the trustworthiness of priests and the ability of the

abuse in the Catholic church might have been caused by the mandatory requirement of celibacy for the priest since men, due to their taken-for-granted 'biological fact', had to have sexual intercourse. Because most church offenders are heterosexual, married men, public debates and discourses to stop abuse reinforced the necessity of having legal sex, promoting the 'benefits' of marriage for all men. The media projection of celibate masculinity as dangerous implied married men were safe, and thus, the image of the 'good father'[20] dominated the Irish understanding of ideal masculinity and therefore helped marginalisation of single men.

On the other hand, simultaneous with the above-mentioned public debates regarding the decadence of the Catholic church, novel constructions of masculinities emerged soon after the years between 1960-1990, the period called the Celtic Tiger for Ireland. The Celtic Tiger period was a turning point when Ireland began to reach economic prosperity, and many Irish men, particularly the younger generation, mobilised. During and soon after the Celtic Tiger period, most men who used to live outside Ireland began to migrate back and work outside the land owing to new foreign investments and job opportunities. Hence, the image of more self-confident and economically independent men became prevalent, the historical link between traditional Irish masculinity and the land was broken, and the idea of the 'hard man' gradually faded.

Mobilisation of the younger generation, innovations in work areas, and variations in occupations reinforced an unprecedented change in normative gender relations since women who used to be precluded by the Church began to participate in paid jobs, became more visible in the public domain, and contributed to family income. Dual income in families transformed the traditional family type, and younger men necessarily "forged new, more flexible masculine identities" (Frosh et al. 2). These developments in

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state to prevent child" (Ferguson, "The Paedophile Priest, 247). Soon after the scandal, the government was broken down.

[20] For further details, see Richard Collier's article "Waiting Till Father Gets Home: Reconstruction of Fatherhood in Family Law" (1995). In his article, Collier indicates that the politics of 'good father' in the 1990s is reminiscent of 'back to basics' politics. The safeness of fatherhood is emphasised to regularise heterosexual relationships and emerged in parallel with the idea of 'companionate marriage' and the 'egalitarian symmetrical family'. To Collier, this reconstruction of the father image was "a reference to the economic and familial order of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (Collier, "Waiting Till Father" 6).

masculinity identities could not be limited to the Irish youth, as they have closely tied to globalisation and neoliberal politics of neighbouring countries.

Neoliberalism, one of the hottest issues discussed among various disciplines since the 1980s, refers mainly to a novel global economic formation. It offers "a set of deliberate strategies", as Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale put it, "to increase the share of profit going to capitalists and corporations" (29). These strategies include decreases in payments, forcing employees to work harder and faster, abolishing a number of rules and regulations that are germane to employment and working conditions, cutting tremendous amounts of the taxes that the rich would pay, promoting entrepreneurs to benefit more out of former public utilities and services utilising privatisation, and loosening the unions to break down the resistance of the offenders. These principles have been more or less typical among neoliberal states across the Global North. Under such circumstances, except for a few wealthy elites, most men and their families have few options to make economically independent lives. Thus, numerous people have met a novel phase of capitalism that fashioned a new form by neoliberal means in contrast with class societies that were prevalent for ages.

Neoliberalism as an economic regime commenced operating in capitalist societies in the 1970s, yet its effect has spread rapidly and globalised throughout the following decades. Bringing more profit to the wealthy elites, neoliberalism and the free market policy made most people's lives unstable and insecure during the 1980s and 1990s. Traditional means of production slightly changed, the old trustworthy employee and employer images faded, and regular, long-term paid jobs were replaced by insecure, part-time, fast-changing human resources in many privatised sectors due to perpetual economic crises and recessions adversely impacting industrial profits. Moreover, the rapid impoverishment of the underclass grew into a significant problem for global corporations since lower income meant lower consumption. In an attempt to sustain such a sensitive and precarious economic balance, strict measures were taken by financial institutions such as state and private banks, enabling masses of vast amounts of credits, loans, and mortgages to make them participate in the web of consumerism (Lindisfarne and Neale 33). However, these short-term, artificial ameliorations could not cover the gap between the poor and the rich,

and economic inequalities became more visible in the long term since most profits remained in the hands of the wealthy elites.

When the free market policy dominated the world economy, these new economic and commercial factors denoted extreme impact upon traditional gender norms, leading to novel forms of gendered relations. The new policy transformed the historical attributions to work and profession, and this constant shift has had broad ramifications for men, masculinities, and traditional fatherhood at the intersection of gender and class. Particularly among the middle and upper-middle-class communities, the cult of the hard, skilled, or semi-skilled breadwinner men has been replaced by the softer, white-collar men. Besides, many middle-class women's economic independence through labour participation forced many men to question their social and familial roles as men. These men negotiated with novel socioeconomic norms, regenerated their masculinity practices, and assumed new masculine identities called 'the new man' and 'the new lad'.

According to John Beynon, these two masculine identities emerged, respectively. "The new man", he argues, "is associated with commercial masculinity and the spectacular expansion of consumerism" (*Masculinities and Culture* 102). This new image of men coincided with the zeitgeist of Thatcherite England in parallel with the emerging popular culture due to economic developments in the Global North during the 1980s. With a considerable individualistic emphasis on commercialism prompted by dominating neoliberalism, the new man expanded rapidly among white middle-class men owing to the proliferation of media tools. The wide distribution of colour TV, advancing photography, and best-seller men's magazines helped the image of the new man spread among middle-class men through visual representations in the mainstream media apparatuses such as men's style press, TV commercials and men's fashion.

Ubiquitous in the mass media, the constructed image of the new man reverberates prominent features for men in contrast with traditional men. The sheer difference that the new man makes with the traditional man, Frank Mort indicates, is that "the new man was linked to the more progressive and caring versions of fatherhood [and] was defined as a metropolitan phenomenon, supposedly visible in a number of London locations

associated with consumer-style" (*Cultures of Consumption* 16). Novel masculinity traits among these men resonate with two prominent features: First, they bear more egalitarian views on equality between men and women, responsibility for household sharing, emotional reflection, nurturing, and care. Second, they are self-centred and fashion-oriented consumers. It is crucial to realise that the heavy emphasis made on the new man appeared at times when the pattern of family slightly changed, at times when most men began to marry in their late thirties or even remain single, and at times when several men started to support their wives or partners for their education and professional careers and take more responsibility for domestic chores. Therefore, the invention of the new man denotes a period when many young men sought refuge from their fathers by cutting their bounds with hegemonic masculinity ideals relevant to previous socioeconomic norms.

However, the pervasiveness of the new man who bears progressive attitudes towards women, children, and other men is a highly controversial issue. Despite their positive representations, many men are neither eager to take responsibility for household share nor meaningfully change their masculine habits and expectations. It remains a myth since how nurturant these men are, how they position themselves in the gender hierarchy, and to what extent they take responsibility for household shares are ambiguous. Moreover, these novel representations of men with more egalitarian views and attitudes are fallacious, as they do not include most men but refer mainly to a few middle-class white men.

Contrary to the media invasion of the new man, simultaneous economic crises and business recessions left many men out of the game. The means of heavy industry in pre-Thatcherite England was nearly demised and replaced by the service industry. The constant shift from industrialism to post-industrialism made working-class men and their families precarious to an increasing extent. Technological advancements replaced numerous skilled and semi-skilled men with automation. Job opportunities that demanded physical power vanished, and many men had to be part-time employees. As a result, the gap between middle-class and underclassmen became more visible, denoting exact differences in the constructions of distinct masculinities. It became apparent that men could not equally participate in the world designed for/by consumerism. Several men

could not find space in this weird, specific, fashion-oriented world, and the global codes of meaning created by the media were inevitably irrelevant for the underclassmen who were marginalised by that commercial-based, media-driven illusion of manhood. The massive gap between the constructed image of the new man that was relevant for a small number of privileged men and the harsh socioeconomic realities that numerous underclassmen find themselves triggered the emergence of a novel stereotype, namely the new lad.

As Beynon suggests, the new lad emerged during the 1990s for a specific reason. It "was a reaction both to the 1980s men's style press and a reaction to the growing assertiveness of women" (*Masculinities and Culture* 111). Laddism tended to reflect the 'absurdity' of the new man in two ways. On the one hand, it was a mere response against the new man's artificial gentility, which would not coincide with most men and their masculinity practices. On the other hand, it was a genuine backlash against the popularised new man image, representing more egalitarian attitudes towards women's rights and gender inequality. Rejecting being 'softer', emotional, self-expressive, nurturer, and thus 'feminised', the new lad assumed working-class men's stereotypical attitudes regarding their physical appearance, habits, discourses, and views on women, feminisms, and gender equality.

The mutual point between the new man and the new lad is their artificiality, as both are promoted on behalf of consumerism through consumer-oriented media tools. Particular labels were in fashion among young men, frequently appearing in the popular media, reflecting the commercial motivation behind them. The best-seller magazines such as *Loaded* and *FHM* were pioneering means that helped laddish culture immediately spread among the youth (Edward, *Cultures of Masculinity* 34). These men's magazines fill the gap between the artificial gentry of the new man and the majority of middle-class men and younger boys. They functioned to teach young boys how to be 'proper' men regarding their appearance, dress codes, and manners. Laddish culture spread among young boys because most could not cope with the higher expectations and norms of the novel hegemonic masculinity traits of the new man. The ambivalence of these boys was successfully used by the men's magazines in that they served for the promotion of

regenerated ‘manly values’ for the laddish culture, including heavy drinking, offensive language, hooliganism, violence, machismo in contrast to the image of the new man. It is safe to argue that simultaneous with the anti-feminist men’s rights movement and the mythopoetic men’s movement, laddism grew into a widespread masculinist ideology wherein discourses of masculinity crisis, male victimisation, and aggression prevailed through physical representation emphasised by the new consumer culture.

Accordingly, the reconstructed images of the new man and the new lad reverberate particular masculinity politics to enhance the relatively decaying power of men after feminist achievements. However, it is still undeniable that being a man in contemporary society denotes numerous privileges. These privileges include all material means in terms of power, wherein men’s abiding institutional and economic power is not a coincidence since “[t]here are probably thousands of histories of institutions that were organised, staffed, and run by men” (Kimmel, “Invisible” 3). In many respects, all social institutions, educational organisations, the web of governance, medical science and its practices, politics, media tools, entertainment, history, literature, and art are often designed by men to prioritise their benefits. These historical privileges have long been transmitted to new generations through the institutionalised power of men.

As discussed earlier, such visible power of some men over other men and women is necessarily relational and artificial. The artificiality of male dominance is perpetually maintained through distinct forms of violence by numerous men. Although there have been unfortunate tendencies to associate men’s aggression and violence with their ostensible right to rule over ‘the weak’ (marginalised men, subordinated men, women and children) as an outcome of their biology, they are not necessarily bound to scientific facts (Connell, *The Men and the Boys* 215; Ellis 18; Hern, *The Violences* 17; Kaufman, “The Construction of Masculinity” 3; Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* 383). For this reason, men who hold power in various institutions struggle to save and reproduce their privilege through aggression and violence. Men’s relentless aggression and violence against ‘the weak’ denote institutional and individual violence, and both have direct relevance to contemporary politics, ideologies, economics, moral beliefs, and traditions.

In his interrogations of violence of men, Jeff Hearn focuses on two major themes: “power and control” (*Violences* 6). He further argues that, either structural or interpersonal, men’s inherited violence is (re)produced through distinct power mechanisms, and men’s violent practices have political reverberations (Hearn, *Violences* 6-7). Accordingly, one might suggest that power is obtained and secured through several forms of violence in different institutions wherein men learn to be ‘real’ men. Men’s violent practices are (re)created in particular institutions varying from armies, schools, families, and judiciary systems to global corporations, businesses, bureaucracies, and hierarchies, whereby men have long granted their power and control. In the hierarchical structures of these social organisations and institutions, men acknowledge how to obey the rules put by men and learn how to perpetuate these rules over other men.

From the general perspective of critical theories on men and masculinities, men are seen as the perpetrators of different forms of violence, which let them obtain particular privileges over other men, non-binary men, women, and children through legitimising violence and control. Men’s violence is visible in different forms; however, the most common form is physical and symbolic violence. Men’s physical violence includes mass killings, wars, murders, harassment, rape, sexual violence, and juvenile delinquency. Moreover, symbolic violence perpetuated by men is not least harmful. The (un)seen symbolic violence prevails in public and domestic spheres. Mainly through industrialisation, men dominated urban spaces, as most cities have been designed and constructed either for men or for the indirect benefit of men. Men built many male-only areas and gave their names to the famous boulevards, well-known squares, universities, and state buildings. Besides, men dominate bureaucracies, as they have long ruled and run decision-making mechanisms. In many respects, societies are dominated by distinct men in all spheres of life.

As it has been discussed so far, masculinities refer to particular configurations of gender practices; their construction rests in gender polarity and thus compulsory heterosexuality through which men become the ruling party in gender hierarchy. Men have legitimised their power through consent and violence in peculiar contexts. To discern and unfold men’s historical power, poststructuralist gender theories interrogated the historical

construction of maleness by men and, for men, in terms of the power of discourse. Poststructuralist methodology, in essence, follows the structuralist view in that subjects are constituted. However, poststructuralist approaches distinguish themselves from structuralism by thoroughly examining how subjectivities are constructed through discourse. Contrary to the rigid and unchanging structures, discourses that shape individuals are constantly changing, contested, and subject to transformation.

Accordingly, the construction of gendered identities in the subject constitution was highlighted by peculiar poststructuralist views, which raised challenging questions about deconstructing fundamentalist and essentialist notions of sexuality in gender relations. Gender analyses of poststructuralist interrogations basically "try to understand how gender works, in culture, history and language, to construct what [falsely] appear to be transhistorical truths about men, women and sexuality" (Bederman 19). Therefore, the poststructuralist approach is, by definition, "not a position, but rather a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which 'positions' are established" (Butler and Scott xiv). It is indicated that established positions, particularly the polarisation of gender distinctions, could only be deconstructed by shedding light upon the constructive discourses of science, politics, law, and language.

In the same vein, rereading Foucauldian concept of subjectivity and then reformulating and reapplying it to gender theory, Butler emphasises the historical contingency of sexual identities, opposes strict polarities of sex/gender binary, and accentuates the fallacy of dichotomous thinking as a consequence of the heterosexual matrix, as "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble* 34). Deconstructing binary oppositions such as nature/culture, modern/primitive, subject/object, reason/emotion, body/mind that have been dictated by structuralism in the modernist tradition, poststructuralist feminist theories scrutinised particular binaries such as sex/gender and man/woman in terms of their discursive construction. Thus, blurring the binaries and queering the normative categorisations, poststructuralist gender analyses strictly oppose enquiries that might include essentialist references or implications, as it pinpoints the destabilisation of any biological categorisation. As a result, the fluidity of

definitions laid bare the precarity of men's dominant narratives of masculinity. At times when the validity of the 'true essence of masculinity' is disputed, at times when historical certainties are challenged, at times when the taken-for-granted attributions to men and masculinities are deconstructed, it is time to thoroughly confront the possibility that there might not be "a true or abiding masculinity and femininity" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 192). It is then possible to make a parallelism between the function of language in literary narration, gender identity, and their contingency.

Accordingly, the poststructuralist approach to gender analysis might serve as a necessary ground to discuss issues concerning men and masculinities in literature. "The most innovative approaches to the discussion in literary and cultural theory", Joseph M. Armengol suggests, "are those that have been able to synthesise sexual politics and poststructuralist theories in new productive ways" ("Past, Present, and [Future]" 66). Studying gender through a poststructuralist gaze in literary texts offers considerable insight into how men perpetuate inequalities based on gender and how they obtain power and privilege in gender hierarchy. For the last few decades, multiple forms of masculinities and their toxicity have become a hot topic for discussion since there have been several complex, violent acts in distinct societies, such as school shootings, raids, financial crises, pandemics, and political and religious conflicts wherein men are often the perpetrators. Moreover, beyond the harm they cause, many men are simultaneously brought to the fore by their flaws, such as alcoholism, emotional and chronic disorders, high suicide rates, and shorter life expectancy. This might indicate that the archaic representations of powerful men are in decay, and most men could not suit the idealised norms of the monolithic male image.

Moreover, although critical studies on men and masculinities as an independent discipline have proliferated, contemporary theories on gender have still been dominated by women writing about women. It might be simply because men are not eager to talk about their gender and sexuality to the extent that they have already done about women. Extending masculinity studies towards literary analysis might prompt distinct men to confront their toxicity and take responsibility for gender equality. Notwithstanding, in literary criticism or fiction writing, taking men as subjects is a two-edged sword. In one of the earliest

studies, Peter F. Murphy underlines such perilousness and foregrounds that "masculinity, like femininity, is a fictional construction", and thus one might detect the fact that "myths of masculinity have been perpetuated in literature [and] the role literature has played in reinforcing the assumptions about masculinity, and at times, helping to establish the norm of manhood" ("Introduction: Literature and Masculinity" 1). As can be seen in Murphy's cautious remark, beyond its progressive benefits, it is palpable that studying men and masculinities in literature also bears significant risks. It is well-documented that literary texts have an undeniable power of representation, so one might be careful and responsible in inspecting men and masculinities in fiction. Therefore, critical masculinity studies in literature should demythologise singular, monolithic, universal manhood and masculinity. It should emphasise that men and masculinities are discursive constructions, repeatedly manifesting in the everlasting world of fiction.

Embracing these principles, critical interrogations on men and masculinities in literary studies have been accelerating worldwide. Particularly in Turkey, several academics and scholars have problematised distinct representations of men and masculinities in literature with a profeminist lens. Ayşe Saraçgil's *Bukalemun Erkek* (2005), Zeynep Ergun's *Erkeğin Yittiği Yerde: 21. Yüzyıl Türk Romanında Toplumsal Ve Siyasal Arayışlar* (2009), Hasan Bahadır Türk's *Hayali Kahramanlar Hakiki Erkekler: Çizgi Roman Ve Fotoromanda Erkeklik Temsilleri Üzerine Denemeler* (2013), Çimen Günay Erkol's *Broken Masculinities: Solitude, Alienation, And Frustration In Turkish Literature After 1970* (2016), Murat Göç's *20. Yüzyıl Amerikan Edebiyatında Erkekler ve Erkeklikler* (2020) are the first examples of full-length books regarding men's peculiar representations in Turkish, British, and American literature. Along with many other scholars and researchers, Şafak Horzum has been prominent in critical studies of men and masculinities in British literature. In his several essays, Horzum interrogated men and masculinities from the political constructions of stock characters in the eighteenth-century comedy of manners ("Sentimentalised Masculinity" 2018) to the representation of 'masculinity crisis' in the Victorian novel ("Emperyalist Erkekliğin Çöküşü" 2017). He has also discussed theoretical terms and concepts of the field in his essay, "Erkek ve Erkeklik Çalışmaları: Sorunsaldan Kuramsala" (2018). By making notable contributions to the field, each scholar pursues the footprints of men and masculinities regarding how

they have been reshaped and reconfigured in different sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts.

Similarly, pursuing critical theories on men and masculinities in literary studies, this dissertation mainly focuses on the discursive constructions of men's practices in family relations through three examples from contemporary British novels. Particular novels are read in terms of their utterances of distinct constructions of men, masculinities, and fatherhood. Separate chapters of this dissertation interpret the idea of fatherhood as a domain of power struggle. The mutual point in these stories indicates the precarity of masculinities since they lead to tension between fathers and sons. Throughout the following chapters, it is foregrounded that fatherhood as a masculine identity remains an extension of the state and its institutions. It epitomises a notably unattainable affinity with traditions and power. Thus, several men, either as fathers or sons, are objects of this institutional domination, reiterating difficulties regulating their mutual relationship. The abstract, fluid, uncanny, yet strong bounds between men and their sons metamorphose into ambiguous 'crises' manifesting in the acts of fatherhood. Navigating the intricate and dynamic bond between fathers and sons poses various formidable obstacles, which entail ambiguity and potency that might be highly challenging to manage. In particular, the given works are analysed in terms of how fathers might be abusive to wives and children in the name of assuming their authority legitimised by the grand narratives for a long time. It is also significant that those texts cover a long period in distinct settings wherein fathers' attitudes and perceptions of fatherhood witness a fundamental change. Yet, the clash between fathers and sons remains.

Accordingly, in the first chapter, John McGahern's *Amongst Women,* short-listed for the Men Bookers Prize in 1990, has been studied to scrutinise the ideology of fatherhood in the Irish patriarchal family structure during the post-independence era with a particular emphasis on the old-fashioned, authoritarian *paterfamilias*, Michael Moran. Once an admired IRA guerrilla, Moran fights for the independence of the Republic of Ireland; he then returns home, gets married, has five children, and runs his small farm to feed his large family. Dominant, abusive, and violent, Moran assumes his unquestionable authority in his family after losing his bounds with the army. For Moran, his family is

divine, a microcosm of traditional Irish society. The family must be kept together, yet he fails because of his never-ending, unresolved conflicts with his sons. This chapter, therefore, digs into the ideology of masculinism and fatherhood in Irish culture and their relevance in the post-independence era.

In the second chapter, fatherhood and the relationship between fathers and sons has been examined in a highly distinct context, as there are only absent-present biological fathers in Nick Hornby's million-copy best-seller, *About A Boy*. The novel mainly revolves around Marcus and Will Freeman, the former of whom is a twelve-year-old boy living with his depressive and suicidal mother after his parents' separation. At the same time, the latter is a thirty-six-year-old singleton who survives with his late father's legacy. After the breakup, Marcus and his mother moved from Cambridge to London, where several problems at his new school welcomed him. Desperately alienated, bullied, and neglected, Marcus meets Will Freeman and somehow replaces him with his biological father. Through their relationship, Will strives to reconcile with his toxic masculinity traits by establishing an intimate but very detachable bond with an outsider, Marcus. Throughout the chapter, the contemporary image of the 'new man', 'laddism', the question of absent fathers, and the ideology of 'new fatherhood' are investigated in the context of the neoliberal post-Thatcherite era.

Finally, through the third chapter of this dissertation, Maggie Gee's *The White Family* has been interrogated regarding the unresolved clash between Alfred White and his sons. Despite Alfred and May's efforts to keep the patrimonial family together, the Whites face an inevitable collapse. Rejecting Alfred's authority for years, Darren retreats to the United States and often voices his hatred against his father and the whole family. Dirk, the younger son, murders a young man of colour in Albion Park as a result of his hatred against the 'other', which is precisely obtained by the father. Soon after reporting his son to the police, Alfred dies, and Dirk is jailed. Focusing on the relationship between the tyrannic father, Alfred White, his family members, and his sons, the chapter foregrounds that the never-ending, unresolved clashes and crises among the family members denote specific issues regarding men and men as fathers at the intersection of gender relations in a particular sociopolitical and socioeconomic context. Throughout the chapter, it has been

argued that the conflicting relationship between Alfred and his sons reveals many white men's fear of displacement in postcolonial Britain. These men's 'fear' of losing their ongoing authority and power reverberates the so-called crisis of masculinity, which manifests the root causes of xenophobia, homophobia, racism, hatred, and violence against other men. Hence, the chapter has shed light upon the reconfiguration of toxic masculinity traits and their political associations by accentuating specific discourses disseminated by the New Right and the Conservatives.

CHAPTER I

"ONLY WOMEN COULD LIVE WITH DADDY": IRISH MASCULINITIES AND FATHERHOOD IN JOHN MCGAHERN'S *AMONGST WOMEN*

John McGahern's fiction often embrace issues concerning Irishness, Catholicism, rural life, and their close affinity to the construction of traditional Irish family. Author of six novels, several short story collections, a drama, and three screenplays, McGahern's focus on fundamental themes such as home, paternity, patriarchy, Irish identity, sexuality, masculinity, and fatherhood is assured. Among these frequent themes, the intricate relationship between fathers and sons is distinctive. In McGahern's fictive world, fathers are often strict, rigid, self-centred, narcissistic, abusive, and violent, yet rarely nervous, shy, or too timid to appear as 'father-in-control' figures. Meanwhile, sons are frequently rebellious yet seldom docile, obedient, and submissive. All in all, the portrayal of the unstable, obscure relationship between fathers and sons is strongly thematised in McGahern's fiction.

Several short stories by John McGahern pinpoint the enigmatic affinity between fathers and sons[21]. To name a few among many, the story titled "Wheels"[22] is a good illustration of a perplexing relationship between a rural father, Jimmy, and an unnamed, urbanised son, who fails in his attempt for reconciliation soon after his father's disillusionment. Another notable story, "Korea"[23], depicts the misery of a son named Luke, who wishes

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[21] Siobhan Holland's "Marvellous Fathers in the Fiction of John McGahern" (2005) and Michael L. Storey's "'Fellows like yourself': Fathers in John McGahern's Short Stories" (2009) are two influential essays that focus particularly on issues concerning fathers in McGahern's distinct short stories. In her essay, Holland pays attention to the vulnerability of the father figures in Post-Independent Ireland and the patriarchal social matrix wherein these fictive works were (re)shaped. She also analyses several short stories and particular novels by McGahern in this context. On the other hand, Storey investigates autobiographic elements in McGahern's short stories and highlights central analogies between the author's life story and fiction. He deconstructs McGahern's interviews and the autobiography titled *Memoir* (2005) and aims to discern particular similarities between father figures in his fiction and his biological father.

[22] By refusing Jimmy's wish to live together in Dublin, the son indeed breaks the renowned wheel of tradition: "Fathers become children to their sons who repay the care they got when they were young, and on the edge of dying the fathers become young again" ("Wheels" 19). Hence, "Wheel" ends without further hope to establish the supposed ground for affinity, as the son clearly notices such a bitter reality.

[23] However, Luke plans a patricide when he overhears Moran's intention to convince him to serve in the American army. It is then noted that Moran might be paid ten thousand dollars in insurance on condition that Luke is killed in the army. The story ends with the following lines wherein Moran becomes entrenched

to be closer to his father, Moran. Ultimately, it becomes apparent that Luke's survival hinges on a patricide, and the father could remain alive so long as his son vanishes.

Besides, McGahern's controversial novel[24], *The Dark* (1965), epitomises the tortuous and twisted relationship between a violent father and a submissive son. The novel delineates the story of an old, widowed father, who causes great fear and terror in his children, particularly in his only son, Mahoney. The father is in the habit of beating his son so severely that his abuse "was horrible and worse than death to think" (*The Dark* 2). Along with physical abuse, sexual harassment of the father is also quite explicit, and for young Mahoney, it "was better not to think or care" (*The Dark* 2). In the end, after several controversies between the father and the son, the young Mahoney somehow becomes inured to his torture and concludes that "[he] wouldn't have been brought up any other way or by any other father" (*The Dark* 120). Both declare how much they love each other "no matter what happens in the future" (*The Dark* 120). The son negotiates with the father and decides to take the road his father has already paved for him.

These examples reveal that John McGahern is keen on peculiar themes of perennial interest regarding men, men as fathers, and their perplexing relationship in the patriarchal Irish family structure. This chapter, then, focuses mainly on his novel *Amongst Women* (1990) in an attempt to deconstruct the eerie affinity between the tyrannic *paterfamilias*, Michael Moran, and his sons, Michael and Luke. Taking the father and his precarious fatherhood traits as focal points, this chapter aims to interpret destructive, long-lasting clashes among the Morans as a series of nervous tension prompted by particular masculinity traits, which are (re)structured and (re)constructed by gendered power relations over decades in post-independent Ireland. It is further argued that *Amongst*

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in his son's pretty vile and detestable spirit: "Each move [Moran] made [Luke] watched as closely as if [he] too prepare [himself] to murder" ("Korea" 80).

[24] Soon after the publication of *The Dark* in 1965, McGahern became the object of severe criticism owing to the insistence of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin because of the alleged obscenity of the book. The Irish Censorship Board banned the novel immediately, and the writer was sacked from the state school, where he had been a teacher for nearly eight years. McGahern moved to England silently to prevent public uproars and worked temporary jobs, including teaching and labouring, to earn his life. He also kept writing, yet he could only make a decent life for himself once he moved back to Ireland. Famous figures of the day, such as Samuel Beckett, asked whether he needed any support for public protests. Yet, he humbly rejected it by claiming that "[c]ensorship and the whole business was a joke [and he] didn't think it was worth protesting" (Murphy, "John McGahern 144).

Women encapsulates fundamental themes relating to Irishness, Catholicism, rural Ireland, men, masculinities, and fatherhood and thus epitomises the formulation of contemporary hegemonic masculinity traits that intersect with a web of political relations such as religion, militarism, nationalism, and neo-liberal economic means that commenced in anticipation of the Celtic Tiger period, highly prevalent in Ireland between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s. This chapter, therefore, seeks to explain how men and men as fathers strive to locate themselves in politically turbulent times when the long-situated Irish masculinities and relevance of patriarchy have been questioned.

Before examining the novel in detail, it is essential to invoke a few critical works pinpointing certain autobiographical elements in John McGahern's fiction in general and in *Amongst Women* in particular. To Patrick Crotty, for instance, "almost all of the extensions of McGahern's fictional world beyond the immediate domestic circumstances of the author's childhood are based on experiences in the earlier" (43). Using the character of Michael Moran, McGahern documents his problematic relationship with his abusive father, and such perplexing affinity between them lies at the heart of the novel. The severest memories of adverse repugnance for the father reverberate in *Amongst Women*, as Michael Moran embodies the peculiar qualities of Frank McGahern, with whom he had a disconsolate relationship. When he was asked about his father in one of his interviews, McGahern affirmed that "[they] had a distant relationship, always" (Murphy, "John McGahern" 141). It is also well-documented in his *Memoir* that McGahern was victimised by his father by all means of violence, including "threats, scolding, abuse, sarcasm" (*Memoir* 282), as well as physical and sexual violence for a very long time, as he often felt that "the part of the dream that did not include [his] father must have been his alone" (*Memoir* 83). In parallel, the repercussions of an abusive, violent, frightening father determine the tone of *Amongst Women*.

Accordingly, one prominent feature that makes this particular novel significant as a literary text, as Eamon Maher assumes, is the fact that it unfolds the hatred of McGahern towards his father since Michael Moran resembles him much, as both of them are "self-absorbed, dissatisfied, domineering, unpredictable, mean-spirited, delusional individuals" ("Holding a Mirror" 258). Furthermore, Liam Harte agrees that *Amongst*

Women overlaps with McGahern's own life story as "the biographical depiction of Frank McGahern in *Memoir* maps onto the fictional portrait of Michael Moran [...] with uncanny accuracy through a host of shared circumstantial details and psychological traits" (54). However, Harte further notifies critics not to "lap into reductive, overly biological readings of the fiction" (54). In a similar vein, McGahern does not favour the critical analyses of his fiction regarding ostensible autobiographical elements in them. On the one hand, he accepts the similarity of his own experiences to his fictive characters by claiming that "all true stories are essentially the same story in the same way as they are different: they reflect the laws of life in both its sameness and its endless variations" (*Memoir* 303). Yet, on the other hand, he denies the accuracy of the critical texts written as documentation of his biography and reiterates that "a richer kind of truth is revealed through the imaginative transformation and amplification of raw materials" (Harte 54). However, despite McGahern's vehement denial, considering these literary critics' remarks, suffice it to claim here that *Amongst Women* could be evaluated concerning fathers and sons in two ways. First of all, assessing *Amongst Women* as a product of the cultural and historical context abates the celebration of the family institution in the Big House novel[25] and lays bare how ostensible crises of Irish masculinities emerged in the face of father-son relationships to the verge of the Celtic Tiger period. Secondly, reading the novel through the autobiographical elements would enable the readers to notice that the writer, when he is ageing, strives to settle his disputes with his father, Frank McGahern. This particular text (and his many other fictive works that focus on fathers and sons as well) epitomises the crisis of the male author. This crisis emerges as an endless struggle with the father in a beseeching gesture of reconciliation.

Amongst Women is a novel without a notable plot. The story revolves around a widowed IRA veteran, Michael Moran, who settles down on Great Meadow, a remote farmhouse in rural Ireland, soon after the War of Independence. The novel opens with the very last days of Moran, and the sequence of some important events for the family is mentioned through retrospective narration. Fathering five children alone for a long time due to his

[25] In her renowned article titled "A Prayer For My Daughters: Patriarchy in Amongst Women", Antoinette Quinn remarks that McGahern's novel is a deliberate renunciation of the Big House novel that was noticeable in the earlier Irish fiction and thus *Amongst Women* "might be termed a small house novel" (79).

first wife's death, Moran decides to marry another woman, Rose, a compassionate step mother figure for the children. Nearly a year before meeting Rose, Moran confronts his elder son, Luke, who leaves home and never returns due to severe abuse of Moran. Apart from the appalling case of Luke, the dullness of the mundane is broken only when a few significant events occur. The novel, then, ends with the death of Moran and his funeral.

Although *Amongst Women* has a static, unmoving plot, constant references to rather monotonous domestic chores, a firm conviction of religious practices, and the portrait of the ageing father who could not fit in the novel masculinity norms illuminate the construction of Irish patriarchal family and its precarity along with the social context of then-contemporary Ireland, when, as in Antonio Gramsci's renowned assertion, "the old [was] dying and the new [could] not be born" (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 276). The conflict between the father and his sons embraces the clash between the old and the new, and thus between the previous and contemporary values attached to religion, professions, men, masculinities, and fatherhood on the verge of neo-liberal repercussions for the Irish patriarchal family.

Implicit in the title, religion, particularly Catholicism, assumes salience in *Amongst Women*[26] and primarily determines the masculine tone of the novel. Moran consolidates his patriarchal power and tyrannises over his family regarding basic Catholic teachings on the holiness of kinship and the superiority of the father in the hierarchical family structure. Rituals and religious practices in Great Meadow assist Moran in obtaining paternal supremacy over his family. For this reason, the prayers occupy highly symbolic importance and become a leitmotif throughout the novel, as Moran is assured and fully believes that "the family that prays together stays together […] even though they are scattered" (*AW* 137). However, the rosary, a Roman Catholic way of praying, is practised daily and properly not because Moran is a firm believer in the Catholic doctrine but because it is an instrument for discipline to be performed with pure attention. Through

[26] The title of the novel, *Amongst Women*, is derived from a Catholic rosary called *Ave Maria* or *Hail Mary*. The original prayer that includes the title is as follows: "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen." For further details, see: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/the-hail-mary.html

conducting the rosary together, Moran not only enjoys but also abuses the privilege of ruling as the father of his family. Even once, Moran "looked so strained and tired that [the children and Rose] offered to say the Rosary in his room, he brushed the offer aside. He knelt as erect as ever at the table" (*AW* 6). In all circumstances, the rosary must be said in complete discipline, and all family members must attend the daily Rosary responsibly.

Furthermore, Antoinette Quinn draws attention to the symbolism behind the insistence on regularly saying the rosary Hail Mary as prayers. To Quinn, "the internal structure of this prayer, the Creed with which it opens, the 'Our Father' and 'Glory be to God the Father' that encloses each decade, emphasise Divine fatherhood" (86). Quinn further argues that while the rosary, Hail Mary, blesses the Virgin Mary amongst all other women. As she is the mother of Jesus Christ, Moran strives to denote that he is the one who is blessed in this motherless family (Quinn 86). Therefore, Moran's insistence on this particular rosary lies at the heart of his self-fulfilment as a power-holder father figure. All family members accept the beads as a promise of their union, a collective experience that makes them acutely feel Moran's authority.

A subtle emphasis on rituals and religious practices in *Amongst Women* epitomises how the Catholic church would dominate the daily routines of the Irish and determine their gendered family relations in the Free Irish State. It is widely accepted that "the ethos given to [Irish] society was provided by Catholicism. Catholicism needed the state, and the state needed Catholicism" (Rafferty 261). The Free State's founding fathers recognised the importance of Catholicism in shaping the Irish national identity, given that Catholicism was the primary identification for Irish subjects. Hence, the Church remained one of the prevailing institutions with a profound impact on the Irish habitus, which encompasses the way in which Irish individuals perceived and comprehended themselves, along with their families, communities, and society as a whole.

Institutionalising the state with Catholic doctrines would have particular reverberations in gendered family relations considering the Church's and the State's historical interest in men and men as fathers. Kieran McKeown summarises the contextualisation of fatherhood by these two established power mechanisms as follows:

> One of the most influential images of fatherhood for many centuries has been the patriarch which literally means 'father and ruler'. In the hands of medieval Church and State, the image of the patriarch became the over-arching image of patriarchy in both heaven and earth, with one layer of fatherhood resting upon another. In this imagery, God is the father and the ruler of heaven and earth; the King is the father and ruler of his people; the priest is the father of his flock and the man is the father and head of his family. Throughout the generations, this imagery and, more particularly, the structures which support it, has conferred power and status on men, or at least on some men, in the public spheres of work, politics and religion ("Fathers" 14).

As McKeown suggests, Catholicism and its moral codes of hierarchical family structure have often been prevalent in Irish society, at the heart of which fatherhood is assured. Justifying their power by religious authority, men and men as fathers maintained their ostensible rights to rule over their families in the Catholic formation of the patrifocal family. However, particularly after independence, due to the abrupt centralisation of the new Irish State, novel perceptions of men and masculinities prevailed over former stereotypes. Thus, relationships among the Church, national identity, and the family developed into more complex relations at the intersection of gender and politics.

Through the new constitution of the Free Irish State established by Eamon de Valera in 1937, the Irish family gained a peculiar meaning, and the country experienced a deep-rooted conservatism. This substantial shift in the perception of the family in Irish society marks the marginalisation of women and the celebration of a precisely male-dominated society (Connell, "Masculinities in Global Perspectives" 308). The constitution posited women's place within the home, where they were celebrated as mothers with special duties, and men assumed instrumental tasks in the rejuvenation of the country. Thus, flourished in a masculine political culture, the Irish Free State diligently propagated Catholicism and its highly gendered relations through the medium of which then-contemporary hegemonic masculinity traits were moulded, reproduced, and practised.

In addition to the ambiguities and complexities of the newborn state, the trials and tribulations of the Second World War also triggered a major social transformation in Ireland. Along with many political disputes in the aftermath of the war, Ireland experienced a booming economy that has had widespread repercussions on social relations, living conditions and, therefore, on men, masculinities, and the patriarchal

family structure (Hearn et al., "Home and 'Work'" 127). The current social order attached new implications and interpretations to men and masculinities, thereby exerting most men in need of (re)constructing their 'true male identities' to adjust to the norms of profoundly new Irish society. Women began to gain more autonomy, integrated themselves into various occupations, and became more visible in the public sphere. Consequently, many men and men as fathers could not adjust themselves to regenerated gendered relations and suffered an alleged crisis, the crisis that obliged them to maintain their decaying power over their households.

It could thus be suggested that, in *Amongst Women,* McGahern's depiction of Michael Moran embodies such crises. He represents a hesitant father figure who fails to embark upon novel masculinity traits to recreate his authority over his family. In his old age, Moran struggles to keep his power as a traditional Catholic family patriarch, ending with frustration. He grows into an alienated patriarch who "mirrors symbolically the ambivalent position held in the national 'family'" (Patten 261). The ambivalence displayed by Moran is indicative of a critical evaluation of patriarchal nationalism and a thoughtful reflection on the diminishing presence of traditional Irish piety. This poignant account is further elevated by the support of a steadfast Catholic hierarchy. Moran's individual experience of forced retreat causes him to hold fundamental Catholic values frantically as a means of control through which he could grant his authority as the father of his household.

Struggling to base his masculine authority upon Catholic doctrines, Moran would place a slightly exaggerated emphasis on the alleged substance of prayers in his household. A rigid code of religious practices governs the whole family, and each family member knows that, in all circumstances, "to live the house before prayers were said would invite certain confrontation" (*AW* 109). Disobeying religious rituals made in the name of God and, therefore, in the Father's name would be a transgressive attitude. Moran's attention to prayers is significant and sinister. When Maggie brings her future husband Mark to Great Meadow, he is shocked by how Moran dictates the prayers, as "in their house prayers were never said aloud. Each child would say his private prayers until they were forgotten about in their growing up" (*AW* 136). Being able to say the rosary aloud would

make a crucial test for Mark's acceptance into Moran's family. Moran's magisterial emphasis on that night's prayers, which "never had rung out more domineeringly" (*AW* 136), might not be a coincidence. To some extent, he is determined to assert his divine authority as an eternal and imperishable example for his future son-in-law.

Hence, Great Meadow becomes a contested terrain where Mark's masculinity and his 'relevancy as a real man' amongst the Morans would be appraised. Although Mark has never been a firm believer, he does not resist but yields to Moran's prayer rules. What Moran seeks in his imaginary kingdom is nothing but resignation. When Mark and Maggie leave Great Meadow after their visit, Mark cannot help mentioning that "[he] needs a drink. [He] needs several drinks. [He] feels as if [he has] just gone out of the jail" (*AW* 141). After the night with Mark, when Rose asks Moran how he finds Mark, Moran's reply is assured: "If he suits [Maggie], he will suit me" (*AW* 139). Moran was sure Mark would surrender his authority, as he "saw him no threat and was unusually indulgent" (*AW* 139-40). Moran has already emasculated Mark through his desperate attendance in the family rosary. What matters to Moran is larger than Mark's true piety.

The prayers also allow Moran to place himself in the centre of attention in the family. Like a chief conducting an orchestra, Moran strenuously leads the Rosary. Defining himself as the "larger self of [his] family" (*AW* 12), he could never stand losing his leading position in it. When Moran diligently suffers from anxiety about losing attention, prayers play a crucial role. In one significant scene, Moran's fear of losing attention becomes visible. Maggie visits her family for the first time after moving to England. During her first visit, Maggie buys presents for each family member. Everybody is happy and bursts with joy. Rose and the children begin to enquire about Maggi's new life in London. Yet, it does not last, as Moran bothers them all despite Rose's extraordinary effort to keep their warm family union as follows:

> Such was the excitement and focus on Maggie that in spite of Rose's care to draw him into the conversation Moran began to feel out of it and grew bored. 'I think it's time to say the Rosary,' he said earlier than usual, taking out his beads. They put newspapers down and knelt. This night Moran enunciated each repetitious word with a slow clarity and force as if the very dwelling on suffering, death and human supplication would scatter all flimsy vanities of a greater world; and the muted

> responses giving back their acceptance of human servitude did not improve his humour (*AW* 79).

Although the rosary is a daily routine in Great Meadow and everybody is aware of the fact that it is performed in all circumstances, Moran's hurry to say the prayers at that particular moment signifies his apparent anxiety of "regain[ing] the limelight Maggie has appropriated" (Holland, "The Question" 179). The more Moran tries to concentrate on his practice, the worse and strange it becomes, as "the coughing, the rustling of the newspapers, the rasp of coat buttons on table or chair exasperated his brooding" (*AW* 79). It is one of the moments when Moran gradually begins to acknowledge that he is to be neglected as a patriarch.

In the religious context, Moran's self-fulfilment as a despotic father is not based solely on repetitive prayers. The novel also encompasses Biblical references regarding family and its patrifocal organisation. One evening, after they have dinner and practice the rosary together, "like a shoal of fish moving within a net, Rose and the girls started to clear the table" (*AW* 79). This scene is highly significant, Nicholas Collins discusses, because it "demonstrates the family's male-dominated organisation with its in-control patriarch, whilst the women are passively engaged their submission" (118). Nevertheless, apart from a simple, unexacting reading of this scene, Collins further indicates that immediate attention should be paid to the direct biblical reference for the fish, the net, and the Holy Trinity as follows:

> The reference to the net reminds us of a Biblical fishing analogy offered by Jesus: 'Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men'. The net in this instance represents a way of spreading the gospel and of internalizing in Christianity those currently outside it. The net is, therefore, an enclosing space, but one whose boundaries are semi-permeable: people must be able to come in and go out. The net and its boundaries must be holy: hole-y because of the net's openings; wholey, or else it does not enclose fully; and holy, because we're in the realm of the gospel and the Bible. It is these characteristics that render Moran's family not just an enclosed, endogenous space, but also a holy family, a shadowed version of the Holy Family of the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost and Mary, the virginal mother of the Son: a paradoxical figure. This wholeness and completion must also therefore be part of the holiness of the family (118-19).

In parallel with the Biblical analogy wherein Jesus advises his followers to bind a net to invite people to the realm of Christianity, Moran binds the net to keep his authority with

an endless struggle by positioning himself as God over his own family. Moran has bounded the 'net' for a long time. He is keen on determining every detail regarding his children's lives to keep them under his control. This theme recurs, for example, in discussions of Sheila's appointment for her future career. Then, Maggie moves to London to become a nurse, and Mona and Sheila devote themselves to their dreams of having distinguished occupations. They study hard for their exams to have professions, as they are sure that any career opportunity would enable them to eliminate the enforced net. When they take their exams, it appears that "both girls had done well but Sheila had done brilliantly" (*AW* 86). Rose and the girls are grateful until Moran disturbs their spirit again: "'We will have to consider everything' he says. 'What do you mean *consider*?' Sheila's voice quavers. 'We'll have to consider where it will all lead to,' he said" (*AW* 86). Sheila feels her father's ruthless pressure on her to choose a primary and safer path for her career.

It is argued that Moran feels threatened by Sheila's success, as it could potentially challenge his sense of superiority. His fear is revealed when Sheila wins a scholarship to study at university as a result of her brilliant scores. He flows into a furry, especially when he learns that Sheila managed to get a right to study medicine. Although he claims he will not interfere with her decision, he is inwardly furious. He pleads economic difficulties for his resentment, yet his rage is unrelated to financial matters. He is aware that Sheila's chance of being a medical doctor directly threatens his superiority since, with a university scholarship, "the whole world was wide open to her" (*AW* 87). Sheila may have found a way to evade Moran's attempts to control his family members. When Moran and Sheila are discussing the particular situation, he ceases Sheila's speech abruptly with a well-known biblical expression: "'Physician heal thyself,' he muttered in a half-over-heard aside and went out" (*AW* 88). Although it is 'over-heard,' his contemptuous remark is an aside denoting the then-contemporary precarious position of the Irish men, particularly of the IRA veterans. Following his aside, Moran's train of thought reveals his disappointment:

> Sheila could not have desired a worse profession. It was the priest and doctor and not the guerrilla fighters who had emerged as the bigwigs in the country Moran had fought for. For his own daughter to lay claim to such a position was an intolerable affront. At least the priest had to pay for his position with celibacy and prayer. The doctor took the full brunt of Moran's resentment (*AW* 88).

Moran's irritation with Sheila's wish to become a medical doctor reverberates the repercussions of two specific aspects of masculine anxiety in then-contemporary Ireland. First, Moran is aware that his economic power has consolidated his divine right. If Sheila would become a doctor, she might be able to end up an economically independent woman who would no longer need Moran in many respects. Besides, she might make a further example for other family members Moran controls through economic oppression. Maggie has already moved to London, Mona will possibly find a proper job in Dublin, and Sheila is to be away for several years, and she would hold a prestigious title. Moran is becoming increasingly anxious about Sheila's opportunity to become a medical doctor because he fears that his daughter will not only "represent the new upstart class he so resents but also outgrow him" (Paulick 9). Second, he is also anxious about Ireland, the country he fought for years. Claiming himself one of the founding fathers of Ireland, Moran acknowledges that the Free Irish State is becoming a foreign land for its founders. The upcoming generations are enthusiastic about leaving Ireland for better financial opportunities, which threatens the ongoing power of their fathers. Moran represents traditional values wherein the patriarchal family institution is vital. Leaving the country, the family, and thus, the realm of the patriarchal father castrates each institution and emasculates the whole patriarchal state organisation. The secularisation of the State would end up empowering women, thereby threatening men's domain of power.

Accordingly, as Moran weakened in time owing to his old age, he could no longer master 'the fish in his net'. Even women under his rule "were controlling together what they were mastered by" (*AW* 46). To some extent, women of the Great Meadow began to design and control the household. Sheila, too, is determined to avenge herself on her father, who once deterred her from making a respectable career in medicine. Like Mona, she works in civil service. After getting married, she has children, and she does not bring them to Great Meadow so often since "she did not want [their] confidence in the way she felt her own had been" (*AW* 170). Sheila is fully aware that "doors would be open to [her children] that had been locked to her, their lives would be different" (*AW* 170). However, their clash and struggle with the father have never been a battle of wills. It is not a matter of displaying power. Apart from Sheila's rare individual protests and resistance, the women of Great Meadow fully surrender their father and his domain of control in the long

run. To the sisters, "[b]eneath all differences was the belief that the whole house was essentially one. Together, they were one world and could take on the world. Deprived of this sense, they were nothing, scattered, individual things" (*AW* 145). Their surrender to Moran is a patriarchal bargain[27] made between the women of Great Meadow and Moran. Both parties manage to keep their mutual benefits without disturbing the established relations of the family hierarchy. Thus, in the time being, the women of Great Meadow become more and more dependent on their captivity, and finally, "they [were] prey to their own hauntings" (Harte 66). The girls' subjugation and submission to their father's realm enable Moran to reign without further compromise. The invisible bargain between them makes Moran's daughters feel secure and superior, not because they are more independent but because of Moran's achievement in intimidating them. Their ostensible superiority "was little acknowledged by the wide world in which they had to work and live. […] Within the house the outside world was shut out. There was only Moran, their beloved father; within his shadow and the walls of his house they felt that they would never die" (*AW* 93-94).

In terms of Moran's struggle for power in his family, this thesis suggests that his relationship with his sons, Michael and Luke, is more complicated. Despite his achievement in capturing women in his 'holy net,' Moran could never pass his masculine values defined by Catholic indoctrinations onto his sons. Neither of the sons ever shows sympathy for spirituality; instead, they are keen consumers of worldly pleasures, delineating their infringement of the fatherly laws. To some extent, the ongoing clash between Moran and his sons is stimulated since they manage to tear the 'holy net' off, which is set to keep them in the order of the 'holly father'. The sons' tendency to live more secular lives reveals their rejection of former religious norms, denunciation of their father's rule, and a significant threat against Moran's masculinity.

From the beginning until the end, the tension between Moran and his sons could be read as an outcome of both parties' masculine anxiety. Michael and Luke struggle to overcome

[27] In her renowned essay titled "Bargaining with Patriarchy," Deniz Kandiyoti suggests that women's gendered subjectivities are devised and regenerated by negotiations that are made between men and women, "[that] may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity. […] They also influence both potential and for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their resistance" (275).

their father's authority without further compromise. After several arguments and clashes among them, in the end, Michael negotiates, yet Luke negates the father's rule. Michael, the youngest of the siblings, lives in the fatherland far more than Luke. After Luke's and the daughters' desertion, Michael stays in Great Meadow. Although Michael does not project explicit opposition to his father's imposition of religious thought and the way of life it proposes, he is secretly keen on encountering worldly pleasures such as drinking and sexual intercourse that began to be prevalent among the youth in then-contemporary Ireland as a signifier of hypermasculinity traits. Once, his hunger for sexual intercourse is reported by Maggie: "'He doesn't seem to mind who he has as long as they have skirts'" (*AW* 132). Triggered by hyper-masculine tendencies, Michael's excessive wish for worldly pleasures could be regarded as an implicit struggle to prove his 'manliness' against his father's dominance.

Michael's struggle to validate his masculinity is revealed at a dance party when the daughters visit Great Meadow, and they all go out to a barn. Throughout the night, "[n]one of the Moran girls drank. They were as much shocked by the confidence with which Michael moved about among the men as by his actual drinking. Their little brother had grown up without their noticing" (*AW* 101). For Michael, outside Great Meadow, there is a whole world to be discovered, and he is ready to contest to make room for himself among other men. The barn is very crowded, and Michael is strutting with his drink in his hand, "while the men merely turned their backs on the show of boy's masculinity. Catching his sisters' stares of disapproval, he waved his glass to them across the floor and started to survey the women" (*AW* 101). Michael is ready to debunk his father's strict Catholic morals through his attempt to enact hypermasculinity. Leaving the hall with Nell Morahan, Michael is proud of his first step to 'manliness', after which "[his sisters] could not take him for a child anymore [as] he was fifteen years of age and commanded the world" (*AW* 103). That night, Michael experiences his very first sexual intercourse. While suffering from a genuine fear and terror of his father, Michael's fling with Nell Morahan is a pursuit of worldly pleasures as an emblem of proving his independence from Moran's holly net.

Apart from being on his mettle for proving masculine independence, Michael's intercourse with Nell epitomises the novel social conditions of contemporary Ireland as a result of "the political, economic, social, and sexual transformation of [the country] from the 1920s to the 1970s" (Wall 305). Unlike his father's, Michael's generation marks an epoch in the history of Ireland, when the Church and its strict restraints on people's sexualities are challenged. Michael and Nell deconstruct the Catholic values upon which Moran struggles to construct his masculine authority. During their daily trip to Strandhill, they make love again. The scene is portrayed vividly by the narrator as follows:

> In a hollow between high dunes they spread out raincoats on the sand and kicked away their shoes. She then, half-kneeling, pulled away her underthings and moved close to him for warmth. He pulled down his clothes over his thighs and entered her as she had shown him on their first night, very gently and a little timidly, in spite of the terrible urging of his need. […] When he entered her for the third time she was ready to search for her own pleasure and he was now able to wait. Such was her strength that he was frightened. She shouted, seized him roughly at the hips, and forced him to move; and when it was over she opened her eyes and with her hands held his face for a quick, grateful kiss he couldn't comprehend. The weak sun stood high above them. Feeling the damp cold, they dressed, shook the sand out of their shoes and raincoats and climbed back down to the shore. There was not even a dog chasing a stick along the whole empty strand, only several birds walking sedately along the tideline which had now come much further up on the beach. As if they had set out on a journey they felt morally bound to complete, they walked the whole way back past the cannon as far as the ruined church on the opposite point (*AW* 105).

One might argue that in the quotation above, the author's close affinity with sexuality and its pertinence with the Catholic Church is unfolded. Michael and Nell enjoy their lovemaking in front of the 'ruined church' to which McGahern might attach a particular meaning as a signifier of the decadence of Catholic limitations and impositions on nonmarital sex. For them, "the roofless church" (*AW* 106) has already faded into insignificance. To their further notice, between the rocks below the ruined church are "several clear pools, [yet] there was much minuscule life in the pools but no stranded fish" (*AW* 106). The moral codes dictated by Catholicism could no longer feed the lingering fish, namely the power of men in the holy net.

Besides, the unorthodox attitude towards sexuality is reflected by McGahern in that Nell directs and rules their intercourse. Michael is almost shocked when he feels controlled by Nell. She not only teaches how to enjoy sexual intercourse but also seeks her pleasure.

Nell's attitude toward sexuality is unconventional in that Irish women were often burdened with a desperate responsibility for embodying the purity of Catholic Ireland. Besides, it contradicts Irish men's ongoing hegemony, whereby men stipulate strength, autonomy, and power and women are expected to lack agency. The scene indicates the weakening of the men who used to be empowered by the Church while women simultaneously gained self-confidence regarding sexuality. However, Moran's generation is still eager to see the Church in power. When Moran takes Rose on a ride to the same place, they somehow refuse to confront its decadence as "[t]hey turned back before reaching the roofless church in the middle of the old graveyard out on the edge of land. 'The locals still bury there,' he told her" (*AW* 60). For Moran, the Church is still relevant in their lives.

Another biblical reference is manifested in Moran's eerie affinity with his elder son, Luke. As already mentioned, Luke leaves Great Meadow and emigrates to England. Moran desperately expects Luke to return home and accept the fatherly-law sooner or later. However, it is noted that Luke neither pays a visit to Great Meadow nor tends to show any sign of reconciliation with Moran. Brian Liddy correlates his disobedience and deliberate rejection of the father with an explicit biblical reference as follows:

> It is hard not to equate Luke's absence with the parable of the prodigal son; the destitute firstborn in a foreign land finally realizing that his father's 'servants have bread enough, while he, himself, 'may perish with hunger.' Moran, then, waits for Luke to come back proclaiming 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you' (Luke 15:17-18). But Luke Moran is more than the firstborn. Luke is the antithesis, in Moran's eyes, of everything that he has fought for, and yet Moran can never fully or essentially see him as Other. Not only does Luke's independent existence thwart Moran's sense of control over his own life, but it thwarts it as an absent, unreachable force that has removed itself to the very country that Moran had fought so passionately to extricate from his life ("State and The Church" 119).

As explained in the quotation, Luke's revolt against his father finds its true essence in becoming the antithesis of Moran, the epitome of the founding fathers of the Free Irish State. Moran fought to save Ireland from the English. However, Luke not only leaves the father but also leaves him for the sake of a life in England. Accordingly, one might suggest that the father's refusal signifies the rejection of the tradition and the cutting of bonds with the norms that the father puts, and thus the State. Luke's disobedience denotes the fact that the new generation of Irish men would no longer burden themselves with the

conservative and limiting environment of the country. Being loyal to the country, to the religion, to the family would no longer be counted by the sons of the founding fathers. Therefore, the greatest betrayal is Luke's emigration to England. Luke moves to England and persuades his siblings to work and live there for their betterment, as he "had tried to get Maggie to go to England to learn nursing against Moran's fierce opposition" (*AW* 49). Consequently, as a former IRA guerrilla leader, Moran realises the futility of his past struggle for an independent, Catholic Ireland. To Moran, Luke's separation from the family prompts rebellion and disloyalty to the values he has sacrificed for a long time. The painful truth that Moran faces is that "Luke was turning himself into a sort of Englishman" (*AW* 148). It is a shocking remark that slaps into Moran's face: "What did we get for it?" he asks gravely. "A country, if you'd believe them. Some of our own johnnies in the top jobs instead of a few Englishmen. More than half of my own family work in England. What was it all for? The whole thing was a cod" (*AW* 5). Moran longs for an independent Ireland wherein Catholicism and its religious values would be respected and celebrated. However, even his offspring would not respect these values. At Christmas, nobody could hear from Luke. The first Christmas dinner after Luke's desertion, Moran acutely feels his predicament and insult:

> 'You'd think he'd come for the Christmas or even write but never a word, no thought for anybody except for himself,' and it cast a deep shadow when they tried to imagine what kind of space enclosed Luke in England during the same hour, but they weren't able to imagine it. It was much too like facing darkness (*AW* 35).

By leaving his father's reign and emigrating to England, Luke invokes the darkness of great fear and hatred of the Irish fighters against many men's emigration to England during and soon after the War of Independence, which denotes gendered implications for men and men as fathers. Emigration to England, which had long colonised Ireland, epitomises a direct threat to Irish men's masculinity according to the "political rhetoric in the revolutionary and post-independence era about emigrants that claimed they were traitorous, greedy or unpatriotic was pervasive" (Redmond, "Brave Enough" 205). The then-contemporary political rhetoric foregrounds that the men who emigrated to England would emasculate themselves and their forefathers. The prevailing discourse in nationalist Ireland reinforces the idea that those who migrate to England would be emasculated by adopting English traits that are constructed through secular means in the

neoliberal order. It also suggests that leaving Ireland for England would render their fathers' historical struggles against the English futile, implying that the decision to emigrate is a failure on the part of the fathers. In this sense, the younger generation's emigration implies that their fathers' efforts were in vain and caused them great humiliation.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *Amongst Women* could also be read as John McGahern's individual strive to bring reconciliation between his realm and then-contemporary norms, between his worldview and Catholic Ireland, and between himself and his father, Frank McGahern. Religion, particularly Catholicism, is of particular importance in these disputes. John McGahern wrote this novel when he left great turmoil of controversy behind him. Soon after the publication of his second novel, *The Dark*, he was declared a religious dissent by the Irish Catholic Church, fired from his job as a teacher in a state school, and forced to leave his own country. However, in the later period of his life, McGahern somehow sought reconciliation with all these issues. Fictive writing allowed a refugee to find his voice in an atmosphere wherein he strived to "survive parental disillusionment with the realities of Irish independence and the authoritarian oppressiveness of family and society" (Sloan 219). Resolving his dire predicaments with the father and with the former values attached to Irish identity would grant further hope and peace in secularised contemporary Ireland.

The publication of *Amongst Women* was long after Frank McGahern's death, yet the father figure in this novel has a peculiar presence and influence. McGahern's father becomes a haunting ghost, "which is powerfully suggestive of the complexity of [their] relationship and of the act of articulating [him]" (Sloan 220). In his *Memoir*, McGahern lays bare how complicated their relationship with his father was and admits that he could never fully understand him, as "so changeable was he, so violent, so self-absorbed, so many-faced" (226). One might seek parallels between John McGahern's close yet ambiguous affinity for religious law and fatherly law. "Despite his religious unbelief and his antipathy toward what he saw as the hollow devotionalism of Irish Catholic practice", Liam Harte suggests, Moran "could never disavow the spiritual and aesthetic importance of his early religious induction" (56-57). After all those controversies, McGahern still

mentions the Catholic Church as "[his] first book [through which he] was introduced to all [he has] come to know of prayer and sacrament, ceremony and mystery, grace and ornament and the equality of all women and men underneath the sun of heaven" (*Memoir* 203). His emphasis on the 'equality' of men and women in the Biblical depiction of heaven is reminiscent of his childhood dreams to which he struggled to attach himself in the absence of the necessary connection with the father.

It is well-documented that McGahern's father was often aggressive, violent, and dominant in their home. After losing their mother at an early age, McGahern and his siblings had to live with their father for a long time. The house where they lived together was harshly ruled by the father and his strict religious impositions. As he confessed in an interview, those were the days when "Catholicism dominated everything. […] The authority was paternalistic. God the Father in Heaven, the Pope in Rome, the father who said the Rosary each night in the house" (Collinge and Vernadakis 7-8). In his accounts, one might notice the abundance of fathers and distinct fatherhoods, neither of which implies genuine affection and sympathy.

It could thus explain the reason why patriarchy and fatherhood grow into a perennial interest in McGahern's fiction. In his writings, particularly *Amongst Women*, McGahern deconstructs the quintessential power of patriarchy and lays bare how precarious Catholic representation of historical masculinity and fatherhood in the contemporary world can be. Between these two significant power centres, namely Catholicism and his violent father, who assumed power regarding religious indoctrinations, McGahern seeks an alternative realm wherein power relations might be altered in favour of women. In his interview with Rosa Gonzales, he clarified the issue in detail:

> *Amongst Women* is also a novel about power. You know, people like myself in Dublin, that belonged to a tight intellectual society that didn't care much about Church or State we were all right, but I think it was very difficult for a woman to be in that society then, and I think women were very badly off in that society. And *Amongst Women* is also about how women in a paternalistic society create room and power for themselves, and in a way they take over the world of Moran, it's the women rather than the men, what they'll do with it we don't know, but they have the power now (43).

John McGahern, as a male author, explores the possibility of repositioning himself in contemporary Ireland and enquires about the potential for women to gain equal rights in society through fiction writing. In the fictional world of *Amongst Women*, he strives to challenge men's dominance and present a weakened Moran, possibly as a symbolic means to seek revenge for his own abusive father. *Amongst Women* ends where it begins, as both ends pinpoint Moran's decadence while women are ready to take power. It opens with a caustic remark denoting the current misery of the ageing *paterfamilias*: "As he weakened, Moran became afraid of his daughters" (*AW* 1). Moran, who tyrannised all his family for a long time, particularly the women, becomes wretched and intimidated. Nevertheless, through the end of the novel, one might witness Moran's self-reckoning. In his last days, Moran begins to escape his sickbed and ramble through the meadow: "Now he wanted to escape, to escape the house, the room, their insistence that he gets better, his illness" (*AW* 178). The more Moran ages, the more he seems to have lost his reason. His masculine power decays day by day. The fear and loathing he spread yields to disillusionment. On the one hand, he yearns for his past 'glories' as an influential patriarch. Yet, on the other hand, he recognises the fact that "[h]e had never realized when he was in the midst of confident life what an amazing glory he was part of" (*AW* 179). Gradually, Moran reveals his ambiguous position between faith and doubt. As previously mentioned, his insistence on praying has never been an authentic deed. It was somewhat motivated by his will to power and dominate. The closer he feels death, the more frankly he talks to Rose about the relevance of confession as a reminiscent of his doubt:

> 'I never met a priest yet who wasn't afraid of death. What do you think that means?' he said to Rose. 'Maybe that's why they become priests.' 'What good does that do them?' 'They make sure of their own place in heaven that way.' 'Then they shouldn't be afraid to die.' 'I suppose everybody is afraid.' 'If they believed what they preach they shouldn't be afraid. Who knows anyhow? Who cares?' (*AW* 179).

Moran's apparent frustration and disappointment in terms of losing his power is revealed on his deathbed: "'Why aren't you praying' he demanded as if he knew he was slipping away" (*AW* 180). Rose and the daughters begin to say the Rosary. When it is Maggie's turn, Moran gives his last breath. The very last word heard from Moran is a suggestive remark: "Shut up!" (*AW* 180). Then, he is gone. This significant scene, to Liam Harte, stands for a Kurtz-like epiphany. In his final breath, Moran cannot bear that "the women's

assumption of authority is symbolized by their taking control of the rosary, Moran's chief rhetorical weapon for so long" (63). After Moran's burial, Rose and the daughters "slowly left the graveyard they seemed with every step to be gaining in strength" (*AW* 183). In the face of Moran's death, McGahern might argue that those with power will be women: "[A]nd now, as they left [Moran] under the yew, it was as if each of them in their different ways has become Daddy" (*AW* 183). Moran, the ruthless patriarch, is to be replaced by women.

In the political context, the death of Moran signifies the end of an era. Since *Amongst Women* begins with the very last days of Moran and ends soon after his death, the novel, Eamonn Hughes claims, is also about "the death of a political generation in Ireland" (151). Hughes further argues that Great Meadow, where Moran used to have a ruthless rule, is "a metonym for Ireland: the displacement of Moran by his daughters and the complex gender play of the novel from its title to its final words is almost a fictional preparation for the 1990s Ireland of Mary Robinson's Presidency" (151). Moran embodies the former patriarchal and masculine politics of de Valera. After his death, women are ready to hold power, which connotes the very first presidency of Robinson. Changing the centre of power in government might trigger a change in family configuration, leading several women to assume traditional roles that have long been attributed to men. Similarly, in the last lines of the novel, Sheila makes a final remark on men in their family: "'Will you look at the men. They're more like a crowd of women,' […] 'The way Michael, the skit, is getting Sean and Mark to laugh you'd think they were coming from a dance'" (*AW* 186). Sheila's final comment reverberates somewhat improved conditions of social structure concerning gender relations in contemporary Ireland.

Moran's funeral anticipates a different future for the country through particular symbols. At his funeral, only two local politicians appear "in undisguised contempt" (*AW* 183), and his coffin is covered by "a faded tricolour" (*AW* 183). His burial marks the conclusion of outdated and idiosyncratic customs, faith, government, and finances. The new formation of Irish society during the Celtic Tiger, when "Ireland reinvented itself" (Kirby et al. 1), is foreshadowed. Before transforming its economic means, Ireland was essentially an

agricultural country and the Irish devoted particular attention to rural family life for some precise purposes.

First and foremost, in their national memory, there was great fear of poverty as the Irish suffered from the consequences of the Great Famine. The catastrophe of the famine, as McCullagh documents, had significant repercussions for the new configuration of the Irish family in the Free Irish State and reverberated with "the syndrome of values called 'rural fundamentalism' ("A Tie that Blinds" 205). Engaging in cultivation, production, sustainability, and the land had been vital for most Irish families soon after the Independence. In the novel social context of rural Ireland, men and men as fathers must be strong agrarians and good providers to earn their bread from their land (Hearn and Pringle et al., "Academic Research" 38). Accordingly, physicality and physical labour were among the salient features of idealised manhood, namely the cult of the hardman.

Secondly, the Church's simultaneous efforts to inculcate the importance of individual effort and strength and the significance of the Catholic family life merged with the celebration of the strong men and men as fathers in rural Ireland (Cusack 230). Along with the prompted fear of starvation, religious codes encouraged most rural men and men as fathers to engage in farming with their family members. Composed chiefly of small landowners, the rural Irish families had to run their farms with the help of their sons since "the sub-division of land and the pattern of family life it supported was no longer an economic option [and therefore] replaced by an inheritance system organised around the stem family" (McCullagh 205). Hence, triggered by economic and religious motivations, the Irish ended up with a reconfiguration of the family system. From then on, families in rural Ireland needed to trust in their sons to keep their land cultivated for their future prosperity. Leaving the land to a particular son was undertaken by the father, which attributed another form of power to men as fathers among families (Ni Leime et al. 2). Most men were to bring their children, peculiarly their sons, to support their families by keeping the father's land through generations.

Shaped by the cult of hardman, Irish hegemonic masculinity traits are salient in *Amongst Women*, too. After the Independence, as he retreats to Great Meadow, Moran shapes his

land, as the economic well-being of the colonised Ireland has long relied on the soil. In return, he is metaphorically shaped by his land. By accommodating a shift in his masculine retribution, Moran embodies the cult of hardman and becomes proud of his fatherhood due to his ability to feed the family. Since the cult of hardman denotes a self-made man in his land, Moran would "be his own man here, he had thought, and for the first time in his life he'd be away from people" (*AW* 130). Secluded from the rest of the outer world, Moran's primary ambition is to encourage his sons to keep his order in cultivating the land so that they would be self-sufficient men. In one of their arguments, he yells at Michael about what he achieved as 'a real man' as follows: "The family was brought up here. I suppose everything wasn't done completely right but we did all we could according to our lights. Nobody starved. We asked nobody for anything" (*AW* 136). Moran is sure that a 'real Irish man' must acquire strength and will to feed his family. Because "his racial fear of the poorhouse or famine was deep" (*AW* 68), Moran is the one who assumes his role as the head of Great Meadow and desires to be a role model for Michael. However, Michael is reluctant: "Though tall and strong for his age [Michael] had no liking for hard physical work and he was slow to give Moran any help on the land" (*AW* 64). Confident of his manly superiority, Moran emasculates Michael, whom he does not find manly enough. Michael's rejection of hard work in their rural life is one of his most significant challenges. Once, Moran triggers a quarrel that Michael is not interested in farming. Instead, he prefers to feed several pets and flowers:

> This both irritated and amused Moran. "Suppose one of these days you'll be getting yourself a skirt.' 'Trousers are far handier,' he was able to smile it aside. 'If you grew something like carrots it'd make some sense. It'll be a long time before you'd eat any of those flowers.' 'They're fun to look at.' 'Looking won't get you far in this world,' Moran said. But hidden in the boy's answering nod was an equal contempt for Moran's work, which he regarded as nothing short of voluntary slavery (*AW* 65).

Moran's violent attitude towards Michael's interest in beauty rather than strength is a thinly veiled threat towards Moran's masculinity and his ambition to form a stem family. To Moran, men should preoccupy themselves with necessary products for their family's economic means as an emblem of their imposed masculine roles. Moran's patriarchal world, which is strictly constructed through masculine codes, dealing with aesthetics and beauty could relate to either femininity or hypo-masculinity. It is argued that Moran's repulsive and loathsome reaction towards Michael's interests bears contemporary

political implications. Although strict enforcement of masculine and feminine tasks upon individuals has a more extended history, particular economic relations in terms of gendered roles were politically imposed during the foundation of the Free Irish State by Fianna Fail under the rule of Eamon de Valera. Soon after Ireland's independence, Fianna Fail rested their election campaign mainly on the (re)construction of the cult of hardman to consolidate power. To their effective campaign, men needed to be proper breadwinners to free themselves from England's lingering economic impositions. At times, when Ireland was in a great struggle for financial independence, "Eamon de Valera criticised Irish workers being merely wage slaves and dependent on others for their living. The suggestion that Irish workingmen could work for themselves in rural Ireland proved popular, and the sturdy self-sufficient farmer was held up as the Irish masculine ideal" (Barr et al. 11). It was suggested that the primary source for their economic independence was their land and "thus, it was only by securing their access to the land that Irish men could undo their national humiliation" (Beatty, "Fianna Fail's Agrarian Man" 157). This novel form of identity construction, namely propagating agrarian masculinity, had been highly relevant for the Irish to (re)build their national identity.

In a similar vein, Moran is keen on adapting not only himself but also his sons to the image of a self-sufficient man through their land, as "they could run this place like clockwork. They could in time even take over other farms, a dream he had once had about his eldest son: together they could take over everything" (*AW* 108). However, his dreams would not come true. Luke has already emigrated, and Michael is often reluctant to keep his father's promise. His children are prone to adjust themselves to conform to the benefits of novel opportunities brought by the market economy. Shaped by capitalist means, the market economy would demand different traits and qualifications from men and men as fathers. In contrast, Moran is eager to conserve traditions that fortify rural masculinity norms and "resented any dredging up of the past. He demanded that the continuing present he felt his life to be should not be shadowed or challenged" (*AW* 6). For Moran, preserving the old might be the only way to keep his masculine authority over the family, yet his power is declining considerably. Hence, Moran suffers from a sense of alienation in his realm. The passing of time takes away from his victorious past. His disappointment remains apparent in his state of mind as follows:

> It was like grasping water to think how quickly the years had passed here. They were nearly gone. It was in the nature of things and yet it brought a sense of betrayal and anger, of never having understood anything much. Instead of using the fields, he sometimes felt as if the fields had used him. Soon they would be using someone else in his place. It was unlikely to be either of his sons (*AW* 130).

After the war, Moran retreats to Great Meadow to 'earn his bread' out of the land and to become the ruler of his reign, which his sons would take over. He firmly believes that "[a]lone [they] might be nothing. Together [they] can do everything" (*AW* 84). However, Moran recognises the bitter reality soon after his sons' desertion and loses hope of keeping his reign by leaving the legacy of the land to his sons. He suffers severely from their abandonment since it is "a breach of *geasa*, an abandonment of the household gods, a denial of their own father's right to the immortality that permits a man to live all over again in his sons" (Kiberd 345). The sons would keep living in another realm to fulfil their dreams.

It is argued that their denial of the father's right results from a masculine contest over which men struggle to obtain power. Rather than fighting to conquer the father's terrain, Moran's sons prefer to leave the order of their father so that they can build their own space for power in another symbolic order. By escaping the father, Moran's sons construct new masculine identities through the reconfigured traits of masculinity. Moran, then, acknowledges the fact that the cult of the hardman is to be replaced by alternative masculine ideals due to a gradual change observed in labour market structures. However, Moran is "emotionally frozen in time and unable to adapt with any grace to the changes that threaten his vulnerable and authoritarian position" (Sampson 217-18). Likewise, many Irish men resist change in gender relations and conform to restrictive beliefs and expectations about what it means to be masculine, as it leads to uncertainty about their gender identity. This resistance to change is a reflection of the larger societal norms and values that shape gender roles and expectations in Irish culture.

Although cultural history sufficiently contradicts a singular definition of men and masculinity, men are often eager to place themselves into narrow definitions and stereotypical gendered qualities. "When men are conscious of their gender", Peter Middleton asserts, "they talk of heroic masculinity, of manhood, and its vicissitudes" (2).

The invention of such masculine codes regarding power, strength, heroism, and violence is not new. Instead, it tends to show a direct link to the historical context of any society. In post-independent Ireland, hegemonic masculinity was being (re)shaped to which Moran could no longer adjust himself. In particular settings, Moran's anxiety of being powerless manifests his precarious masculinity, ending with ostensible crises. One significant event took place in Moran's home when Moran's former comrade James McQuaid paid one of his regular visits. These two veterans used to meet in Great Meadow on Monaghan Day, "the end-of-February fair in Mohill" (*AW* 1). They would revive their old memories in a manner of epic boasting and spend the whole night together. Unexpectedly, the last time McQuaid visits Great Meadow turns out to be a masculine wrangling at the end, of which McQuaid deserts him. His "growing irritation at Moran's compulsion to dominate, to have everything on his own terms or not at all, had hardened into a sudden decision to overturn the years and quit the house at once" (*AW* 21). McQuaid's instant renunciation of their companionship perpetuates the loosening bonds between men as an outcome of Moran's inability to reconfigure himself for the new formation of the society wherein former qualities of masculinity are no longer valid. McQuaid thinks that "Moran's fear of vulnerability is at the root of his stubborn need for victory" (Sampson 226). He also notices that the struggle for power among men has been significantly altered in post-war Ireland, wherein Moran could no longer take the lead and, therefore, could not build meaningful relationships with other men.

It is indicated that Moran and McQuaid have been close friends since the War of Independence. During the war, Moran was the commander, and McQuaid was a lieutenant in his column. Fighting together for freedom, these men improved a strong male bond. For these men, "the war was the best part of [their] lives. Things were never so simple and clear again" (*AW* 6). After the war, Moran retreats to his home, yet McQuaid takes up business as a cattle dealer and "they came together once a year to slip back into what McQuaid said were the days of their glory" (*AW* 14). These war veterans revive their past glories and are proud of their heroic deeds as the rudiments of their 'brotherhood'. One might suggest that Moran and McQuaid often felt secure during the war due to their stable positions in the hierarchical structure of the military organisation.

Their positions' simplicity and plainness make these men know their place, wherein articulating masculine identities would be straightforward.

It is often argued that either armies or paramilitary organisations have been proper homosocial settings for men to improve their bond. Most men acquire and enact masculinities in hierarchical military organisations where they learn to dominate, obey, fight, survive, and negotiate. These well-disciplined and strictly ruled organisations teach men to hide their emotional sensitivity and vulnerability. Toughness and strength are rewarded, whereas weakness and compassion are punished or insulted. Military prowess, therefore, denotes hegemonic masculinity, which is prevalent in militarism and war. In other words, "masculinity shapes war, and war shapes masculinity" (Cockburn 249). In the process of instructing men on what it means to be an 'ideal man' and what masculinity entails, combatant or military masculinities aim to reproduce and perpetuate certain 'manly values'. These values are often (re)defined and (re)generated in homosocial settings, such as army and paramilitary structures. In particular, combatant or military masculinities tend to emphasise traits such as physical strength, bravery, and aggression while subverting or even denouncing qualities that are traditionally associated with femininity, such as empathy or sensitivity.

This process of socialisation can have significant implications for both individual men as fighters/soldiers and society as a whole. On the one hand, it can create a sense of camaraderie and group identity among fighters/soldiers, which can be crucial for their mental and emotional well-being. On the other hand, it can also lead to the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes and the perpetuation of toxic masculinity, which can have negative consequences for both men and women in a given society. Similarly, in revolutionary Ireland, a subtle emphasis was given to the militarised masculinities enacted by men in a strict hierarchy, as the nationalist politics were designed according to masculine ideals (Beatty, "Masculinity and Nationhood" 163). At the time, masculinism as an ideology remained a crucial part of the dominant political discourse wherein women could no longer make room for themselves. The Irish women who used to take more responsibility at the beginning of the struggle for independence were marginalised. They were forced

to retreat to their homes or given seemingly lighter tasks such as office work or rear service areas.

In the ideological constitution of the Irish Republican Army, peculiar codes of hyper-masculinity such as physical prowess, mental strength, wish for self-sacrifice, and heroism became paramount (Redmond, "Masculinities" 135). Fighting against the coloniser is reflected as a 'male duty'. Men had to bear hyper-masculine traits to save their country from the 'rapist colonisers' since the subjugation of Ireland by the coloniser England was performed in the name of feminising the Irish men (Beatty, "Masculinity and Nationhood" 164). The 'manliness' of the coloniser could only be defeated by being more masculine and violent. The war between the coloniser England and the colonised Ireland was, therefore, a contested terrain wherein men had to fight to save their masculinity since "the nation which regards bloodshed as a final horror [would lose] its manhood" (Goldstein 275). Signifying bravery, aggression, violence, toughness, endurance, self-reliance, and self-consciousness, an Irish fighter should definitely be a 'real' man to defeat the enemy[28].

Similarly, one might easily observe the reaffirmation of combatant masculinity traits and epic boasting manifested in Moran's and McQuaid's gathering on Monaghan Day in *Amongst Women*: "From year to year [Moran and McQuaid] used the same handrails to go down into the past […] the drilling sessions by the river […] the first ambush […] marching at night between the safe houses […] executions […] the death of friends […] the rain, the wet, the damp [and] the terrible hard labour it was for some men to die" (*AW* 14 - 16). They commemorate how courageous they were and how epic was their struggle against the enemy. For them, "with distance it had become large, heroic, blood mystical, something from which the impossible could be snatched" (*AW* 2). It is only part of a

[28] The Green Book, the IRA Volunteers Handbook, manifests the ideal character traits of the guerrilla fighters. The expected qualities of a guerilla reinforce hegemonic masculinity norms of then-contemporary Ireland, as "he must act alone and fight alone with the weapons at his disposal […] His endurance has to be great: and for this he needs a fit body and an alert mind" (8). Besides, the heavy emphasis on the pronoun 'he' manifests how men became dominant in IRA and women were marginalised and regarded inferior to men. For further details, see *The Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army: Notes on Guerilla Warfare online*: https://ia601300.us.archive.org/30/items/IRAHandbook1956/IRA-Handbook_1956.pdf

tremendous manly struggle, an encounter through which Irish men could save their country, ideals, freedom, women and children.

In McQuaid's and Moran's masculine world, there is no room for independent women who could take leading roles in their families. Both men are in an endless effort to prove their masculine power over women in domestic spheres. One might suggest that these men's mutual struggle to prove their masculinity over women might be reminiscent of the prevalent fear of emasculation that is perpetuated by the English colonial discourse. Irish war veterans, as Andersen and Wendt argue, "adopt[ed] dominant colonial models of masculinity to reject the conquerors' efforts to mock and question their ability to be 'real' men" (8). Due to the inheritance of colonialism as a ruthlessly patriarchal system, many Irish men and men as fathers felt 'useless' in their domesticity and intended to be despotic rulers in their households as realistic replicas of their English colonisers. Left devoid of economic, political and social power, the Irish men and men as fathers directed their will to control their families.

By the same token, Moran and McQuaid grow into tyrant patriarchs in their homes and used to "treat women with contempt and deny them personal independence" (Sampson 220). Seldom being home, McQuaid "except to eat or sleep, […] all he ever did was yell, 'Get the tea. Polish the boots […] Where's the fucking collar? […] Then he would be gone for days […] After days of peace the door would crash open: 'There's six men here with lorries […] Set the table […] We're fucking starving!' There was never a hint of blow" (*AW* 13). Moran's and McQuaid's women-hating attitudes are revealed during their gathering. During the day, the daughters only serve these men, cooking special dishes and filling their empty glasses. The day is often remembered as full of tension and hurry as follows:

> The girls had the freshly cut bread, butter and milk on the table. The lamb chops sizzled as they were dropped into the big pan. The sausages, black pudding, bacon, halves of tomatoes were added soon after to the sides of the pan. The eggs were fried in a smaller pan. Mona scalded the large teapot and set it to brew. The two girls were silent as they cooked and when they had to speak to one another spoke in quick, urgent whispers (*AW* 12).

The revival of Monaghan Day grows into a sort of male setting where these two men perform and regenerate their heroic masculine traits. It is a homo-social setting, and only men are allowed to enjoy it. The girls appear as mere servants and are subjected to verbal violence and insults during the day. Their sexual destiny is debated as though they were mere objects to be exchanged: “These girls are blooming. You better have your orchards well fenced or you’ll be out of apples by October” (*AW* 11). McQuaid’s verbal insult does not meet any confrontation. To Moran, “[t]he words were said with such good humour and aggressive sureness that it would have been impossible to take offence” (*AW* 11).

Apart from their mutual tyranny against women, it becomes apparent that these men also fashion themselves in distinct masculinity traits. Through their last gathering for Monaghan Day, the power relations between men and women and between different men are successfully accommodated. Once in sheer ecstasy over the possibility of revolution, Moran faces precise frustration with Ireland’s then-contemporary social, political, and economic milieu. He feels a wry grimace of disappointment when he recalls the glamour of his struggle. Moran was the eminent leader of guerrilla fighters who had already lost their former prestige. Most fighters in his column had died, and few survivors “were in most ways the unlucky ones, doomed to live like aliens in the new land that they had brought into being” (Kiberd 332). However, McQuaid manages to make proper room for himself in the new formation of the Free State, yet Moran remains disappointed and trapped in his previous position.

Moran envisages his superiority and hegemony over McQuaid might not last forever. In a similar vein, Fidelma Ashe reminds us that “combatant masculinities despite their association with power and control may not be hegemonic within the broader society [since] hegemonic status is not automatically conferred on those men who engage in militarism or political violence” (*Gender, Nationalism and Conflict* 97). Ashe’s affirmation epitomises Moran’s masculinity crises at its best since there is no proper place to rule except for Great Meadow when the war is over. Moran’s civilian life obscures his former hegemony and power, and he is under a significant threat of an eerie emasculation. Besides republican enthusiasm, the war *per se* used to keep him alive. The end of the war means a symbolic castration for Moran, and the rest is a bitter disappointment.

After the war, as a disfranchised veteran, Moran rejects the pension paid for the former IRA guerrillas and retreats to Great Meadow for farming due to his apparent disillusionment. For Moran, "[m]any who had pensions and medals and jobs later couldn't tell one end of a gun from the other. Many of the men who actually fought got nothing. An early grave or an emigrant ship. Sometimes I get sick when I see what I fought for" (*AW* 15). Yet McQuaid argues that Moran should take the pension: "Take what they'll give you. Never question the colour of money" (*AW* 20). Moran notices that McQuaid is gradually losing the ideals that they both defended. He turns into an irresponsible capitalist and loses his religious belief. For McQuaid, "[i]n this world you don't exist without money. And there might never be another world" (*AW* 20). Clinging to Irish combatant masculinity traits that refer to heroism, devotion to Catholicism and nationalism, Moran still yearns for former principles they once fought for: "Look at the country now […] Run a crowd of small-minded gangsters out for their own good. It was better if it never had happened" (*AW* 18). When McQuaid argues that "the country is [theirs] anyhow [and] maybe the next crowd will be better than the mixture of druids and crooks that [they]'re stuck with" (*AW* 18), Moran protests in furry and replies sharply: "Leave the priests out of it" (*AW* 18). Through these two veterans' conversation, one might recognise that fundamental principles of combatant masculinity such as honour and faith are replaced by financial power. It is Moran who "loaned McQuaid money when he had started in the cattle business but now McQuaid was the richer and more powerful man" (*AW* 18). Because McQuaid makes a great success in trade, he begins to feel "the authority he had slowly made his own over the years, an authority that had outgrown on Moran's" (*AW* 18). For Moran, McQuaid miraculously transforms into a liberal Irish man who is successful in business, and he also grows into an apolitical puppet who is ready to forget about his passionate fight for independence and, therefore, loses his religious beliefs and values.

As it is mentioned above, the novel Irish hegemonic masculinity signifies liberal traits to which Moran could conform, and he begins to feel "like an animal in unknown territory" (*AW* 61). On the contrary, McQuaid manages to adopt. Accordingly, their confrontation is significant in that it unveils how then-contemporary Irish hegemonic masculinity traits are constructed and shifted in historical context. When Moran and McQuaid were armed,

their alliance was stable and definite in the hierarchical structure of the military organisation. Moran was simply superior to McQuaid. However, in their civilian lives, their relationship gets complicated, and Moran feels infantilised by McQuaid, as "[h]is fascination with McQuaid's mastery of his own world was boyish" (*AW* 12). Moran notices that "he had never been able to deal with the outside" […] and "go out from his shell of self" (*AW* 12). When McQuaid's condescending attitudes dissolve his supremacy, Moran does not hesitate to end their bond with an acrimonious separation.

Though Moran has already noticed they are widely dispersed in time, McQuaid's final remarks on Luke are the last straw. When he learns that Luke deserted the family, McQuaid pays tribute to him: "The young will have their way, Michael. Anyhow, I always liked Luke. He is very straight and manly" (*AW* 13). As already mentioned, Luke's desertion is a profound sorrow for Moran and "runs like an open wound" (Cronin 171). Immediately after McQuaid scratched that 'open wound,' Moran feels threatened, irritated, and afraid of emasculation again. From then on, "he would neither plead with him to stay nor help him with his leaving" (*AW* 21). When leaving Great Meadow, "'[s]ome people just cannot bear to come in second,' [McQuaid] said loudly enough to be heard" (*AW* 22). It is the exact time when Moran decides to seek refuge in a safety zone, namely the patriarchal family, where he could still reign supreme: "After years, he had lost his oldest and best friend but in a way he had always despised friendship; families were what mattered […] He saw with better lucidity that he would marry Rose Brady now" (*AW* 22). As can be seen from these lines, Moran's constant wish to marry Rose Brady is triggered by McQuaid's provocation, as he recognises that Great Meadow could be the only place where he could keep his power.

Moran's obsession with power is prevalent in his self-definition. All his relationships with people around him are defined by the reaffirmation of power, which he would obtain through combatant masculine codes regarding aggression, domination, control, and distinct shades of violence. Even in his daily language in civilian life, Moran's yearning for his previous power that he assumed as a guerrilla fighter is pervasive and "this is characterised by frequent references to the army, war, and military life in general" (MacArthur and Moreno 182). Moran refers to his offspring as troops, seeing himself as

the commander of the family army. He transforms Great Meadow into an entirely masculine setting, a self-contained microcosm wherein he rules his 'kingdom' and masters his 'subjects' in a god-like manner. After his retreat, he perpetuates violence against each member of his family. Following Luke's desertion, he shifts his attention towards Michael, and even minor issues escalate into major conflicts. Their ongoing disputes eventually escalate into a fight, with Michael attempting to confront his father at the dinner table:

> In the house each day grew more tense. […] The very air felt as if it was being so stretched out that it had to change or break: as small a thing as a salt cruet eventually brought all that was between them to a head. 'That salt,' Moran demanded. 'What salt?' 'Are there two salts? Pass that salt!' Instead of lifting the small cruet, Michael pushed it across the table towards his father. Moran seethed as he watched. As it was pushed, the small glass cruet touched a fold in the tablecloth and overturned. 'You wouldn't pass salt that way to a dog,' Moran rose from the table. 'Have you any idea who you are passing that salt to?' 'I didn't mean for it to overturn.' Michael was at an intolerable disadvantage sitting down. 'You just shoved it over to the dog.' 'I tell you I didn't mean …' 'I'll teach you to mean something!' Moran struck him violently but he managed partly to avert the blow, the chair falling over as he jumped to his feet (*AW* 119).

Their fight lasts momentarily without a real triumph; however, Michael is frightened. As he shows a sign of weakness, Moran does not miss the opportunity to intimidate him. He is close to a gunshot:

> It was then, coldly and deliberately, that he fixed his eyes on the shotgun where it stood beside the back door in the far corner of the room. Whether he was seriously thinking of using the gun or that he wanted Michael to think he would use it would never be known. If he just wanted Michael to think he might use it he succeeded absolutely. For the rest of that evening his son stayed dose to the gun. Any time Moran moved between him and the back door he found himself tensed to spring. He would have given anything to discover if the gun was loaded but he couldn't check it (*AW* 120).

Their quarrel signifies another masculine wrangling at the end of which Michael surrenders. In their encounter, Michael "fell at the last hurdle" (*AW* 123). He is close to defeating his father, yet his fear restrains his passion. He could never be sure whether his father would commit filicide to maintain his authority. Due to his growing unease, Michael denies another confrontation with Moran. The incident, however, helps him

assert moderate individuality and maturity. He reforms his feelings and attitudes. Deep in his mind, he buries the incident as a childish impulse, and "[s]entimentally, through each small act he found himself taking leave of his youth" (*AW* 121). Their physical fight is a turning point for Michael and Moran. They both test their limits regarding an assault and withdrawal between filicide and patricide.

In Great Meadow, Moran is predominantly controlling, fierce, brutal, and violent as a father. Great Meadow becomes his "fortress, […] the limited territory over which Moran reigned" (Sampson 230). It is thoroughly controlled and run by Moran, as "[e]verybody was watchful [and] [i]t was like moving about in a war area" (*AW* 135). Ultimately, he manages to intimidate the women of Great Meadow and Michael. Moran's primary ambition is to keep his offspring under control in his masculine realm. However, Michael is eager to seek his individuality since his father's domain is no more than "a voluntary slavery" (*AW* 65). Hence, he tries to escape Great Meadow twice. In his first attempt, he is brought home by his sisters, who have already been allies of the father. Yet, in his second attempt, he manages to survive in London. Moran is disappointed by Michael's desertion in that he should have learned to be a 'real man' in his masculine realm. Then, "'he [would] have to learn his lesson from the world. The world [would] not care much about him'" (*AW* 127). Moran's anxiety is not caused by an effort to protect Michael. Instead, he is dismayed by the idea of rejection. Moran recognises that his sons' desertion signifies "the younger generation's collective refusal to inherit their father's legacy of Great Meadow" (Wu 41). From then on, their battle grows into a cold war without an evident confrontation.

One might argue that the clash between Moran and his sons mirrors vast and multifarious conflicts between distinct fathers and sons in their relations. The eerie affinity between men as fathers and their sons has been the focus of numerous studies in various disciplines. A common view among gender studies suggests that "[f]athers tend to enforce gender stereotypes more than mothers, especially in sons" (Adams and Coltrane 234). Acquiring particular codes of gendered behaviour (either toxic or progressive) from their fathers, most sons need to receive validation from their fathers to prove their masculinity. Therefore, "fathers (absent or present) have a massive influence on their sons and this

cannot be understated when looking at how toxic masculinity can be avoided or taken up by a male" (Whitehead, *Toxic Masculinity* 93). Accordingly, it might be claimed that the symbolic function of the father is to provide a role model for the son to display peculiar sets of 'masculine' behaviour. Because masculinities and distinct fatherhoods do not denote biological facts but social constructions that men strive to pursue, and because fathers make the most influential models for them, sons mostly learn how to obtain authority and power from their fathers in their path towards manhood. The sons either reconcile with their fathers to share their power or challenge them to assume greater control.

In a similar vein, within his eerie affinity with the father, in other words, as a man who fails to defeat his father, Michael signs an unwritten contract with Moran. Although he escapes home and looks for further opportunities, he avoids further conflict with the father and "[a]ll the old trouble between the son and the father had been forgotten about" (*AW* 142). In the long run, unlike Luke, Michael accepts Moran's authority, pays his regular visits to Great Meadow, and helps the farm labour voluntarily, not because he would end up a future patriarch but because he is emasculated and has to gain his father's acceptance. When he tries to persuade Luke to visit, his reconciliation and complicity are revealed: "'Daddy's all right now. He's old. He can't do feck-all anymore […] 'I suppose I'm sort of fond of the old bastard in spite of everything'" (*AW* 147). Michael's latent sympathy for Moran indicates his yearning for Moran's validation to prove his manly existence. In another significant scene, Michael is on his way home, and as soon as he gets closer, "in the frail way that people assemble themselves he […] looked to Great Meadow for recognition, for a mark of his continuing existence" (*AW* 147). It is well-noticed that Michael desperately needs to remain complicit with his father to prove his validity as a man in his father's domain.

Consequently, Michael could (re)position himself in the hierarchical relationship with the father while Luke remains distant. Luke's attitude, therefore, marks a stark contrast to his siblings' submission to the father's authority. He is an antidote to everything Moran has fought for, such as religious devotion, national belonging, and respect for the patriarchal family. He acknowledges that returning to Great Meadow, namely his father's domain,

will be a threat to his masculinity, which is built in contrast to Moran's patriarchal identity that is constructed in terms of rural and combatant masculinity. When he is asked to visit Great Meadow due to his father's illness, his reply is remarkable: "'Only women could leave with Daddy'" (*AW* 133). Unlike Michael, Luke manifests his masculinity through an open war against his father. To Luke, his father's patriarchal domain is nothing but a means for 'feminisation'. In contrast, "Michael can be accommodated to Moran because of his more feminised character" (Robinson 149). With an intense fear of emasculation, Luke turns his eyes towards novel hegemonic masculinity norms in urbanised London.

Luke's definition of strength and 'true manliness' denote economic well-being rather than traditional patriarchal power. In England, he proves his 'manhood' and no longer needs to be complicit with his father's power. Luke and his English business partners profit from the renovation, buying older houses to convert them into flats. His career path is highly symbolic in that he transforms the big old houses (patriarchal family life) into apartments (modern urban lives). He somehow deconstructs former hegemonic norms of masculinity and fatherhood and attaches himself to the novel traits of masculinity. Besides having an extramarital affair with an English woman in London and devoting himself to the expectations of the market economy rather than spirituality, Luke's denial of the fatherly law is very much in the foreground. When his father is referred, Luke replies in furry: "Either I'm crazy or he is" (*AW* 146). When given voice, he explicitly rejects his biological father as a source for a role model and therefore his 'manliness': "'I know I didn't choose my father. He didn't choose me. If I'd known, I certainly would have refused to meet the man" (*AW* 144). Meanwhile, "Moran was secretly grieving for Luke" (*AW* 152) as an emblem of his failure, as "[h]e kept repeating to Rose how he felt that he had only really failed with one of his children and that it troubled him more than any of his other dealings throughout his life" (*AW* 175). No sooner than all conflicts are resolved among the family members, Moran's only ambition is to reconcile with Luke. Too close to an apology, he writes Luke a letter to invite him personally to Great Meadow with a final effort in misery:

> He spent several nights writing the letter. Some of his old fire and anger returned as he wrote. The finished letter was short. […] 'There are times in my life when I pondered my sanity,' it began. 'They are all mad but me and thee and I have doubts of me. Let me say that I had no wish to harm you in the past and I have no wish to

> harm you in the future and if I have done so in thought, word or deed I am sorry. The daffodils are nearly in bloom, also shrubs, flowers, fruit etc. It'll soon be time for planting. Tired now and of that thought, who cares anyhow? Daddy (*AW* 176).

As can be seen in the quotation, Moran's eventual endeavour to bring Luke back to his reign implies neither a latent sympathy for his son nor a genuine remorse for his violence against him. His conditional apology regarding 'if he had done so' reverberates a denial of self-defect. His letter to Luke suggests the precarity of his masculinity and fatherly authority. As he ages and his health deteriorates, Moran becomes increasingly preoccupied with his demised power over Luke. Despite already holding a patriarchal grip over every family member, Moran must further validate his control over Luke. This struggle is unending and consumes Moran, and Luke notices it from the letter: "He must be dying, Luke thought after he read the letter. He put it aside at first but after rereading it he felt the same for Moran as he would feel for any mortal" (*AW* 176). Luke's refusal of a visit signifies more than neglect. His rejection of reconciliation implies a symbolic patricide, cutting Moran's arteries, which have long revitalised his masculine identity defined by the fatherly authority.

Constructing his masculine identity in terms of Catholicism, militarism, and the cult of hardman, namely then-contemporary Irish hegemonic masculinity, Moran often lacks particular capabilities to build affectionate relationships with his family and other men. His inability to communicate and emphasise precipitates a masculinity crisis, eventually leaving him in loneliness and despair. Managing to infantilise his offspring and Rose, Moran subsequently recognises his defeat owing to Luke's lingering refusal to obey. To Jennifer Mullen, the main reason for Moran's failure to develop a close affinity with Luke is his inability to communicate. Thus, "the difficulty of communication between father and son is a recurring theme throughout the novel" (143). It is therefore argued here that Moran's lack in terms of building somewhat healthy relationships with Luke as well as other men and women reverberates the "western masculine emotional regime where stoicism and emotion control are central" (Reeser and Gottzen, "Masculinity and Affect" 147). Because hegemonic masculinity forces men to control their ostensible 'feminine' emotions, which means being tender, gentle, benevolent, sensitive, and vulnerable in order not to pose 'weakness', most men, men as fathers, and thus Moran are destined to be the victims of their masculine subjectivities.

In *Amongst Women*, Moran often refrains from showing affection and sympathy towards his kin. Being aware of his inability, he never feels any traits of remorse and does not hesitate to mention it: "'I was never any good at getting on with people. You should all know that by now,' [once] he said half humorously" (*AW* 6). Even in the most intimate moments, Moran does not show a sign of sympathy or warmth. During one of their family prayers, "in a sudden flash that he was sometimes capable of, he acknowledged his daughters' continuing goodwill and love, love that usually inherently unable to return" (*AW* 6). Moran's 'inherent inability' to return affection and love leads him into a desperate struggle to save the family unit concerning threat and violence rather than sincerity and closeness. The whole family know very well that, in Great Meadow, "[a]nything broken had to be hidden until it could be replaced or forgotten" (*AW* 11). In Moran's domain, there would be no hope for healing or betterment. He is deficient in affectionate or tender impulses but embodies deadly intimacy. As an epitome of his oppression and violence, Moran inadvertently amputated a pheasant while cutting the grass in the field. His tractor cuts the pheasant's legs, whose "eyes were shining and alive, a taut stillness over the neck and body, petrified in her instinct" (*AW* 159). Because the pheasant is referred to as 'she', one might argue that it symbolises the women of Great Meadow whom Moran's lingering violence has victimised, as they are often broken yet could not leave him despite their emotional damage.

However, in the end, Moran falls prey to his irrational masculine chauvinism. His latest struggle to remain 'manly enough' amongst women is a grotesque parody of his militarised masculinity. Moran's inclination to prove his masculine authority is mocked when he kills a jackdaw for nothing. One morning, after a gunshot is heard, "[h]e was standing at the open window in his pyjamas, the shotgun in his hand, staring out at the front field where the black splash of a jackdaw lay on the white ground beneath the ash tree. (*AW* 7). Moran is caricatured in his pyjamas as an absent figure of authority. Once a heroic guerrilla leader, he then "allowed Rose to take the gun away but not before he had removed the empty shell. […] The gun was returned to its usual place in the corner of the room and no more mention was made of the dead jackdaw" (*AW* 7). His rifle used to be an emblem of masculine virility, but it is now hung on the wall without a single bullet.

Losing all means of power, Moran passes away in misery and is buried with all traits and values once the men of his generation are proudly represented.

To conclude, *Amongst Women*, a fascinating novel that offers a glimpse into rural Ireland during the early years of the Irish Free State, offers a wide range of issues regarding men, masculinities and fatherhood. The story centres around Moran and the challenges the members of the whole family face. Depicted as an authoritarian father who embodies the fading traditions of Ireland, Moran exerts his power brutally over the household. He simultaneously instrumentalises Catholic indoctrination and distinct means of violence to control the whole family. Meanwhile, each family member finds peculiar ways to resist the assumed power of the father. On the one hand, women in Great Meadow often utilise silence and renunciation as subtle forms of defence and resistance. On the other hand, the relationship between the father and his sons is quite distinctive. Moran's inadequate representation of masculine identity complicates his relationship with Michael and Luke. While the former negotiates and obtains proper masculinity traits from the father, the latter negates, as he perceives his father's domain as a threat to his masculinity. Throughout the novel, one might discern that patriarchal power is not an inherent trait but a performance that can be manipulated, transformed, and altered. Ultimately, *Amongst Women* shed light on the performative nature of patriarchal power and how it can be challenged and changed through resistance and subversion. Therefore, the novel subverts the 'Big House Novel' discourses, reflects the decaying power of the Catholic Church as the sole determiner of daily life in Ireland, and functions as a means for reconciliation with the late father that the author desperately seeks.

CHAPTER II

"YOU NEED A FATHER, DON'T YOU?": THE NEW MAN, THE NEW LAD, AND THE ABSENTEE FATHERS IN NICK HORNBY'S *ABOUT A BOY*

Nick Hornby has been a famous writer and a celebrity in England since the early 1990s. A highly prolific author, Hornby has written nine novels, several non-fiction books, short story collections, anthologies, and cinema and television scripts. Soon after the publication of his widely acclaimed self-confessional memoir *Fever Pitch* (1992) and a million-copy best-seller novel *High Fidelity* (1995), Hornby's creative writing has been constantly exposed to critical gaze and received quite mixed reviews. On the one hand, particular discussions about his fiction revolve around the question of whether his novels are worth having scorching critical enquiries, as many scholars, literary critics, and reviewers find his works highly simplistic, dispraising them for having unctuous attitudes towards crucial matters (Dinter 126; Moseley 605). On the other hand, his writings are found worthy of attention since they denote a peculiar context wherein a complex web of social, economic, cultural, and thus political issues intersect (Ferrebe, "High Visibility" 221; Ochsner, "Who's That Man" 247-8; Tate 32). Taking the latter as a focal point and to pursue Jeff Hearn's renowned assertion that "the personal is political is theoretical" ("The Personal" 175), it is suggested that Hornby's popular fictive and non-fictive works avail benefits of apprehending the relationship between the personal and the political, considering the material-discursive configuration of gender practices in a particular setting.

The period in which Nick Hornby penned his early fiction designates acute sociopolitical transformations in England regarding the public and private lives of men and men as fathers and thus marks a shift of emphasis on family practices. This chapter aims to examine how Hornby's second novel, *About A Boy* (1998), represents the (re)constructions of distinct types of men, more specifically the 'new man' and the 'new lad', concerning their (dis)inclinations for fatherhood in post-Thatcherite England. It is further argued that the novel overlaps with contemporary issues on the problems of 'absentee fathers' and the idea of 'new fatherhood', which have been (re)investigated amid heated debates over the 'masculinity crisis' as a repercussion of neoliberal politics

and policies. The chapter simultaneously attempts to discuss the novel concerning literary traditions it belongs to, the 'lad lit' and the 'dad lit', regarding its function in perpetuating ostensible victimisation of men and men as fathers in the late 1990s by representing a coarse desire to get 'back to basics' to re-establish the attested power of men, when England's economic dominance over the world deceased, when previous codes of meaning attached to men and masculinities were obscured, and when the society of 'self-interest' was replaced by the prevailing discourse of 'Cool Britania'.

About A Boy illustrates the relationship between Will Freeman and Marcus, whose paths cross by coincidence. Will, a thirty-six-year-old, unemployed, single Londoner, lives with the royalties of a Christmas song his late father composed. Living a charming life, Will spends his days just for his tastes and hobbies, such as reading popular magazines, collecting trendy vinyl records, shopping for brandy clothes, and aimlessly driving his sports car all around London. Getting confused with his former partners, having difficulties socialising, and pursuing casual sex, Will engages with single-parent groups to meet lone mothers, where he meets Marcus.

By contrast, Marcus is a secondary school boy who lives with his mother, Fiona. When his father, Clive, and Fiona split up, Marcus has to live with his mother in London, where he confronts several problems as a teenager. Bullied and rejected by his peers at school and spending desperate times with a suicidal mother, Marcus appears as a lone boy. When he coincidentally meets Will, Marcus tries to persuade him to marry his mother. Because Will is neither eager for marriage nor has an idea of commitment to any woman and is never fond of children, he tends to remain aloof from Marcus. However, after several events, Will asks Marcus to pretend to be his son when he falls in love with another single mother, Rachel. In the time being, the relationship between Will and Marcus improves, they get closer, and the novel concludes with a moderate ending immediately after all the conflicts are resolved among each character.

Now that the novel opens with peculiar descriptions of conflicted, confused, and disintegrated male figures, Marcus and Will, it is suggested that the scene is set to portray both men as victims of the contemporary failure of the family institution, whereby they

might supposedly fulfil their 'needs' to mature into vigorous men. It is argued that the early emphasis on these men's sufferings overlaps with the hottest political debates on family policies and simultaneous cultural conflicts, the problems of single parents, and (ir)responsible fathering in the post-Thatcher era. These current debates on the family institution and the shifting emphasis on fatherhood might be traced from widespread relations of gender, disseminated over precise political, economic, and cultural developments to which the modern State and its extensions have rendered so far. It is also suggested that all these relations reveal the institutionalised power of men. Particular attempts for structural modifications for the welfare of women and children have been backlashed through multiple discourses of the 'masculinity crisis' perpetuated by men to secure their ongoing power.

After the Second World War, due to a dramatic shift in public opinion towards major social institutions and their apparent socioeconomic outcomes, such as the secularisation of the State, proliferation of mass communication, and the rise of consumer society, historical assumptions of masculinity, family, and shared beliefs on human reproduction have been altered, leading to the metamorphoses of traditional fatherhood[29]. The premodern perception of a Christian-based father figure mutated into a modern breadwinner and later grew into an ambiguous postmodern identity (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, *Men and Masculinities* 47). Ambiguities in the new form of fatherhood are closely tied up with the perception of gender and its relationship with power during the

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[29] According to Michael Kimmel, three masculinity archetypes, the 'Genteel Patriarch', 'Heroic Artisan', and the 'Self-Made Man', and their propensity for fatherhood could be detected between the early seventeenth century and the late nineteenth century in England and the United States. To Kimmel, the emergence of these stock male figures was perpetuated due to particular political and economic conditions. These masculine stereotypes emerged and became dominant in parallel with the rise of capitalism and redefined the relationship between fathers and sons. Paving the way towards the American Revolution, the prevailing metaphor of a rebellious son against the tyrannical father fuelled the War of Independence, "as in the Sons of Liberty in their protests against King George, and their resolve, in the Declaration of Independence, to resist tyranny 'with manly firmness'" ("Preface" xii). Cutting their bonds with the British, the United States' founding fathers reaffirmed masculinity and initiated their sons into manhood. Taking their roots in the British aristocracy, the 'Genteel Patriarch' was a devoted father to his family. Similarly, the 'Heroic Artisan' assumed similar qualities of fatherhood with the 'Genteel Patriarch' in that he was a dedicated father and taught his son his craft and the codes for being 'manly'. However, by the nineteenth century, the image of a 'Self-Made Man' appeared. The 'Self-Made Man "derived his identity entirely from success in the capitalist marketplace, from his accumulated wealth, power, and capital" (Kimmel, "Consuming Manhood" 38). Hence, unlike his predecessor, the Self-Made Man was an absentee father, leaving his home to compete in the homosocial arena in search of prosperity and respect.

last two decades of the previous century. This period is marked by a paradigm shift in the Global North, namely the shift towards the Neoliberal State.

Particularly in England, when Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, she first tended to dismantle the Welfare State and its institutionalised apparatuses. Endorsing neoliberal tenets in distinct spheres of the State organisation, Thatcher also embraces specific politics and policies that bear broader connotations in the current family institution and the perception of fatherhood. More precisely, Thatcher's interests in the neoliberal social structure of accumulation intersect with the philosophical doctrines of a dominant political ideology, the New Right, and its peculiar affection for families (Nunn 21; Tusscher 75-76). Accordingly, one of the primary aims of the Thatcherite government was to empower the patrifocal family in a decade of crises when divorce rates skyrocketed and the number of lone parents boomed. The creed of the New Right and Thatcher's fervent wish to preserve traditional moral values converged and promulgated a common fear of de-moralisation and promiscuity. These fears accelerated since many women would give birth in extramarital affairs, and children often grew up with little or no aid and contact from their fathers. Hence, several majors were taken to enforce laws concerning families, parental rights, custody issues, and the well-being of children by calling fathers back into families[30]. The urge to call fathers home leaned heavily towards the New Right's tough stand on moral principles concerning family practices, which functioned to consolidate the loosening power of men in patrifocal families.

It is safe to argue that one of the primary reasons for the State's exact inclination to reinforce patriarchal fatherhood by instrumentalising the New Right's creed rested heavily on economic reasons for the reconfiguration of the State through neoliberal principles. Accelerated progress in family policies aimed to delegate financial responsibility primarily to parents rather than the State. The neoconservative ruling party

[30] The first of several legislations made in decades whereby parental responsibilities and children's rights were regulated is the Children Act of 1989, which became law in 1991. The law marks a turning point in domestic issues in that it claims "children as the responsibility of parents, rather than their property" (Marsiglio, "Stepdads" 220). However, the particular legislation rested responsibility "automatically with the mother, and if married to the mother at the time of the child's birth, with the father" (Standing 34). After the heated political debates of the 1980s and the inadequacy of the Children Act of 1989, the Conservative Party conceived a new policy to enforce regulations on the parental responsibilities of fathers.

was highly eager to cut public expenditure for social welfare; thereby, parents must take financial responsibility for their children to avoid additional expenses for the State[31]. These arrangements were to be implemented by evoking sympathy for the resurrection of the patrifocal family[32].

Soon after Margeret Thatcher's resignation, legislation on families and parental issues underwent reasonable modifications under John Major's service as the Prime Minister, extending to children born out of extramarital affairs. Through the Child Support Act of 1991, the government redefined the financial duties of biological fathers regardless of their marital status. Along with enforcing the new law, the Child Support Agency was founded to regulate custody issues and calculate the average alimony biological fathers were forced to pay. However, enforcing the law by dint of an official institution, or what Fidelma Ashe calls "the restructuring of familial responsibilities through expert systems" (*The New Politics* 33), would indicate that the State directly involves private areas of the citizens to reconstruct their domestic household. Utilising 'expert systems' in familial matters, more precisely, in the subjects' personal lives, gave way to publicised debates on traditional stereotypical gender roles, constructed norms, and imposed responsibilities on parents.

The foundation of the Child Support Agency and its intervention in 'privacy' is accompanied by fundamental yet contradicting questions raised through the State's *raison d'etre*. Disparate theoretical views on the State and its apparatuses to regulate particular societal issues arise from discussions about whether it legitimises its assumed power over subjects to bring order or to discriminate against some groups based on race, class, and

[31] In one of her speeches, Margaret Thatcher explicitly declared the government's pursuit of "strengthening the system for tracing an absent father and making the arrangements for recovering maintenance more effective" ("Speech at National Children's Home"). She insisted on replacing the 'nanny state' with the strengthened and responsible individuals of the neoliberal State (Ferrebe, *Masculinity* 165; McCarthy-Cotter 39).

[32] For further interrogations on the intersections of gender, family, patriarchy, fatherhood and legislations in the 1980s and 1990s Britain, see Kay Standing's essay titled: "Reasserting Fathers' Rights? Parental Responsibility and Involvement in Education and Lone Mother Families in the UK" (1999); Leanne McCarthy-Cotter's recent study on the issue titled: *The 1991 Child Support Act: Failure Foreseeable and Foreseen* (2019); Richard Collier's *Masculinity, Law and Family* (1995); Richard Collier and Sally Sheldon's *Fragmenting Fatherhood: A Socio-Legal Study* (2008); William Marsiglio's full-length book, *Stepdads: Stories of Love, Hope, and Repair* (2004).

sex. While the liberals view the State as a neutral mediator operating for the community's common good, the Marxist and feminist interrogations challenge the conceptualisation of a benevolent State. To the Marxist notion, the State functions in favour of the ruling class and its interests, promoting the exploitation of the working class. However, several feminist accounts challenge these theories and indicate that Liberal and Marxist views on the State are degendered. Coining the term 'patriarchal state'[33], particular feminist scholars examine the link between gender and the State, accentuating the idea that the State's absolute power could only be detected accurately by denoting its inevitable bond with masculine domination.

It is argued that such an immediate state intervention in family affairs reverberates the repercussions for the patriarchal state and masculine domination in the web of power relations. More precisely, governmental intrusion on sensitive issues without scrupulous attention denotes a deliberate strategy for Foucauldian power surveillance, suggesting an effort to regenerate gender roles, particularly the male role, by (re)associating fatherhood with breadwinning, as many biologic fathers are charged with maintaining economic responsibilities for their children. Although the only motivation behind The Child Support Act of 1991, as the title suggests, ought to be an effort to serve the children and to guarantee sustainable means for their development, it simultaneously reveals complicated issues for distinct men as fathers. In other words, when the government withdraws from the financial support of lone mothers and children by leaving economic responsibility to fathers, it unfolds inequalities among distinct men as fathers due to their unequal access to financial resources and opportunities. Hence, the government's tendency for withdrawal fuelled historical debates about the 'masculinity crisis' and caused several 'feckless fathers' to depart from families by rejecting their children despite the abovementioned law's enactment.

About A Boy denotes the perpetuation of the 'masculinity crisis' when patrimonial families began to shatter, and fatherhood began to be defined more by taking

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[33] For detailed feminist interrogations on the patriarchal state, see Raewyn Connell's *Gender and Power: Society, The Person, and Sexual Politics* (1987); Sylvia Walby's full-length book: *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990); for further examination of the State by distinct feminist accounts, see Catharine A. MacKinnon's book *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (1989).

responsibility than assuming rights. Therefore, the conflicts among disparate characters in the novel are triggered by men's strange yet close affinity with power in (the lack of) patrifocal families. Marcus and Will are in a precarious position when the established family order is disturbed. They feel oddly distant from the relative safety of patriarchal power and its guidance for the attested norms of hegemonic masculinities. More precisely, when they abstain from a traditional family, Marcus and Will seem to conflict with society due to growing anxiety of emasculation, leading them to a haunting and horrible sense of insecurity. Their perceived incompatibility with the rest of the community lasts until they regain their self-confidence as men by mediating between the older qualities of patrifocal families and the new forms of kinship. Hence, Marcus and Will set off on a relentless journey for self-reformation whereby they are tested for determination to cut their bonds with their absent/present fathers, and thus with tradition, and thus with older means of power. Their maturation is completed only after negotiating with each other by forming a symbolic father-son relationship.

The novel opens with parallel stories of Marcus and Will, respectively. While the former suffers overtly from lacking a patrifocal family, the latter covertly conjectures its (un)necessity. From the very first chapters of the novel, one might observe Marcus's harassing anxiety of sorrow caused by social deprivation and neglect in the absence of his father. Marcus cannot adjust to a supportive environment at school or home for his development. He despises her mother for not forming a healthy relationship with any man to father him, as"he didn't think he'd ever get used to this business" (*AB* 1). It is implied that Marcus feels trapped while living with a lone mother. Helpless, hopeless, and desperate, he defines himself as "weird, and he [believes] that part of the reason he [is] weird [is] because his mother [is] weird" (*AB* 13). Refusing to conform to 'emphasised femininity', Fiona appears 'weird' in contemporary London where "[p]eople had a duty to care […] even if they didn't have the requisite raw material" (*AB* 87). She remains an outsider, "just too hippy" (*AB* 87), interested in 'trivial' issues.

Fiona's depiction as a 'weird' woman and an 'insufficient' mother indicates the novel's masculine tone. It is ceaselessly emphasised that Fiona does not conform to the norms of

the dominant cultural habitus of the 1990s, which imposes 'female attractiveness'[34] upon women in the metropoles who are expected to take care of their physical appearances, engage in consumerism, follow fashion, and enact responsible motherhood at the same time. Unfitting the *zeitgeist* of the 1990s urban life, Fiona not only marginalises herself but also secludes Marcus from the outer world by not paying attention to her son's typical desires, tastes, and hobbies. Encountering enormous difficulties with adapting to his mother's impositions, Marcus would instead enjoy his time as his peers do; however, "if he wanted to do anything that any of the other kids spent their time doing, he had to argue with her for hours" (*AB* 13). Therefore, from the very beginning of the novel, Fiona, a selfish, incurious, suicidal, outcasted hippy whose character traits do not match with the 'emphasised femininity' and with a nurturing mother, is depicted as an 'inadequate guide' for Marcus.

Being under the custody of an 'incompatible mother', Marcus has difficulties engaging with school, wherein he might alternatively socialise with his peers. The more he strives to make friends at school, the more he becomes an object of mockery and ridicule due to his odd appearance, as "[h]e was wearing the wrong shoes or the wrong trousers, and his haircut was wrong all the time" (*AB* 13) resulting from Fiona's bizarre 'feminine guidance'. Marcus is aware that Fiona's motherly advice "didn't do him any good at school […] it made him different, and because he was different, he felt uncomfortable and because he felt uncomfortable, he could feel himself floating away from everyone and everything, kids and teachers and lessons" (*AB* 14). As seen from the examples, it is insistently implied that a desperate 'feminine influence' causes Marcus's isolation, and his relentless wish to anchor in a safer homosocial environment grows into a hopeless dream. Seeking an integration into his peers' social circle, Marcus recognises the necessity of training for initiation into 'idealised' manhood to be given by an experienced man, a father figure. Devoid of a commendable male figure to guide him through maturation, Marcus believes that he "need[s] a father" (*AB* 122) since only an exemplary

[34] In her seminal article, "The Affective, Cultural, and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensitivity 10 Years On" (2017), Rosalind Gill analyses how several women, particularly in urban settings, were "under unruly [and] constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling [and consumer spending] to conform to ever narrower judgements of 'female attractiveness'" (616). To Gill, 'female attractiveness' is a primarily constructed image perpetuated by the 'girl power' motto in the popular media.

male figure would help him reform to adjust to contemporary society as a young adult in general and to feel secure in the hostile environment of London in particular.

Moreover, the heated debates about absentee fathers resonate in *About A Boy* in disparate ways. Notwithstanding its significant opening regarding Fiona as an insufficient mother rather than a victim of a deserted man, the novel simultaneously illustrates how several women are put in vulnerable positions and burdened with onerous tasks to deal with their children when their fathers find possible ways to leave their families irresponsibly: "There were endless ingenious variations of the same theme. Men who took one look at their new child and went, men who took one look at their new colleague and went, men who went for the hell of it" (*AB* 36). The novel, therefore, serves a particular purpose to lay bare how men, women, and children are affected by the current policies in disparate ways and how political manoeuvres are "perceived as an attempt at social engineering" (McCarthy-Cotter xvi) by giving prominence to the patrifocal family.

In the same vein, Marcus is much affected by these debates on the necessity for patrifocal families. Soon after his mother's suicide attempt, he recalls a significant moment that brought the 'benefits' of having a family with a present father into a big question in his mind:

> They'd been watching a programme on TV about the family, and some silly fat Tory woman said that everyone should have a mother and a father, and his mum got angry and later depressed. Then, before the hospital thing, he'd thought the Tory woman was stupid, and he'd told his mum as much, but at the time he hadn't worked out that two was a dangerous number. Now he had worked that out, he wasn't sure it made much difference to what he thought about the fat Tory woman's idea; he didn't care whether the family he wanted were all men, or all women, or all children (*AB* 14).

Despite the dominant political discourse of the State's urge to call fathers back, Marcus is not very keen on traditional families. He "simply wanted people" (*AB* 14). He resists the New Rights' creed about patrifocal families and is convinced by the developmental difficulties of solidarity. Rather than desiring to be a part of a nuclear family, which is "the normal, boring kind, with school and holidays and homework and weekend visits to grandparents" (*AB* 3), he is looking for a new way to adapt to a society where he might be able to exist without the danger of loneliness. For Marcus, rather than the marriage

institution *per se*, the importance of families and fathers rests in providing a role model, love, and care whereby children might find serenity and peace.

Marcus is not the only suffering child due to absentee fathers in the novel. Ali, another lone boy with an absent father, is depicted as miserable, aggressive and threatening. Even an independent, attractive, and prosperous mother figure, Rachel cannot stimulate her son's development. When Ali is violent towards Marcus, Rachel suggests as an excuse that "Ali finds this very difficult" (*AB* 200), referring to her separation from Ali's father. Moreover, Ellie is delineated as an eccentric teenage girl with a negligent father. Her mother, Katrina, who "seemed to have given up on her daughter a long time ago", calls Ellie "mad [and] out of control [admitting that she] really hoped she'd turn out like this, feisty and rebellious and loud and bright" (*AB* 257). Because Ellie remains far too out of an 'ideal' family wherein she might be cared for and loved, she is "always in trouble for something or other, usually something quite bad" (*AB* 135) under the custody of an irresponsible mother. It is implied throughout the novel that regardless of their mothers' social status, these children suffer severely in a cultural environment where marriages have already shattered. Leaving their children with mothers, many 'feckless fathers' reject their responsibilities.

Nevertheless, when closely scrutinised, let alone being critical of men's patriarchal power, one might detect the biased discourse of *About A Boy,* which tends to conceal men's privilege in and out of family relations. Similarly, some critical enquiries on the novel overlook the gendered aspects of fatherhood. For instance, concerning the examples of 'feckless fathers' and their lone children, Ali Güneş asserts that Nick Hornby has written such a domestic novel to reflect his discontent with the drastic cultural shift in contemporary England that ended with the collapse of the traditional family. He further argues that "Hornby, as a man, seems interested in 'domestic life' and thus seeks to restore traditional family life as he artistically stresses the view that there is a need for togetherness of father and mother in a family" ("From Mother-Care" 62-63). To Güneş, Hornby is aware that the current societal structure wherein families no more matter "spoils harmony, peace, and stability for traditional life of the past in various ways" (62). Güneş's analysis might be relevant in that the novel lays bare Hornby's dissatisfaction

with the failed domesticity in the post-Thatcher era, as it strikingly depicts many men, women, and children who are aimlessly floating to integrate into communities out of the traditional family. However, his argument lacks a significant point hidden in plain sight. That is, what Hornby wishes fervently might be not only the reconstruction of domestic life *per se* but also a sort of craving for the historical power of men and men as fathers who have begun to lose their privilege in socioeconomic relations and thus regenerated multiplicity of crises recently.

One might admit that *About A Boy* reflects the burden of some women victimised as lone mothers by men. For example, the discrimination several mothers experience is voiced by Ellie when she reminds Marcus how men are privileged at times when families are shattered. While talking about Fiona's suicide attempt, Ellie underlines the disadvantages of being a woman in the public eye in terms of social pressure: "'See, if your dad killed himself, nobody would say, you know, oh, he's got a son to look after. But when women do it, people get all upset. It's not fair'" (*AB* 182). Ellie further tells her observation that "there's about a million kids whose parents have split. And none of them are living with their dads'" (*AB* 182). However, particular references to unequal share of opportunities and biased societal judgments could not be taken as critical, as they do not determine the general tone of the novel, and these rare instances taking place in the story are 'insincere' gestures made towards current feminist interrogations. Besides, these observations, which articulate some lone mothers' sufferings, are invalid in that they are voiced by Ellie, who is depicted as the most insolent, impudent, impertinent, and flippant character throughout the story. Thus, it is suggested that Hornby presents the current social reality concerning particular difficulties that women and children experience without sincerity, as he ignores the unequal distribution of power in gender relations and the asymmetry between men and women regarding legal, economic, and social opportunities.

Without making the connections between gender and power, one might overlook the historical privilege of men in the web of socioeconomic relations. As seen in Fiona's and Katrina's case, several mothers fall victim to the unequal distribution of wealth caused by the vast gap between men and women in their access to economic resources, legal rights, and job opportunities. The State's aim to empower families unfolds the asymmetry

between them, as men would depart quickly, and women mostly remain with the children. As previously mentioned, the policy measures help deepen parental problems and threaten the welfare of children. Many women remain helpless because the State ignores its financial duties to support lone mothers.

Ignoring the structural inequalities and systematic domination of men over women, children, and other men, *About A Boy* focuses on the accelerated problems of middle-class white men and men as fathers in the postfeminist era. For these privileged men, fatherhood denotes confinement to women and domesticity, financial burden, and many other responsibilities such as breadwinning, doing housework, and caring for children. To be more precise, patrimonial families would serve fathers freedom and power without much duty; however, when several women have integrated more into social and economic relations by participating in full-time jobs with higher salaries, forming independent lives, and asking for equal rights in public areas in contemporary urban life, their current positioning has resonated with fear among many men. These men found themselves in a 'crisis' due to the lack of patrimonial power and thus emasculation at the same time.

Similarly, *About A Boy* deals more with the privileged men's anxiety and fear of emasculation and seeks to cope with it and integrate into society without the guidance of exemplary father figures. While the novel's opening accentuates Marcus's incompatibility at home and school, the alternating pattern of chapters enables a simultaneous depiction of Will Freeman, who also conflicts with his social circle. Unlike Marcus's complicated problems due to his compulsory seclusion from the outside world, Will appears as another lone man whose loneliness is a personal choice. Therefore, in stark contrast with 'unfitting' Marcus in his father's absence, Will's debut in the story indicates a paradigm shift. Because he inherits a regular income from the royalties of a Christmas song his late father composed years ago, he can make a comfortable life without needing social solidarity. Wandering here and there spontaneously, going shopping habitually, following fashion magazines routinely, collecting vinyl records regularly, and pursuing women and sex incessantly, Will Freeman has a solid will to free himself from the shackles of commitment to any familial interaction. He is only "committed to non-commitment" (Ochsner, *Lad Trouble* 283), desiring to lead a life without paternal responsibilities.

Will Freeman's strong aversion to paternal responsibilities unfolds when he visits his old friends, John and Christine. Will observes their messy domestic life in shock and wonders how they could "live like this, [as] their place was, Will couldn't help thinking, a disgrace" (*AB* 7). When he is asked whether he wants to be the godfather of their new-born baby, Will replies in a furry: "Listen: I'm touched that you asked. But I can't think of anything worse. Seriously. It's just not my sort of thing'" (*AB* 9). Will is irritated by their domestic life since he explicitly defies families with children. He believes that having children has to do with material reasons. When people get older, they will need children to care for them. Noticing his presumptions, John blames Will for being immature. To John, remaining a singleton is a character flaw, and he claims his disappointment: "We have always thought you have hidden depths" (*AB* 8). Will is disturbed, leaves the house, and never meets them again.

Will's visit to John and Christine is significant because it denotes his current mindset of a nuclear family. He is reluctant to embrace becoming a family man, as it entails the responsibility of raising children and a lifelong commitment to a single partner. It is argued that Will's deliberate vacillation of privacy indicates more than a never-ending desire for polygamy. More precisely, his circumvention of commitment implies the anxiety for a clean break from the older norms of masculinity that would constrain men to be traditional breadwinner fathers of nuclear families. Beyond several duties for which Will feels unprepared, the notion of fatherhood also signifies maturation. Hence, he indulges in the comfort of prolonged adolescence due to his growing anxiety and fear of fatherhood.

It is suggested that Will's reluctance for loyalty, responsibility and thus fatherhood is caused by his fear of maturation, which reverberates men's overwhelming aversion towards emasculation. For Michael Kimmel, men have long felt emasculated by women. Because being 'masculine' is often defined as not being 'feminine', men insistently escape from women to prove their manhood since "[w]omen meant, first, mother, with her incessant efforts to curtail boyish rambunctiousness; and later, wife, with her incessant efforts to keep men in harness as responsible and respectable workers, fathers, and husbands" ("Born to Run" 19). Accordingly, Will, a relentless "kidult" (Lukes 281), tends

to escape obligations and duties that women and children would indicate. He seeks alternative ways to prove his manhood without taking responsibility for fatherhood. On the one hand, as a self-sufficient white middle-class man who can survive without material aid from women, Will does not want to renounce his privileges and embraces the selfish individualism the neoliberal age promotes and celebrates. On the other hand, due to an intense fear of being emasculated by women, he desperately needs to reaffirm his masculinity, which becomes blurred by the perpetuation of prevalent discourses on the 'masculinity crisis' in the neoliberal condition of contemporary England.

The articulation of the 'crisis of men' in contemporary societies, Stefan Horlacher suggests, is dominant to the extent that "one could almost have the impression that the formerly strong sex is about to become the new weaker sex, mainly characterised by numerous physical and mental weaknesses" ("Configuring Masculinity" 3). Many men experience various health and safety issues, including shorter lifespans, higher rates of cardiac disease, mental health disorders, and workplace injuries, and more men engage in interpersonal violence and commit suicide. These issues highlight the challenges men face in modern societies. However, particular discourses on the 'crisis of men' overemphasise and manipulate men's unhealthy practices to suggest that men are unfairly disadvantageous compared to women in various aspects of life, and such claims regarding men fall prey to women due to feminist achievements lack evidence. They are often used as propaganda to hide the complex dynamics of gender relations.

Specific discourses on the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity' based on male victimisation denote two interconnected sets of concerns, which Tim Edwards calls "the crisis without [and] the crisis from within" (*Cultures* 6). The first set of concerns, the 'crisis without', resonates with issues regarding the current position of men in the hierarchic configurations of specific institutions such as the family, education, and work. The particular interest of this perception is that many men have undergone a loss of power and privilege compared to their previous positions in these institutions. The second set of concerns, the 'crisis from within', echoes a more elusive challenge, focusing primarily on the perceived transformation in men's subjective experiences of their masculine

identities. This internal crisis is characterised by powerlessness, a lack of meaning and a prevailing sense of uncertainty, which permeates their self-definition of manhood.

Stuck between political oppressions to regenerate families, the problematisation of particular issues such as domestic labour and childcare by feminist interrogations, new patterns of employment, reconfigurations of professions and workspaces, and the bombards of the mainstream media representations, some men, mainly white middle-class men, felt distanced from traditional qualities of idealised manhood that would historically correspond with heroic deeds, great ideals, and fatherhood. The prevalent political and cultural discourses on the ‘masculinity crisis’ helped emerge two popular stock male figures among white middle-class men, the New Man and the New Lad. These masculinity typologies are contradictory responses to the ‘crisis of men’ circulated in a vast territory, including several sub-fields in social sciences, marketing strategies of fashion brands, commercials in mainstream media tools, and their representations in literary and non-literary texts. At the reconfiguration of these two images of men, both the ‘crisis without’ and the ‘crisis within’ intersect.

Several men and men as fathers react to the ‘masculinity crisis’ differently. On the one hand, some detect that they would presumably begin to lose their historical privileges due to the outcomes of neoliberal formation of the economic means and the responsibilities imposed by the new policies. Eventually, these men struggle to consolidate their power over other men, women, and children through violence and neglect. On the other hand, others notice the necessity for negotiating with the new norms of being men since enacting traditional masculinity is challenging, signifying numerous compelling traits such as heroism, physical strength, sexual virility, economic wealth, rationality, success, and competitiveness. They acknowledge that these impositions harm their relationships with other men, women, and children. When these men find traditional masculinity unhealthy and emotionally constraining, they eliminate or somewhat mitigate harmful aspects of gender identities by reconfiguring the masculinity practices in their daily routines. Hence, the emergence of the New Man and the New Lad marks a historical shift regarding men’s response to the ‘masculinity crisis’; while the former struggles to negotiate, the latter strives to resist change concerning gender equality.

The marketing policy of neoliberalism plays a significant role in reproducing the images of the New Man as a prominent stereotype among men in the metropolises. Media representations through various tools such as cinema, a diversity of shows on coloured television, men's magazines, and newspapers have prompted this fresh image of men through frequent appearances of celebrities and actors as role models in popular culture. Fashioning with the highly popularised qualities of these exemplary male figures, the *Yuppies*[35] of the 1980s embraced the New Man and demarcated the old-fashioned industrial men. Unlike their fathers, this generation of men has developed an intense preoccupation with their physical appearance, prioritising individual success and economic prosperity to embrace the idealised masculinity traits celebrated in the current neoliberal order. Their approach to achieving 'manly' ideals is deeply rooted in the belief that men can assume power on condition that they achieve occupational success and engage well in consumer practices.

Among proliferated media tools and their representations of the New Man, particularly in Britain, men's magazines became highly popular and influential, significantly impacting men's masculinity practices and consumer habits. Seeking endorsements from celebrities such as actors, pop singers, and football players, the proliferation of men's magazines such as *Arena* and *GQ* became increasingly influential through their commercial menswear bombardings and toiletries distribution (Nixon, *Hard Looks* 167). Instructing particular manners and behaviours for an 'ideal' man, these magazines also paid specific attention to the physical appearance of men by focusing on their well-built bodies to arouse interest in the cosmetic industry and fashion. Hence, the fabricated image of the New Man targeted white middle-class men to help them reconfigure their masculine identities concerning the *zeitgeist* of contemporary urban life and market-oriented consumer society. Along with his consumer-oriented, fashionable, sexualised, assertive

[35] The acronym for 'young urban professionals', 'yuppies' refers to a group of people who moved to the metropoles in huge numbers and occupied white-collar occupations during the 1980s and 1990s. Yuppies were often associated with worldly aspirations, a focus on career advancement, and a desire for a luxurious lifestyle. "Whether it was property, cars, clothes, or personal artefacts," Frank Mort suggests, "consumption was a dominant feature of the yuppie style" (172). Furthermore, to Roberta Garret, yuppies represent the zeitgeist of the 1998s, symbolising "the triumph of style over substance, conspicuous consumption, the single-minded pursuit of wealth and the self-regarding 'me' culture of the Reagan years" (*Postmodern Chick Flicks* 71). Because *yuppies* were primarily located in massive cities such as New York, Berlin, Paris, Istanbul, and London, they were rare in smaller urban cities.

body image, the New Man also proclaims ostensibly progressive qualities for men's practices. For the New Man, the idea of gender equality is supposedly not strange; collective responsibilities in domestic chores are not offensive against their masculine values, and self-care and interest in fashion are not weird and do not signify 'femininity'.

By this token, the image of the New Lad is a product of media representations, too. However, it differs in striking ways. First, the New Lad is prompted as explicitly reactionist against the New Man regarding its contradictory views about women, children, and gender equality. In this regard, the New Lad is a genuine backlash against the New Man's propensity for more egalitarian views towards gender equality. Besides, laddism celebrates anti-intellectuality and immaturity. As a product of 1990s England, where class identities blurred, the 'lads' imitated masculinity practices that the working-class men had long assumed. Their codes of fashion, routines and hobbies, and language differ from the New Man in that causality, grubbiness with sportswear, and constant slang are dominant in lad culture.

In *About A Boy*, when he is first introduced, Will Freeman embraces specific masculinity practices typical in lad culture. It is suggested that Will's laddish practices are deeply rooted in white middle-class men's masculinity crisis. Obsessed with the principles of contemporary pop culture, he tends to learn how to be a 'man' through role models represented in the mass media. The new men's magazines, television shows, soap operas, and brand commercials function as conduct books for him. Nevertheless, lacking a male guide who would initiate him to 'manhood', Will "wondered sometimes […] how people like him would have survived sixty years ago" (*AB* 6). He still feels insecure and seriously doubts the validity of his masculine identity.

Will makes his debut by evaluating his level of 'coolness' as a young man in urbanised London. When he picks up a men's magazine with a 'cool' questionnaire, Will notices that he rates "sub-zero! He was dry ice […] Frosty the Snowman!" (*AB* 6). He makes points by having casual sex with several women, making clothing purchases, having a stylish haircut, possessing exclusive hip-hop albums, eating out in lavish restaurants, voting for the Labour Party in elections, and habitually taking drugs. The questionnaire

implies that, to a great extent, the construction of masculine ideals relies heavily on distinct tastes in fashion, music, financial power, and promiscuity, most of which could be achieved by consumption. However, Will cannot make points for anything the political narratives and moral codes impose. Therefore, it is implied that he does not assume some other aspects of hegemonic masculinity tailored for white middle-class men in their thirties regarding having an occupation, forming a family, and fathering children since he is neither successful at professions nor is good at developing long-lasting relationships.

It is argued that Will Freeman represents the insufficiency of total values targeted in consumer-oriented neoliberal England and thus remains an outsider as a man. Despite his capability to be a 'free individual', as he can survive without any outside aid, his uneasiness could be heard most of the time: "There were probably all sorts of things missing — stuff about how depression made you tired of everything, tired of everything no matter how much you loved it; and stuff about loneliness, and panic, and plain bewilderment" (*AB* 227). Will struggles to make himself a room in the neoliberal condition of urbanised London; however, his sincere wish "to be an idler in a world of busy people" (Castronovo 175) results in failure. He selectively associates himself with individuals based solely on their ability to fulfil a particular role or meet a specific need. He prioritises material possessions and economic stability over emotional connections and interpersonal relationships. He is a drawn image of a hungry consumer machine in 1990s London, where individuality is celebrated, and economic prosperity and success are idealised. Paying more attention to his 'resources' than love and care, Will lacks emotional depth and cannot express his feelings, vulnerability, and tenderness.

Resembling a typical new lad at first, in the story, Will matures and reforms as a new man. However, it is a very long journey during which he has to (re)construct his masculine identity by confronting several obstacles and negotiating with fatherhood norms. Meeting a lone mother with two children, Angie, Will takes a step towards being a new man as a father. In their short-term relationship, he becomes "a temporary stepfather for the first time" (*AB* 10). Despite seeing each other a few times, Angie helps Will witness an alternative world where he is a total stranger. She presents another perspective on fatherhood for Will, suggesting he can gain fatherhood rights without taking

responsibility. Will is convinced that being a partner with Angie and fathering her children would bring him "a sort of sentimental photo-opportunity, […] he could walk hand-in-hand with a beautiful woman, children gambolling happily in front of him, and everyone could see him doing it" (*AB* 21). Hence, he seeks to benefit from the cultural privileges of fatherhood without much effort, along with hiding his insecurity, as fatherhood enables men to prove their manhood within secure masculine identities.

Will notices that Angie makes an excellent example for lone mothers who can make lives for themselves without men. She resists the conventional assumptions imposed upon women, recounting her first-hand experience as a lone mother in contemporary society. Angie endorses that being a mother should not necessarily preclude women from experiencing their lives independently. She proves that women as mothers could exist without the aid of men despite the traditional belief that women need men to father their children. To Angie, in other words, mothers do not need men as fathers to complete their identities. Thus, after his short-term relationship with Angie, Will discovers that he might be able to engage with many other single mothers and their children without any expectation or obligation to maintain a long-term commitment.

Will also realises that several women might perceive him as more intriguing if he invents an emotional aspect that would resonate with them. For Will, fatherhood as an assumed identity seems a helpful tool, a weapon to use against women. He notices many lone mothers cannot socialise and find opportunities to meet men since most men "didn't like the kind of mess that frequently coiled around these kids like a whirlwind" (*AB* 21). Showing tolerance to children might open new doors for frequent sexual intercourse. Then, he attends a single-parent group called SPAT (Single Parents Alone Together) by fabricating a two-year-old son named Ned. In SPAT, Will pretends to be a caring father whom an incurious mother allegedly victimises by deserting him with an infant.

Will manipulates and objectifies women by fabricating a story to sexually benefit from them. Indeed, what he solely pursues is "sex with a single mother, [and in return], he could offer "a lot of ego massage, temporary parenthood without tears and guilt-free parting" (*AB* 24). It is argued that Will's obsessive preoccupation with physical sex

without commitment denotes laddish tendencies concerning his 'inability' to develop wholesome relationships with women, other men, and children. Similarly, several men experience inadequacy in forming healthy relationships due to their deficiency in expressing emotions. Men often "eroticise their feelings and needs […] partly because sexual feelings are more acceptable to men than emotional ones" (Horrocks 113). While showing sexual interest towards women is a 'masculine' trait, paying attention to women's feelings, giving them a friendly hug, and sharing happiness, sadness, excitement, and curiosity, namely, showing emotional closeness, is defined as 'feminine'. Because men, particularly heterosexual men, fear being described as 'feminine', they tend to refrain from showing their emotions explicitly.

According to Victor J. Seidler, men's aversion to showing emotions is directly related to the historical construction of the relationship between fathers and sons. Most men, particularly Western men, have learned to hide their feelings as a self-control mechanism in patrimonial families. "In patriarchal culture," Seidler argues, "fathers stood as the legislators of the moral law and felt it to be their duty to instruct their children in its observance" (*Young Men* 50). Children would learn to listen to the instructions of their fathers to be obedient rather than to question since they were aware that to dispute over the father's word meant challenging his authority. Regardless of their desires, children were taught to remain obedient and hide their inner thoughts because revealing them would mean opposing the father's law. Hence, men have learnt to silence their emotions to not distance themselves from their fathers' law, which has long equated with the moral law *per se*.

One might suggest that, in the aftermath of feminist and gay liberation movements' deconstruction of male violence and power, the meaning of being masculine slightly changed. Men and men as fathers have found themselves in a dire predicament wherein they must confront their historical domination over women, other men, and children. Besides, as already discussed, the emergence of new socioeconomic factors in the Global North, such as reconfigurations of work, education, the family, the media, and the massive impact of feminism upon these institutions triggered men's 'crisis without'. The loosening of traditional manufacturing industries and the rise of the service sector have led to

insecure professions such as casual, part-time, and flexible working arrangements, contributing to male unemployment and a noticeable 'feminisation' of the labour force. Simultaneously, increased job pressures have intensified conflicts between work and family responsibilities for employed men.

Moreover, newspapers have often framed boys as problematic in public discourse. They are portrayed as resistant to formal education, prone to criminal activity involvement, and as products of a breakdown in parental authority. To some extent, this breakdown can be attributed to factors such as absent fathers, single mothers, and mothers who engaged in employment outside the home. These dynamics have contributed to a broader perception of the 'crisis without', affecting work, education, and the family. It also resulted in the 'crisis within', leaving many men fearing and doubting their feelings and behaviours.

Men's historical fear and doubt have also been fed by their lack of role models who would teach them how to be 'men' in contemporary society. Because traditional assumptions about men and masculinity are no longer valid, many young men and boys could not adjust to modern society, prompting the 'crisis of masculinity. Devoid of responsible and caring 'masculine figures' as fathers, men and boys tend to learn how to fit in their gender codes through popular media tools. Hence, when the crisis among men and boys accelerates, the popular images of the New Lad and the New Man gain popularity through which men seek role models to enact 'their masculinity'. In *About A Boy*, one might argue that Will's crisis accelerates as he is disturbed by his lack of a father figure as a symbol of connection to tradition and power. In a community where convention and dreariness intermingle, Will struggles to overcome the blurred impositions of obscure male roles and seeks refuge in prolonged adolescence through laddishness. However, at some point, Will notices that to free himself from the shackles of men's historical fear and doubt, he needs to rectify his masculine identity by evading laddism and pretending to be a father, the prevalent hegemonic mode of masculinity.

It is suggested that Will's transformation is one of the key issues throughout the novel, and it denotes gendered implications owing to his propensity for embracing new emerging performances, the New Man and the New Father. Will notices that he cannot meet peculiar

expectations of hegemonic masculinity and its multifaceted forms of power and control, which most men would obtain from fatherhood. Despite his comfortable life, he feels trapped due to his lack of a *raison d'être.* Devoid of instrumental tasks that men have long assumed, Will defies the idea that "he would reach the age of thirty-six without finding a life for himself" (*AB* 7). His anxiety and dissatisfaction result from an isolated life whereby Will cannot assume 'manly power' except for being a financially resourceful man.

Nevertheless, adopting a progressive masculine identity requires taking up more responsibility and growing emotions such as sympathy and tenderness, as "the New Man is gentle and caring [and] cheerfully self-confident in his masculinity" (Jackson, "The Cultural Politics" 206). As Will progresses towards maturation, his attitudes transform from exhibiting stereotypical 'laddish' tendencies to that of a more modern, progressive individual. By acknowledging the shortcomings of laddism, he reforms and ultimately becomes the embodiment of the New Man, particularly in his unwavering commitment to being a responsible and devoted father figure for Marcus.

At first, Marcus and Will are two disparate characters in many ways; however, throughout the story, they mentor each other, help overcome their 'crises', and thus reform together. Both men benefit from this male bond whereby they face their vulnerability, become mature, and improve as better, healthier, and happier individuals. Before his 'reformation', despite his appearance as a good-looking, fashionable man, "at his core [Will Freeman] was ugly and monosyllabic" (*AB* 172). Will's 'monosyllabism' would lead him to think and act out of categorisations and ready-made assumptions about women. In his acts and thoughts, Will used to be trapped in a constructed and limited gender identity. He notices the limiting and toxic traces of masculinity over time, and a compelling need to eliminate these harmful traces unfolds when he meets another woman, Rachel.

Encountering Rachel, a stunning and self-sufficient woman, Will is overwhelmed, and distinct elements of gender dynamics mark their relationship. He is paralysed by Rachel's great strength, admitting to being intimidated by her power. Will realises that his typical

'laddish' tendencies would be a formidable barrier to winning her over: "If there was a disadvantage to the life he had chosen for himself, […] then he had finally found it: when he met an intelligent, cultured, ambitious, beautiful, witty and single woman" (*AB* 172). As a result, Will decides to be open to Rachel with the support of Marcus. He teaches Will how to be an 'adult' and helps him get mature in his feelings and behaviours, as "to all intents and purposes, [Will] *was* a teenager" (*AB* 49). For the time being, Will manages to pose the New Man's masculine traits, such as altruism, a sense of morality, and vulnerability. He acquires to be a responsible and engaging man and expresses his emotions, paying attention to other people's feelings and problems with the help of Marcus. Once Will adopts the New Man's traits, he partly achieves 'maturation' and explicitly differs from his former self.

Revealing their feelings about relationships, Marcus and Will strengthen their bond; thus, Will learns much about his gender identity. For instance, when Marcus thinks he has fallen in love with Ellie, Will eagerly listens to Marcus and values his feelings as a grown-up boy. He notices that Marcus's belief in the possibility of dating Ellie is caused by his evaluating social relations free from the limitations of gendered frames, as he remains aloof from judgemental prejudices. Despite Ellie's notorious reputation among her peers and the school board, Marcus prefers to pay credit through his observation. He defies categorisations and is thus good at making individual choices. He is keen on trying and opening room for unlimited possibilities for his tastes. From music style to dressing, he intends to understand alternatives and would prefer to choose himself rather than credit presuppositions. Marcus's opennes helps Will recognise the limitations of his gendered practices and the benefits of flexibility. In the end, Rachel does not become upset with Will. Instead, she views him as possessing the qualities of a 'New Man' who listens to and respects women. With Marcus's assistance, Will learns to prioritise the emotions of others and transforms into a more compassionate and respectful partner.

On the other hand, Marcus needs training in different aspects. Will recognises that Marcus is "the oldest twelve-year-old in the world" (*AB* 60), yet he lacks the proper appearance that an 'ideal boy' should pose. Due to Fiona's bizarre influence, Marcus can only engage in domestic and thus 'feminine' activities such as reading at home, listening to Johnnie

Mitchell[36], and singing songs himself. Will helps Marcus fit in a contemporary urban setting regarding codes of 'proper' masculine tastes:

> Marcus needed help to be a kid, not an adult. And, unhappily for Will, that was exactly the kind of assistance he was qualified to provide. He wasn't able to tell Marcus how to grow up, or how to cope with a suicidal mother, or anything like that, but he could certainly tell him that Kurt Cobain didn't play for Manchester United, and for a twelve-year-old boy attending comprehensive school at the end of 1993, that was maybe the most important information of all (*AB* 147).

Without Will's considerable support, Marcus appears too remote from the norms that an ideal male teenager 'must' conform to. He is alienated and constantly bullied at school due to the apparent difference in appearance, individual tastes, and lack of propensity for pop culture. To be accepted by his social circle, Marcus finds himself in a challenging position where he has to suppress his unique qualities and conform to the standards of his peers since one has to "lose things in order to gain other things" (*AB* 278). The social environment where he finds himself places immediate importance on conformity, and fitting in seems the only way to gain membership. Any deviation from the norm is met with hostility. Those who resist are met with severe consequences: "They patrolled up and down school corridors like sharks, except that what they were on the lookout for wasn't flesh but the wrong trousers, or the wrong haircut, or the wrong sneakers, any or all of which sent them wild with excitement" (*AB* 14). Marcus's peers are intolerant of any form of individuality and reject any alternative presence that deviates from their narrow view of fashion. To fit in the norms of what Kimmel calls "the guy code" ("'Bros Before Hos'" 45), Marcus needs Will's support, as he knows best the logic behind being fashionable: "It meant that you were with the cool and the powerful and against the alienated and the weak" (*AB* 125). Hence, Will teaches Marcus how to look 'cool', whereby he would "learn to become a sheep" (*AB* 112), an 'invisible' boy among the herd in order not to be "eaten alive at school" (*AB* 115) by wearing precisely the same kind of

[36] According to Sandra Dinter, Joni Mitchell symbolises Fiona's improper feminine imposition on Marcus. Being one of the greatest icons of the Gay movement, Mitchell represents "Fiona's anachronistic and 'abnormal' lifestyle (143). It is also suggested that Marcus' detachment from Joni Mitchell indicates his shift from feminine guidance towards assuming a masculine identity.

shoes, having the same type of haircut, and listening to the same kind of music as everyone else.

It is argued that in his journey to adulthood, Marcus should progress through the stages of development in parallel with 'the guy code', which dictates that boys distance themselves from their maternal figures, as they signify the danger of feminisation, and assume essential qualities of manhood. As they mature, boys may engage in customary practices that establish connections with other individuals of the same gender and reinforce their dedication to hegemonic modes of masculinity. By this token, Marcus's training for initiation to the idealised way of boyhood is sustained through masculine regeneration achieved by male bonding[37] with Will Freeman.

Marcus necessarily cuts his bonds with the mother, namely the female imposition as an authority, to strengthen male bonding. When he meets Will, his distancing from Fiona, a prerequisite for the journey through manhood, is foreshadowed through a significant scene. Feeding some ducks in a park, Marcus accidentally hits one of them with a piece of a sandwich. It dies unexpectedly, causing great dismay to him. The unfortunate event of a dead duck can be interpreted as a sign of impending independence for the ducklings, as they are forced to navigate their environment without the guidance of their maternal figure. Because "the duck often symbolises maternity", Sandra Dinter suggests, "[j]ust as young ducklings follow their mother duck into the water, Marcus is at first loyal to his mother. The killing of the duck, in turn, signifies Marcus's impending autonomy" (145). Therefore, the scene stands for a clear break from the mother for Marcus. As soon as Will solves the problem with the parkkeeper, Marcus has a strange hallucination:

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[37] The term 'male bonding' was coined by Lionel Tiger, a sociologist and men's rights activist who argues that men have been akin to creating closer bonds than women for evolutionary reasons. To Tiger, men have spent more time together as suppliers and defenders since hunter-gatherer societies, as women have had particular 'weaknesses' due to their menstrual and reproductive cycles, enabling homo-sapiens to survive through the ages. For his essentialist arguments on the sexual division of labour in general and male bonding in particular, see the third edition of his full-length book, *Men in Groups* (2009). Besides, Tiger's arguments harboured several criticisms by anti-essentialist gender scholars. It is argued that male bonding "permeates all relations between men [and functions to reconfigure] all the central institutions of society including politics, industry and commerce, and not least single-sex organisations, like the military, and the activities like sport" (Graham, "Homoeroticism" 308).

> It was then that Marcus saw — or thought he saw — his mum. She was standing in front of them, blocking the path, and she was smiling. He waved and turned around to tell Suzie that she'd turned up, but when he looked back his mum wasn't there. He felt stupid and didn't say anything about it to anyone, ever (*AB* 56).

Waving to his mother's image, Marcus becomes ready for initiation to manhood with Will's help, who saves him from trouble when he is paralysed in fear. Because Will's world is a world of men for men, it could be pretty helpful for Marcus to generate a new masculine identity. Marcus has much to learn from Will. While Will is eager to adjust to society by following the mandates of consumer-oriented pop culture, Marcus is unaware of these doctrines. For now, Marcus realises that adopting a lifestyle framed by pop culture is the shortest way to be accepted and integrated into contemporary society.

Therefore, Marcus and Will spend much time together and strengthen homosocial bonds in Will's flat, a self-expressive masculine domain wherein Marcus can observe emerging practices of white middle-class heterosexual men. It is argued that 'home' has made a significant space for men to (re)generate, enact, and reflect the new forms of masculine identities for recent decades. Despite being suggested as a 'feminine' space for centuries, in contemporary consumer-oriented urban culture, the home is transformed into a significant means for self-expression for men (Attwood 98). The significance of 'home' as a representation of the masculine self is proliferated when social relations in everyday life are moulded by particular means of contemporary consumer culture, whereby a new lifestyle is addressed. Accordingly, Marcus and Will strengthen their male bond at Will's home by maintaining their masculine identities as a homosocial enactment, a considerable way of reconfiguring masculinities.

In affirming masculine identities among heterosexual men, Sharon R. Bird foregrounds the significance of homosocial interaction as crucial in that it "contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting meanings associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals" (121). Besides, men often need other men's approval to prove their masculinity, and "within homosocial settings, men mutually determine what makes a [normal] man" (Meuser 396). Marcus, then, learns how to enact masculinity through the guidance of Will Freeman. In Will's flat, an exclusive place for men without

any female interruption, Marcus and Will talk about fashion, style, TV shows, films and music. Marcus grows awareness about pop culture and its relation to consumption.

Men's instant inclusion into the world of consumption regenerates a new masculine identity, what Helene Shugart calls 'commercial masculinity', an emerging phenomenon among contemporary urban men. This type of masculinity that men have tended to grow "poses a significant challenge to a powerful, historical discourse of normative masculinity, distinguished largely by performances and practices of strength, power, control, and domination" (280). Thus, men's masculinity practices concerning everyday life have shifted towards the representation of the spectacular, and their tastes have developed into a crucial tool for creating social and cultural relations, challenging earlier ideas of consumption as a feminine concern and helping men find different paths to follow other than power and control.

Similarly, in his spectacular flat, Will embraces a solitary lifestyle defined by consumption. When seeing Will's flat for the first time, Marcus cannot help thinking that "it was cool [and if he] had a flat of his own, he'd make it look just like this" (*AB* 96). From the posters hanging on the wall to advanced electric gadgets in the kitchen, Marcus witnesses a space of a white middle-class singleton, which is highly different from a family home:

> Marcus followed him into the kitchen. It wasn't like their kitchen at home. It was much smaller and whiter, and it had loads more gadgets, all of which looked as though they had never been used. At home, they had a liquidizer and a microwave, both of which were covered in stains that had gradually become black (*AB* 97).

On the one hand, Marcus is highly impressed by Will's possessions. While on the other hand, he is unsure whether they serve a practical purpose. Will's fancy gadgets and appliances do not function properly and only have symbolic value. Moreover, his flat is stuffed with film posters of *Double Indemnity* and *The Big Sleep*, black-and-white photos of Charlie Parker and Chet Baker, and several vinyl records of *Nirvana.* When Marcus inquires why he keeps all this stuff in his room, Will responds that he finds them cool because they likely "took drugs and died" (*AB* 97). These displays of cultural tastes through particular commodities, as Rob Payne suggests, "expose a gap between what is projected as lived and was actually being lived" (241-42). These celebrity figures share

particular qualities: artistic passion, non-conformism, and rebellion. However, Will's reality strikingly differs. He spends most afternoons lounging on his sofa watching *Countdown*, which even Marcus finds boring. Accordingly, it is argued that the considerable gap between the projected and the reality, between Will's actual life and pretension, foregrounds his anxiety that arises from an artificial and vulnerable consumer-based masculine identity.

Despite depicting Will's sense of futility due to his artificially constructed gender identity, *About A Boy* simultaneously reinforces the idea of 'normal' and 'ideal' for men and boys in the frame of consumerism. The novel's biased emphasis on consumption as an inevitable element of contemporary culture unfolds again when Marcus and Will see Ali's room in Rachel's flat. The room is described as so 'normal' that "[a] social historian of the future would probably be able to date the room to within a twenty-four-hour period" (*AB* 195). The room is decorated in such a way that "[e]verything was there — the Ryan Giggs poster and the Michael Jordan poster and the Pamela Anderson poster and the Super Mario stickers" (*AB* 195). Seeing Ali in his room, Marcus is bewildered, and Will cannot stand thinking that "[s]tanding Marcus in front of posters of Ryan Giggs and Michael Jordan was like taking an average twelve-year-old to look at the Tudors in the National Portrait Gallery" (*AB* 195). As seen in the example, Ali is the 'ideal' boy with his "basketball boots, baggy skatepunk trousers, shaggy grunge hair, even an earring" (*AB* 195), while Marcus is annoying in his "yellow cords and hairy jumper" (*AB* 195). Ali's selection of clothes and accessories expresses his propensity for the 'Guy Code'. One might suggest that his basketball shoes and the presence of sports stars on his wall indicate a love for physical activity and strength, superstars such as Pamela Anderson are references for heterosexuality, and stuff regarding video games stand for his competitive nature and emphasis on winning as significant markers of masculinity. Besides, the narration implies that these commodities are symbols of masculinity and must be purchased to be considered 'normal.' Only those who can afford such products may have the opportunity to experience typical boyhood for initiation to idealised 'manhood'.

It is suggested that the more Marcus spends time with Will, the more opportunities he gains to observe assumptions and behaviours among peculiar men and boys regarding

boyhood, fatherhood, and, thus, distinct practices of masculinities. With the help of Will, who grows into a caring, monitoring 'surrogate father' for him, Marcus enhances his tastes for habitual practices and learns how to make preferences concerning relationships. He gains self-confidence and becomes better connected with the people around him.

Will's contribution to Marcus's development is not limited to fashion, pop culture, and relationships. After socialising with Will, as he meets new people and manages to make friends, Marcus learns to pay credit to people without being judgemental. Most importantly, he does not credit any norms without appraising them depending upon his observation. He becomes a mediator between people, between conflicting ideas, between opposing tastes, and between all kinds of differences, as he has "this knack of creating bridges wherever he [goes], and very few adults could do that" (*AB* 259). When Marcus affiliates himself with anyone, regardless of sex, age, and physical appearance, he tends to develop meaningful and healthy relationships with them. He prioritises companionship rather than kinship. For example, when Clive looks down on Ellie, Marcus defends his friend and rebels against his father without hesitation.

The story indicates that Clive is similar to all other absent fathers. He fails to support Marcus and Fiona, resulting in distant and strained family relations. Marcus only sees his father during the weekends when he visits Cambridge. Hence, Clive remains an absent/present father for Marcus. He neither provides material aid nor strives to make emotional bonds with his son. Despite making neutral, even positive remarks about his father before after the affectionate relationship with Will, Marcus recognises the 'true' function of a father who is expected to be benevolent, responsible, attentive, loving, and caring, which Clive would never fulfil. When he visits Clive last, during the conversation about their failed relationship, Marcus thoroughly despises him for his insufficiency as a father:

> 'And… you need a father, don't you? I can see that now. I couldn't see it before.' 'I don't know what I need'. 'Well, you know you need a father.' 'Why?' 'Because everyone does.' Marcus thought about that. 'Everyone does, you know, to get them going. And after that, I'm not sure. Why do you think one now? I'm doing OK without' (*AB* 270).

Explicit in their dialogue is the idea that Marcus tends to negate Clive as a father rather than negotiate. It is seen that Marcus's rebellion against the father is revealed only when he grows strong bonds with Will. Owning a surrogate dad, he feels freed from the law of the 'feckless father' and talks with the self-esteem he has already obtained from Will. He now believes that fatherhood is a matter of performance and that "anyone else could do that job, and they can" (*AB* 270). Accordingly, one might notice that fatherhood in *About A Boy* is defined as performative. While his biological father fails to perform, Will makes a father figure for Marcus. The novel also suggests that any form of identity such as adulthood, childhood, fatherhood, and motherhood are performative rather than fixed categorisations and "[t]hese can also be performed 'correctly' if certain practices, interests, and looks are adopted" (Dinter 136). Will adopts the expected qualities of a new father and manages to make "an unhappy boy temporarily happy" (*AB* 126). In return, through the novel's end, it is seen that assuming a new masculine identity, surrogate fatherhood, Will partly experiences a recognition of his gendered identity and overcomes his 'masculinity crisis'. While he used to believe in the validity of general truths and the unchangeable nature and order of the world, he now manages to reconcile his self-centred ideas with the alternative realities of the 'other'.

With the help of fatherhood, Ochsner suggests, "Will has turned from an immature, independent and unconnected man into a human being" (*Lad Trouble* 300). He realises that there must be a society wherein individuals should dedicate themselves to the good of others. Selfishness and the idea of self-success bring the community nothing but disappointment and hopelessness. Therefore, Margeret Thatcher's doctrine of 'no society' is challenged by Will. The narration counteracts the prevailing neoliberal narratives that glorify individualism as the ultimate goal. The idea conveyed is that life is a journey filled with challenges, but it is easier to face them with the support of others. It implies that there should be a balance between social responsibilities and the desire for independence, which is often hindered by the uncertainties of neoliberalism.

It is argued that the novel suggests a synthesis of masculinity that compromises these two opposing poles: being aware of responsibilities and an endless desire for independence. Marcus and Will embrace the fresh image of masculinity blended with responsibility and

independence, a metamorphosed mode of men which is quite eligible for the *zeitgeist* of the upcoming century. One might indicate that this fresh image of masculinity is reminiscent of New Labour's 'third-way' approach in post-Thatcherite England. Seeking new politics and discourses, Tony Blair detered previous codes of the Conservatives fuelled with the creed of the New Right. "After eighteen years of Tory rule", Chris Rojek discusses, "Blair and his advisors were intent on presenting New Labour as the tribune for 'modern' Britain" (24). To make Britain 'great' again, Blair and his counsellors created the image of 'Cool Britannia' to merge the assurance of established national authority with the perceived revitalised cultural appeal of a diverse and multicultural Britain. 'Cool Britannia' grew into one of the most discernable symbols used by New Labour to represent the country's rejuvenation.

The term 'Cool Britannia' first appeared in the 1990s and was associated with the country's revival of energy and vitality. This was often connected to the rise of New Labour as a respected political party. In 1995, the opposition leader and a potential prime minister, Tony Blair, arranged a series of well-publicized conferences with notable young individuals in Britain to evaluate the country's current condition (Rojek 23). It is argued that Blair's primary aim was to connect with popular British youth culture icons that were known internationally and had multi-ethnic appeal, in line with the realities of transnationalism and multiculturalism in the country and the opportunities brought about by globalisation. This was a means of identifying with current political and cultural perspectives, using popular trends in British pop culture, art, music, fashion, comedy, and film as evidence of a new and revitalised Britannia, moving away from the negative reputation of the recent Conservative era.

Besides, Tony Blair's perception of New Britain also emphasised "the importance of children and education and presented responsible parenting as an important element of building a new country" (Wieckowska 273). In the era of New Labour, there was a notable acknowledgement of the societal transformations indicative of late modernity. In contrast to the conservative notions of 'back to basics', Blair's government paid attention to the metamorphoses of the family and fatherhood, when it became an object of consumerism

rather than defined by a historically stable godly position[38]. By turning a critical gaze through the metamorphoses of fatherhood in the frame of New Labour and 'Cool Britannia', one might acknowledge the correlation between the decline of traditional masculinity and the proliferation of discourses concerning the idea of 'new fatherhood'. These two distinct phases represent separate chapters in the historical narrative of fatherhood. The waning of the traditional father figure has paved the way for the ascent of a more nurturing and involved paternal role. The archaic notion of a dominant and authoritative father is diminishing, allowing for a more compassionate and tender brand of fatherhood to take root.

However, as Lynn Segal discusses, how new is the 'new fatherhood' is a big question mark, when its relationship with men's ongoing power is scrutinised. She suggests that the idea of new fatherhood "serves a rather old pro-family rethoric, one which always functioned to shore up men's power and women's dependence" (*Slow Motion* 44). Recently, in the Global North, the role of fatherhood has evolved to encompass both traditional breadwinning and a more active role in parenting. Rather than replacing traditional roles, this modern fatherhood adds unique features that enrich the experience of parenting. At the intersection of gender and class, the idea of the 'new father' appears as a pernicious myth, hiding inequalities between men and women. It becomes a useful tool for many men to backlash against feminist achievements and particular efforts for amelioration of the policies regarding custody issues.

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[38] Along with the proposed amendments to the policy regarding parental responsibilities and children's rights by the New Labour, Tony Blair reflected himself as an exemplary man/father public figure during his rule. A month before his wife gave birth to their fourth son, Leo, Blair had announced that he would not have taken paternal leave, adding that "he would go into 'holiday mode', where he did less work" ("UK | Blair to take 'Paternity Holiday'"). Media speculation about his paternity leave has portrayed him as a positive role model for modern fathers. This image promotes responsible and caring behaviour within the family unit, with the potential for social change during politically pessimistic times. This cultural shift is reflected in modern households' various emerging fathering styles. When the baby Leo is born, he calls him "a gorgeous little boy" (Ferguson "Blairs"). Blair's response to the childbirth experience suggests prioritising men's roles and potential political interference. To reconcile conservative and modernising factions, Blair references his attendance at the birth of his son. Using language such as 'gorgeous little boy,' he reinforces patriarchal norms that emphasise a man's role in fathering a son. Unsurprisingly, there was an increase in Blair's popularity after the event. Blair was also exposed to harsh criticism and attacks by particular fathers' rights activists. During Question Time in the House of Commons in 2004, Blair was protested by the members of Fathers 4 Justice by throwing condoms filled with powder for alleged accusations that fathers had been deprived of their rights and "the family law system is both financially and emotionally exploitative and that it is severely flawed in regards to implementing the best interests of the child" (Jordan, "Dads Arent' Demons" 422).

Many men and men as fathers struggle for negotiation (due to the crises of masculinity and fatherhood) with the new order, where some women and women as mothers have begun to assume power in some aspects of life, such as domestic issues, education, profession, and representation in the Global North. Simultaneously, these men's anxieties with the new social order become a prominent subject matter for contemporary British novels, particularly the 'lad lit' of the 1990s,[39] of which Nick Hornby is often quoted "as the originator" (Head 248). The emergence of 'lad lit' is directly linked to another trendy subgenre, 'chick lit'. The mutual features of these two subgenres include subject matters, characterisation, setting, and narration technique. These novels deal with several 'trivial' issues regarding then-contemporary pop culture, scandals, news, and the celebrity's privacy that frequently appears in tabloid media. The stories are set in urban cities, predominantly in contemporary London, and are almost always first-person narratives (Oschner, *Lad Trouble* 50-51).

Besides, the protagonists of the 'Chick Lit' and the 'Lad Lit' show parallelism in that they are men and women in their thirties who seek more meaningful and respectful lives for themselves. However, there is a clear difference between these characters in that the former know what their society expects from them, while the latter feel ambiguity due to the blurred definitions of masculinity and uncertain requirements of contemporary society. What is certain is the fact that authors of 'chick lit' and 'lad lit' were cradled by post-war England and its Welfare State doctrines. Nevertheless, when they started writing, the social realities they had to confront were rather complex. Their responsibilities, expectations, opportunities, fears and thus daily practices, the ways they perceive the contemporary world denote unique qualities beyond their parents' perceptions concerning gender relations.

The 'lad lit' and 'chick lit', therefore, influenced discussions about gender. Both are apt to reflect the social moment rather than to make up a new form of narration. On the one

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[39] According to Elaine Showalter, the 'lad lit' is not an original subgenre. She underlines its connotations for "the 'angry young man' movement" ("Ladlit" 60) and argues that the subgenre dates back to the 1950s. Showalter considers Kingsley Amis's novel *Lucky Jim* as the first example of the lad lit, calling Jim Dixon "the angry young lad" ("Ladlit" 63). However, this chapter bases its arguments on the exclusive conditions of the 1990s and highlights the sociopolitical atmosphere wherein the subgenre and gender intersect.

hand, men in the examples of the ‘lad lit’ confront the idea that “the only convincing contemporary representation of heroism is that of an inner struggle towards greater awareness and deeper relationships; that is a struggle towards a more ‘feminine’ position” (Coward 110). Hence, the ‘lad lit’ reflects the ostensible ‘masculinity crisis’ regarding white middle-class men’s experiences of particular difficulties in expressing their feelings, emotions, and expectations. On the other hand, the heroines of the chick-lit struggle to fit in society wherein they are expected to improve mentally and physically. While heroines of the ‘chick lit’ seek commitment, the lads escape it due to a fear of domestication.

Accordingly, the examples of ‘lad lit’ and ‘dad lit’, in general, and *About A Boy,* in particular, open a significant discussion area where gender and genre intersect. These fictional works embody influential characters who are stereotypically young heterosexual men, who pursue casual sex, drugs, alcohol, football and so on, while at the same time “looking back nostalgically upon childhood and youth and forwards apprehensively to commitment, marriage and children” (Gill, “Power” 51). The proliferation of such fictional characters and their celebrations by many men help distribute fixed masculinity traits and justify white middle-class men’s toxicity. Similarly, in *About A Boy*, Hornby portrays the dissatisfaction with Will’s idle life to shed light on the newly constructed male subject who could only find meaning in life through a genuine bond, the family. What lies under Hornby’s moral is the urgency of families whereby men could find peace by regaining their ‘lost’ power so that they would be able to contribute to society. The novel seeks to integrate the men ‘in crisis’ into the community, letting them gain natural authority and power in the name of fatherhood, considering none of the male characters in *About A Boy* reflect self-confident aspects of hegemonic masculinity prior to their ‘reformation’. Hence, the novel functions as a sort of conduct book through which the white middle-class men regain their self-respect, as they allegedly lost it to women in the post-feminist era.

In the same way, Garry Whannel suggests that Hornby’s fictive works could be read as “a search for a new masculine identity – aware of, yet not defined by, feminism” (76). His awareness of several problems that men cause regarding families and fatherhood does not

mean he is critical of gender relations. Through his fiction, Hornby does not attempt to deconstruct male privilege and power nor tends to become the spokesman for feminist ideals. Instead, he deals with the problems of white middle-class men who have become more isolated and found themselves in a dire predicament in the post-feminist era[40]. In particular, *About A Boy* reflects and, to some extent, celebrates the evolution of modern fatherhood as a new identity for men. It might free many men from the shackles of harmful aspects of toxic masculinity and thus mark a shift away from a specific type of masculinity intricately tied to the traditional patriarchal model of fatherhood.

To conclude, along with several other examples of popular fiction written in distinct subgenres to denote a wide variety of contemporary matters of men and men as fathers, *About A Boy* attracts attention and becomes a million-copy best seller. The reason why and how Hornby's novel attracts such heavy attention is twofold: First, it is related to the subject matter. The book successfully unfolds popular issues regarding families in contemporary society by moulding them into debates over the recent masculinity crisis, which is triggered by current discussions on fathers and fathering. Second, the lighter tone of the novel plays a crucial role. Hornby deals with such a severe topic frivolously, considering the comic style of the narration. In the course of the novel, the author manages to reflect the peculiar feelings and attitudes of both characters by the narration technique. The novel is structured in such a way that neither Will nor Marcus dominates over each other. The events are portrayed as each character experiences them. The narrator sets the scene by providing background information and remains aloof from being judgemental. Refraining from a heavy didactic form, the novel offers men, mainly white middle-class

[40] Correspondingly, in one of his interviews, Hornby admits his motivation behind writing 'male confessional' novels: "I wrote about men, for men" (Broks par. 20). He further suggests that the 1990s lad culture was a "snotty reaction against feminism" (Ingle par. 21). Men's decaying power is thought to have resulted from women's emancipation, as many women and women as mothers have not been eager to maintain a marriage. Because several boys were raised by lone mothers in the 1980s and the 1990s, Britain lacked strong male models; thereby, boys performed poorly in education, and violence among the youth increased significantly (Whannel 23). However, Hornby shifts his focus to female characters in the following novels: "You can't just write about yourself forever. And you can't be scared of what people are going to say or think. I had begun to wonder whether, in fact, women were more interesting generally than men of my own age" (Ingle par. 21). One might argue that Hornby's aversion to writing men for men might not be only about being 'less interesting' than women. Instead, it might be about accepting the contemporary social condition when men have already been the object of discussions about gender.

men, alternative ways to overcome their mounting dismay at fathering in the neoliberal order.

CHAPTER III

"THEY DOLE IT OUT, WE PASS IT ON": THE CONFLICTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN AS FATHERS AND SONS IN MAGGIE GEE'S *THE WHITE FAMILY*

The contemporary British novelist Maggie Gee, OBE, has published several novels, memoirs, critical essays, and articles on creative writing. Born in Poole, Dorset, in 1948, Gee holds a PhD in twentieth-century novels. As the first female chair of the Royal Society of Literature from 2004 to 2008, her novels were translated into fourteen languages, revealing her as an internationally acclaimed author. Her eighth novel, *The White Family* (2002), was shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award[41].

The fiction of Maggi Gee covers a broad range of socioeconomic and sociocultural topics. These issues include "unemployment, global warming, violence, homeless people, militarisation, the threat of nuclear war, infertility, childcare, gentrification, cuts in social services, the lowering of standards in publishing and the commercialisation of culture" (Özyurt Kılıç, "Contextualizing" 3). Hence, she is regarded as one of the prominent contributors to contemporary British fiction with her investigations and explorations of a vast repertoire of subjects in her novels[42]. Handling such comprehensive and extended issues, Gee has become an influential intellectual of contemporary Britain.

In Maggie Gee's fiction, there is a clear indication of the reciprocal relationship between fiction and modern British society. Her fiction is indeed formed by what happens in contemporary society, and her concern as a writer generally determines her choice of subjects (Özyurt Kılıç, "Contextualizing" 4). In particular, this chapter aims to shed light upon Maggie Gee's eighth novel, *The White Family*, in which the author crafts the acute

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[41] For further information and details, see https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/maggie-gee.

[42] Gee has published eighteen books so far, thirteen of which are novels, including *Grace* (1988), *The Burning Book* (1994), *The Ice People* (1998), *The Flood* (2004), *My Cleaner* (2005), *My Driver* (2009), *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* (2014), and her latest one, *Blood* (2019). She also published her memoir titled *My Animal Life* (2010) and her lecture titled "How May I Speak in My Own Voice? Language and the Forbidden", appearing in *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays* (2015).

sociopolitical transformation British society underwent in the last few decades. The novel successfully portrays the public and private lives of the British, the middle class and the working class, the white and the racialised, the heterosexual and the non-binary, the old and the young, the failure of the family institution, and the conflicting relationship between fathers and sons. These issues denote clear indications of men and masculinities and, thus, gender relations. By placing specific emphasis on the changing practices and beliefs about the family institution in the last few decades of twentieth-century Britain, this chapter then examines how this particular novel lays bare the conflicting ideas, politics, policies, and discourses on the (re)constructions of distinct types of masculinities and their impact on peculiar men and boys. The novel overlaps with contemporary issues on the problems of nationalism, conservatism, globalisation, privatisation, and gentrification, which have been interconnected with heated debates over institutionalised violence, institutionalised racism, recurrent homophobia and xenophobia along with the emerging beliefs on the demise of family institution as a repercussion of the rising New Right.

Concerning the abovementioned sociopolitical and socioeconomic issues, the chapter attempts to show the parallelism of particular discourses on the 'masculinity crisis'. It is suggested that what many men and men as fathers experience in contemporary Britain are distinct shades of the 'crisis' of authority caused by what Murat Göç calls "men's displacement [deeply felt by many men at times when] the postmodern crisis of masculinity brings out a displacement of masculine roles offering no substitute for the so-called masculine power and authority" ("Lost in Space" 9). Due to the devastating feeling of 'displacement', men and men as fathers in Britain perpetuate the nostalgia and feel a coarse desire of the Great Empire to re-establish the patriarchal family and the attested power of men. Those are the times when England's economic dominance over the world decreases, at times when the historical influence of the British monarchy loosens, and when previous codes of meaning attached to the nation, gender, race, and sex are obscured.

The White Family is a novel about the conflicting web of relationships among the members of the eponymous patriarchal family in a fictional town, Hilledsen Rise. Alfred

White, the keeper of Albion Park, is hospitalised due to a fatal brain cancer. Soon after Alfred's retreat, his wife May struggles to keep the family together in her husband's absence. However, the precarious web of relationships among the family members is revealed, and the Whites face a tragic end for their family union. Shirley becomes a lone mother to her children without a proper family; despite his constant wish, Darren cannot negotiate with his father during his short visit. Dirk, the youngest sibling, murders Winston, a homosexual man of colour, in Albion Park and is jailed the same day his father and his victim are buried.

The White Family takes its subject matter from a tragic event, the murder of Stephen Lawrence[43]. Gee penned the novel in the aftermath of the brutal murder in 1993 to pursue satisfying answers to the question concerning how such atrocities could take place in contemporary England. In her memoir, she lays down the questions for which she seeks reasonable answers:

> What kind of country, what kind of family, might produce racists like five white thugs? This was what I needed to write about. What did it say about my city? For I had become a Londoner, and Stephen Lawrence was one of our own. But so were the thugs, the murderers (*My Animal Life* 175).

As can be seen in Gee's own words, the motive behind writing *The White Family* is to interrogate the reasons for and severe consequences of the contemporary condition of multicultural London wherein various ways of discrimination are prevalent among middle-class communities. These issues are somehow taboo for the English, who are not eager to confront them. Hence, despite being a widely accepted and celebrated author, Gee could not get her novel published for years, given its 'illicit' subject matter. The novel was published in 2002, eight years after it had been written, due to the unwillingness of

[43] On the evening of 22 April 1993, two teenagers were attacked by a group of unknown men at a bus stop in Eltham, southeast London. Although one of the boys managed to escape, the group caught and repeatedly stabbed the other. Not as lucky as his friend, the young man sadly passed away. The victim was Stephen Lawrence, who is still remembered vividly in today's Britain. Stephen was a young man, a young man of colour, and the murder was racially motivated. It is crystal clear that Stephen is not the only victim of racial hatred in British history. What makes the murder distinctive is the concluding remarks of the private interrogation held by Sir William Macpherson, which unfolded the scandalous process denoting that the Metropolitan Police and juridical system were institutionally racist. For further details, see the full report written after the interrogation in 1999: https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7012/documents/89144/default/.

the publishers, as Gee handled such controversial issues with a progressive perspective. The uneagerness of the publishers reveals how institutionalised racism was still prevalent even in the 'culture' industry and publication sector in Britain during the 1990s.

In her seminal article, Susie Thomas emphasises that there had been literary apartheid in post-war England, and the literary works written since then were separated regarding their subject matters and characterisations ("Literary Apartheid" 309). The novels written by Anglo-English authors would not embrace plurality, as these writers often gave voice to the ones that resembled themselves. Writing for and appealing to the white reading public, both white Anglo-English writers and critics had little or no interest in race until the 1980s. In contrast, Black Asian origin writers focused on multiculturalism, as they took it as a duty to mention and trace black and Asian traditions. Therefore, black and Asian writers contributed to the apartheid by compartmentalising the reading public. Since the 1980s, even though more Anglo-English novelists have tended to be inclusive of the black and the Asian, it remains a question of whether these characters are mere stereotypes in their fiction ("Literary Apartheid" 312).

Even so, the novel genre during and after the 1980s has slightly changed, denoting "the end of the English novel [and] the beginning of British fiction" (English 3). Written by a plurality of voices, the British novel takes radically new issues as its subject matter and reflects how British identity was redefined in the 1980s. Thus, Anglo-English novelists became more aware of the "politics of representation" (Thomas 313) after the 1980s, when several ground-breaking incidents occurred in England. The fatwa against Salman Rushdie and the racial murder of Stephen Lawrence triggered policies concerning immigration control, whereby discussions on race were fuelled. To react to growing problems regarding immigration, economic recession, acceleration of racism and xenophobia, the Anglo-English authors tried narrative strategies to handle such issues because when they intended to participate in the discussions, "they seem often to have encountered considerable resistance from publishers" (Thomas 318). Maggie Gee is one of the most prominent among these novelists.

Soon after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, "being upset" by such an atrocity and "ashamed" (Jaggi 302), Maggie Gee wrote *The White Family* to find possible answers to some tough questions British society has yet to confront, such as root causes of the cruel crime and the reasons for these men's blind hatred. She wanted to voice her anger and also show that not all British people are racist. However, the publishing process was "very rocky, very strong, very hard" (Jaggi 302). Despite her contract for two novels, the second was not published by Harper Collins. She had been constantly rejected and advised that she should have given up on it. As Gee insists, Saqi publishes the novel in the end. She believes that it is accepted by them since "the main people at Saqi come from Lebanon, so in that sense, they are outside mainstream British culture" (Jaggi 303). Due to the apparent censorship, Gee ironically remains an 'indigenous'[44] writer and becomes the object of discrimination as a white English author. Hence, the very long period of the publication story of the novel becomes the epitome of institutional discrimination based on racism in contemporary England.

According to Mine Özyurt Kılıç, *The White Family* can be categorised as "a contemporary condition-of-Enlgand novel[45], presenting working-class and middle-class racism in England" ("Contextualising" 19). Because the novel also takes many other issues as its subject matter, such as economic recession, unemployment, privatisation, and gentrification, Özyurt Kılıç further suggests that "it makes a significant contribution to the literary representation of multicultural Britain" ("Contextualising" 19). Taking her contextualisation as a focal point, it is argued that this novel might be read as reflective of gender relations whereby nationality and national identity are reconfigured in the context of the rising New Right in (post)Thatcherite England. All these issues echo what Kelly Farrell calls the "fin de millennium crisis of British national, post-imperial identity"

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[44] Susheila Nasta calls Maggie Gee an indigenous writer along with Colin MacInnes and Marina Warner, as they are the only "authors addressed issues of migrancy and cross-culturalism within Britain" ("Introduction" 5) until then.

[45] In her book *Maggie Gee: Writing the Condition-of-Engnland Novel* (2013), Mine Özyurt Kılıç analyses the eleven novels written by Maggie Gee between 1981-2009. In her full-length book, Özyurt Kılıç mainly argues that Gee's fiction can be categorised as a contemporary equivalent of a Victorian subgenre, the Condition of England Novel, as Gee's literary works fall under the classification of social-problem novels prevalent during the mid-Victorian era. "Employing the technique of self-conscious fiction and introducing new methods in narration" ("Contextualising" 4), Gee has successfully revitalised this realist tradition, thereby contributing to the continuity of the genre.

(120), and discourses on crises are related to men's 'crises of displacement' fuelled in the political context of Thatcherism through accelerating xenophobia and homophobia.

Anna Marie Smith reminds us that "Thatcherism, the most important variant of New Right discourse, is a particularly complex mixture of imagery, rhetoric and policies which was constantly re-defined in response to strategic circumstances throughout the three Thatcher governments" (*New Right* 5). However, strategic moments in this relatively long period became a cornerstone in legitimising discourses on discrimination based on race and sex. For Smith, among these strategies, two monumental shifts come to the fore: "The right-wing populist breaks with the consensus tradition" (*New Right* 5) and "attacks on local government autonomy" (*New Right* 15). Through the populist break, Thatcherite politics triggered a deep wave of mobilisation of the less privileged towards conservative premises of the New Right, which extensively appealed to alienated and disenchanted voters since the Second World War and the Suez crisis. In the construction of the consent, specific discourses on anti-immigration, nationalism, and white victimisation functioned as a robust social glue under the populist ideology of Thatcherism. As a shared belief of the majority, British borders had to be saved from the black invasion to erase multiple crises that society experienced during the new formation of the neoliberal state.

After the Windrush generation, racism was fashioned in a new dress. Discrimination on race does not indicate absolute superiority. Instead, it foregrounds the impossibility of living together. The new condition that many immigrants experience is "cultural racism [rather than] colour racism" (Modood and Salt 251), as the main emphasis on the 'other' is not biological but cultural. The cultural racism that minorities confront is a dramatic effect of the creed of the new right and the conservative government under which the idea of nation and national identity were reconstructed. The first Thatcherite government redefined the fundamental requirement to acquire British citizenship through the proposal of the British Nationality Bill by Enoch Powell in 1981. Until then, babies born in Britain had been guaranteed British citizenship. However, the bill proposed that only the ones whose parents were British descendants were to have the right to British citizenship, which triggered hot debates on race and racism (Smith, *New Right* 138-39).

Another significant effect of Powel's proposal is that the 'gender' of the state unfolded during the talks about the act, as he offered to discard the transmission of citizenship through the mother. Powell believed it was dangerous to allow such transmission through women since their allegiance could not be tested, as they were not recruited during wars. Thus, Enoch Powell's proposal echoes fundamental beliefs on the roles imposed upon men and women. In the paradigm of sex roles, men and women ostensibly bear peculiar 'biological' functions to serve the betterment of society. For the 'benefit' of the state and the nation, these gender roles are briefly put by Paul Verhaeghe: "Men are represented as the defenders of law and order, fighting for their country; women are incarnated pureness, fair virgins, passively waiting for their one and only task: the production of new sons" (140). While men have special features to kill, women are expected to give life. Both physically and mentally, men are apt to hold arms, conduct wars, and defeat the enemy. However, due to their 'nature', women are caregivers, and their function is to give life by giving birth. Women are still supposed to be as patriotic as men, yet they can serve the nation differently.

Although Powell's proposal was rejected after heavy debates, all of which referred to discrimination based on gender, the State, nationalism, and national identities have often been (re)configured corresponding to military organisation and have still preserved gender bias in Britain. As Graham Dawson suggests,

> The master narrative of Britishness is constituted by numerous micro-narratives about the nation's Great Men: the success stories of poets and politicians, administrators and engineers, and of course soldiers and sailors. With the occasional, troublesome exception of a Queen Bess, a Florence Nightingale or a Margaret Thatcher, the national epic has been predominantly a man's story, and masculine prowess the dominant expression of national character (13).

Men's assumed superiority and power are manifest in their historical role in founding nations and nation-states. Specific ideas regarding nation and nationalism reverberate over men and masculinities since "discussions on nationalism have been primarily by men about men" (Thapar-Björkert 806). Throughout history, men have predominantly influenced and controlled many state institutions, which resulted in a close connection between the values and attitudes of hegemonic masculinity and those of prevalent nationalism. The interplay between these two concepts has significantly impacted the

political, social and cultural landscape in the Global North, shaping how people perceive themselves and their nations.

Similarly, in his recent book, historian Ivan Jablonka discusses that different ideologies have attempted to (re)build nations and national identities in various ways, and one of the tools they often use is redefining masculinity to fit their objectives. These ideologies sought to reconfigure the dominant modes of masculinity to serve their particular aims. The Bolshevik movement, for instance, emphasised the importance of men's physical strength and willingness to sacrifice for the greater good[46]. Conversely, yet in a strikingly similar way, the Conservatives valued traditional gender roles and the idea of a strong, protective male figure. Meanwhile, communist movements emphasised the importance of men's participation in the collective struggle against oppression. In contrast, capitalists paid attention to the value of men's economic productivity and self-sufficiency (*A History of Masculinity* 147).

Thus, being closely related to the State and its institutions, nationalism is a political idea and bears widespread ramifications for men and traditional masculinity. Since the foundation of the nation-states in early modern Europe, the concept of masculinity has closely intertwined with the dominant version of national identity, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two. Likewise, in England, the correlation between masculinity and national identity was so strong that it was required for the 'actual' Englishman to embody the ideals of both. As Dawson suggests, "if masculinity has had a role in imagining the nation, then so too has the nation played its part in constituting preferred forms of masculinity" (1). Therefore, the state as a masculine organisation promotes certain forms of 'manhood' while suppressing others, such as racialised, effeminate, and homosexual men. This context-based, historically fluid, often deemed reconfiguration

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[46] Bolshevism, Fascism, and Nazism shared the image of a new man in common through the politics of representation. Robust, muscular, and virile man becomes the symbol of hegemonic masculinity. The Jew and the capitalist figures are always depicted as smaller, weaker, and effeminate. Hence, "different groups of European men (such as Irishmen and Italians), as well as black men, Jews, Native Americans and Asians (the Japanese during the Second World War and the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War) in different historical periods, were attributed a status from unmanly, naive, helpless and emotionally controlled to hypermasculine, cruel and sexually violent. Hence, the staging of appropriate masculinity was made possible only for a minority of men, resulting in a national conditional manhood" (Haywood et al., "The Conundrum" 93).

concept of masculine categorisations determines how individuals perceive themselves and others and negotiate with abstract ideals and political discourses to construct norms and gender roles in a given society.

Furthermore, to Raewyn Connell, any nation-state is essentially a masculine organisation because of its strict hierarchy, redefinition of an authoritarian leader, division of labour, and direct interest in sexualities ("The State" 537). It often relies on traditional masculine themes to create a sense of unity among its citizens. As a cultural construct, nationalism evokes pride, loyalty, and belonging to one's nation. This is evident in some keywords defining men and men's relationship with the state, such as honour, patriotism, bravery, and duty, commonly associated with nationalism and masculinity. For example, bravery and honour are associated with physical strength and toughness, while duty and patriotism are related to sacrifice and selflessness. The idea of being 'manly' is perpetuated to implement a male-dominated nation-state.

Accordingly, if *The White Family* is "a representation of Englishness in a multicultural world juxtaposed with the upsurge of nationalism" (Özyurt Kılıç, "Of the Two Nations" 129), one might also suggest that the interplay between English national identity and masculinity is one of the major concerns of the novel. Particular characters who do not conform to the traits of 'acceptable' citizens, be it a racial difference or sexual orientation, are marginalised and excluded from the dominant culture of nationalism. In the novel, Alfred White, with an implicit reference to King Alfred, the founding father of England (Özyurt Kılıç, "Of the Two Nations" 176; Fernandez 204), embodies the collective traits of Englishness and remains at the centre of the story. Most of the characters, in this way or another, (re)position themselves and (re)configure their masculine identities concerning Alfred and the values that he represents.

The novel opens in the park, where Alfred quarrels with a family of colour. He entitles himself as the rightful owner of the park and, thus, the country and the nation, as Albion Park "was hard to imagine without Alfred. He was always in there" (*TWF* 31). However, Alfred embodies the eroding imperial values of England, with which he was once intimately familiar. His failure to adapt to the 'new' condition of the country is portrayed

quite ironically since he likes seeing himself as "holding the fort [because of his] nearly fifty years of service" (*TWF* 9). He regards the park as a 'fort' that needs protection from corruption and decay and shows no tolerance to anyone or anything foreign within the park.

In contrast, Alfred's job mainly involves trivial tasks such as telling people they cannot walk on the grass and "shooing them off it" (*TWF* 9). As the novel suggests, the park symbolises the country's diverse and varied composition and the changing society that Alfred struggles to adapt to. He perceives the park and the nation as overrun with individuals who do not conform to orders. As a result, he takes on the role of an authoritative figure:

> 'You see how it is?' Alfred asks, out of breath. There are bubbles of spit at the corner of his lips. 'Can't bloody win, whatever I do. And the language … The women are worse than the blokes. They'd turn the Park back into a jungle. There are notices. These people can't read' (*TWF* 11).

As the quotation shows, Alfred's excessive racism causes him to perceive people of colour as invaders, and his frustration implies his awareness of defeat. Yet, a sense of duty motivates him to do his job. Alfred believes that without his surveillance, the park would be turned into a 'jungle', an offensive reference highlighting his intolerance against anything that is not local or English, which he uses interchangeably. He even discriminates against the animals in the park by calling "Budgerigars" and "Pheasants" British birds since "they've always been here" (*TWF* 40) and associates these birds with being loyal to nationalistic values of the past that he feels nostalgic: "My mum and dad kept budgerigars. It's natural, having budgerigars. Whereas foreign birds- It is not going to suit them. First touch of frost, this lot'll be goners" (*TWF* 40). These birds and their cherished flower beds, mainly consisting of daffodils, are reminiscent of Englishness, which requires defending the country in all circumstances rather than being 'the goners', by whom Alfred refers to the immigrants.

Alfred's excessive nationalism overlaps with several qualities that match his masculine identity moulded by patriarchy. For Alfred, being a devoted English citizen resonates with forming a family, being a father, showing physical strength, having a sense of duty,

responsibility, bravery, respect for the institutions, and a strong belief in the hierarchies. Briefly, Alfred is proud of his patrimonial family: “The Whites. It was the Whites this, and the Whites that—‘The Whites don’t have debts … The Whites never beg … The Whites don’t lie … The Whites have their pride … The White family sticks together’…” (*TWF* 291). Until then, he was a proud English citizen who could achieve particular qualities of hegemonic masculinity. However, as the novel opens with his fainting in the park as a symptom of brain cancer, Alfred begins to confront all these challenging issues and questions them in the days before he passes away in the hospital.

Although Alfred could only perceive national epic as a fallacy in his last days, it was a recurrent theme in Thatcherite England. Since their victory in the Second World War, the British had not experienced a surge of national pride. Even the triumph of the world war did not last long, as the sense of national unity and pride gradually began to decline with the rise of the Labour Party and its policies in the 1950s, which were seen as undermining traditional British values by the Conservatives (Dawson 13-14). These fundamental values were revitalised by the New Right and the Conservatives, who assumed themselves as the guardians of British identity. They believed that promoting traditional values could strengthen the country’s national identity and protect it from the forces that seek to undermine it.

Hence, the Falkland War served as an excellent opportunity for the Conservative government when the British doubted the assumed power of their nation. Stuck between the two most extraordinary powers, the Soviet Union and the USA, during the Cold War, the Falkland War enabled Britain to reawake “not by flexing of nuclear muscles but in the traditional way” (Dawson 14). Fighting in an old-style battle helped the British rediscover themselves, giving them a cause for yearning for the great spirit of the Empire. Margaret Thatcher stimulated the former spirit of the Empire soon after the ‘victory’ in the Falklands:

> The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history. This generation can match their fathers and grandfathers in ability, in courage, and in resolution. We have not changed. When the demands of war and the dangers to our own people call us to

> arms—then we British are as we have always been: competent, courageous and resolute (Thatcher, "Speech to Conservative Rally" 1-2).

The Falkland Victory helped the nation ameliorate the decline and loss. The British revitalised their greatness through a revival of the Empire. Besides, celebrating historical power also perpetuated the power of men and national manhood. By emphasising the words 'our fathers and grandfathers', whether deliberately or not, Margaret Thatcher referred to the actual power holder: men and their masculine power.

Since the foundation of the modern state, it was during the nineteenth century that ordinary men began to act in the armies. The poor, underclass, and, shortly, 'insignificant' men found themselves in a well-conducted organisation wherein specific expectations of the larger society were clearly defined, and being a soldier with its varied connotations became the epitome of manhood. Similarly, Alfred is obsessed with his military inclination, which gives him the impression of being a crucial man for his country in *The White Family*. Despite his trivial tasks in the park, which often require safe monitoring and surveillance, Alfred always appears as "a small brisk figure in a military great coat [and he has] always kept as close as [he] could to the boots [he] wore for National Service" (*TWF* 177). As a loyal keeper of the park, Alfred defends the 'fort' like a heroic soldier and secures it from any invasion that might lead to corruption.

Despite Alfred's sense of superiority that one might see through the memories of his family members and Thomas, he notices that "he is not the heroic figure of power any longer" (Özyurt Kılıç, "Of the Two Nations" 130) and suffers from the fear of displacement. He is defeated by all means in the same way as King Alfred is told to suffer (Özyurt Kılıç, "Of the Two Nations" 130). Alfred, a once influential figure, has lost his power at home and in public due to his inability to accept the changes happening in the family and the country. He cannot cope with the loss of past glory and his ageing and illness, which have left him feeling weakened and disillusioned. As a result, he rejects any form of boasting and agrees with his defeat on his deathbed. His disillusionment is

further intensified when Shirley brings him a John Bull[47] trinket with "a small square pedestal, engraved with 'Land of Hope and Glory'" (*TWF* 147). Shirley thinks that the trinket does not resemble Alfred in appearance but in posture, which he fashions to reflect his entitlement to national duty and racial hatred.

Alfred is haunted by Shirley's gift, which serves as a poignant reminder that the England he once knew, the one celebrated in the imperial narrative of identity and he took pride in, has vanished into the pages of history and cannot be recovered. The trinket symbolises previous "hope and glory. Now the British Empire doesn't exist. [Alfred] never thought that the day would come. In [his] own life-time, the end of the empire" (*TWF* 275). These are the values that he feels incapable of saving. This only deepens his disillusionment as he realises he no longer controls his and the nation's fate. Such realisation makes Alfred angry, and he accidentally crushes the trinket. As the John Bull figure is made of glass and broken into pieces easily, it becomes another symbol of the precarious nature of Alfred's assumed masculine identity.

According to Todd W. Reeser, there is an inevitable bond between any man, masculinity, and precarity in that "there is no essence, no biology that makes him do what he does […] Rather, his gender performance implicitly refers back to other people's previous actions which give his own actions authority and grounding" (*Masculinities in Theory* 81). As seen in Reeser's claim, there is an apparent relationship between men, socialisation, and their masculinity practices. Many men often assume masculine identities by identifying themselves through other men. Furthermore, apart from the 'known men', the exemplary male figures whereby hegemonic masculinity is (re)configured to denote particular ideologies, religious beliefs, ethical concerns, and institutions. Several men learn to be 'proper' through structural power mechanisms perpetuated by law or cultural impositions.

[47] John Bull has been a prominent symbol of Englishness and "came to be the embodiment of national character" (Atherton 97) since the eighteenth century. Despite being a fictional character often used in literary representations during the Spanish Succession, it became a symbol of the ideal Englishman at the end of the century, when "conceptions of race, and racial superiority, make their appearance in the formative period for Englishness" (Haseler 19). Overall, the eighteenth century was marked by a significant interest in racial classification and the origins of different ethnic groups, which ultimately led to the development of racial theories and ideas that would have a lasting impact on English society.

Likewise, Alfred would ground his authority and power upon the collective ideals and symbols of the Great Empire. His self-definition of masculinity is the toughness and rigorousness of the whole nation: “You have to be tough. You have to be strong. That’s how the British got their empire” (*TWF* 183). When he bitterly recognises the futility of values that he grounded his masculinity in, such as being the gatekeeper of Albion Park and the absolute patriarch of the Whites, he feels insecure and displaced at the hospital. The Whites appear dysfunctional, as does Alfred as the patriarch. Albion Park, the last symbol of the Empire, “had gone dark” (*TWF* 276). The collapse of Alfred, his family, and the park may be a perfect example of the analogy between the contemporary condition of traditional families and the nation-state.

The concept of a male-dominated household has often been used as a metaphor for the nation. It suggests that the man in control of his household, including his wife, children, and others, can be seen as a representation of how a leader governs a nation. The patriarchal father and the leader of a nation-state assume the power to exert control over others. Therefore, a man who can manage his household is viewed as someone who can oversee the nation. In return, the leader of a nation is often referred to as the symbolic father and may need to convey sovereign masculinity to maintain order. This analogy implies that a leader’s capability to rule may depend, in part, on his ability to govern his actual household by demonstrating leadership qualities or being a good father.

According to Paul Verhaege, contemporary societies witness “the collapse of the [symbolic] father figure” (135). The notion of a symbolic father figure and the trust in such an entity has become increasingly obsolete, resulting in pervasive scepticism and a lack of faith in all symbolic constructs. Men’s recurrent fear of displacement results from the lack of such constructs, which would guide them to be proper men and hold the historical power of men and men as fathers. Alfred’s unexpected disappearance from Albion Park is a powerful symbol that marks the disintegration and decay of traditional men as fathers and their aspirations for hegemonic masculinity. When he is hospitalised, each member of the family begins to think about him and the way he has fathered his children so far. The family members have mixed views on Alfred as a father. Although May is almost always proud of Alfred in many ways regarding fatherhood, she

"wondered, suddenly unsure" (*TWF* 60). Shirley thinks that her father is a violent man, and she hates her hostile and hateful practices and beliefs. She believes that he transmits his narrow-minded aspects to Dirk.

Meanwhile, Alfred's relationship with his sons is slightly more complicated, as the struggle for individual authority and power defines their conflicting kinship. Dirk "almost worships his father" (*TWF* 65). At times of crisis, his reaction is merely a "submission posture" (*TWF* 121). Even after the severe beatings of the father, Dirk easily negotiates with Alfred and always idolises him, as "Dad knew facts" (*TWF* 213). Nevertheless, Darren White[48], a successful journalist who moved to the USA a long time ago, "has a lot of problems with [his] father. It isn't easy for him, coming home" (*TWF* 149). When he hears that Alfred is hospitalised, he returns home not to visit him with compassion but to "confront" (*TWF* 171). He aims to leave Alfred defeated, discredited, and despised. Indeed, he takes after his father much regarding his anger, self-interest, roughness, and disinterest with the children. Despite his fallacy that he "is not a bad father" (*TWF* 220), Darren is destined to have a redundant and impertinent father, into which he gradually turns in time.

Although Darren is seldom given a voice throughout the novel, his sense of displacement strikingly unfolds in his dissatisfied, uneasy, and unsettled state: "I have to tell someone. I hate my life. Never at home, no time at home. Which is partly why it took me so long, to realise the problem with my father" (*TWF* 173). For Darren, Alfred has never been a 'good enough' father but a violent, cruel man against each member of the family. Shirley recalls several violent acts of their father, one of which turned out to be a masculine

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[48] Mine Özyurt Kılıç claims that Darren White is "a parody of the real-life Christopher Hitchens" ("Authorship" 140). Hitchens is still remembered as a highly controversial figure, a polemicist, and a celebrity journalist in the USA. Despite being a socialist democrat who explicitly opposed several issues regarding wars, anti-abortion protests, and the Vietnam War and defended progressive topics such as same-sex marriages, he grew into a pro-war journalist and an Islamaphobe after 9/11, strictly supporting the USA's military intrusion into Iraq. He "consistently attacked the anti-war left for its supposed betrayal of rationalist principle" (Alderson 218). Moreover, his sexist assumptions, such as 'men are funnier than women' ("Why Women Aren't Funny" 2007), often triggered public debates and became the epitome of gender bias. Interestingly, a recent qualitative study finds that Christopher Hitchens recalls a "good example of contemporary masculinity" (Ingram and Waller 45) for several underclass young men. For these men, Hitchens delivers his public opinions intellectually, but "he does it is very masculine. […] it's just very old-fashioned and has kind of throwbacks in it in that sense, but kind of so embodies that sense of masculinity, kind of intellectual masculinity" (Ingram and Waller 45).

wrangling between Alfred and her brother: "Darren, being the oldest, had tried it on. He staged his rebellion and had it crushed, brutally, wrestling hand to hand with Dad, because Dad was tough, he was small but tough, he was very fit from his life outside" (*TWF* 118). Defeated by Alfred, Darren reconfigures 'dominant masculinity' traits, whereby he grows into a false copy of the 'rejected' father.

As a displaced man dismissed from his father's land, Darren could only prove his power to himself and others to take his place in the 'masculine hierarchy' as a power holder by confronting his father and subverting his values. Hence, Darren successfully forges his path free from Alfred's influence. He finds fulfilment in his professional accomplishments in the United States, where he becomes the "Voice of the Left, Man of the People, as the papers called him" (*TWF* 74). Far from his father's homeland, he embraces beliefs directly opposing Alfred's political views and embodies the changes that his father finds deeply unsettling.

Darren seems to rebel against his father's power when he cannot make room for himself under Alfred's strict authority. Dirk differs from Darren in that he negotiates and identifies with the father: "Dad's like me. We have the same ideas. They're men's ideas, of course, they are" (*TWF* 89). One might suggest that Dirk's complicity with Alfred and Darren's defeat by him have in common that they have positioned themselves by taking the patriarchal power represented by the father as their primary reference point. Their stance on masculinity and power also brings to light an established misperception about the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not mean that the ideology of masculinity is directly imposed from top to bottom, and men accept it without question. Every man finds a place for himself at some point on the masculine hierarchy due to his individual or social characteristics. For this reason, there is no fundamental opposition between hegemonic masculinity and masculinities outside the definitions of hegemonic masculinity. One should often consider that hegemonic masculinity defines an ideological bargaining and negotiation that is constantly transformed, broken and reconstructed, including definitions of masculinity that do not comply with norms and hegemonic representations.

In this context, Darren's opposition to Alfred does not indicate a struggle to be a progressive man. Instead, he fashions with other forms of masculine norms whereby he can assume power over his father, women, and other men. He thinks that he is a primary victim of the patriarchal values his father represents. In contrast, "he prided himself on being a good father, though naturally a lot of things got done by e-mail" (*TWF* 220). Moreover, his attitude towards women and children resembles Alfred in another way: "Darren White, the People's Friend, blowing his top at that poor woman on the counter, and snapping at his wife as if she was a servant" (*TWF* 82). His condescending attitude towards the 'weak' enabled him to emerge as a 'powerful man'.

Reflecting distinct attitudes of peculiar men and men as fathers, *The White Family* bears the performativity of race, gender, nationality, and national identity, which are institutionalised, constantly redefined and redesigned in distinct contexts. The institutionalised form of racism is delineated through Thomas, one of the senior members of the state library. Because it is a public space, one might expect the library to serve everybody equally. Despite some government regulations to prevent discrimination, these are just politically correct implementations and remain far from possible amelioration. It is argued that racism is still prevalent in state institutions. Thomas, a white privileged man, becomes the spokesman of covert racism[49]:

> At the library, you know, it's all sorts – West Indian, Asian, Irish, a Swede – and nearly half the staff are black. But we all get on. It's just not an issue. Apparently the only time we didn't was in the eighties when the council got terribly p.c. and sent two race relations advisers in. Then everyone started to hate each other. Meanwhile these advisers ruined the stock, chucking out books that had the quotes, wrong message and spending the earth on […] Hundreds of books on racism. But the public doesn't care about things like that. People aren't interested, is the bottom line (*TWF* 230).

[49] Thomas's insistence on the fallacy that racism is no longer an issue in contemporary Britain overlaps with popular discussions on masculinities and their criticisms. Eric Anderson, for example, speculates the relevance of hegemonic masculinity and offers a new term called 'inclusive masculinity' to examine men and masculinities in a new way by arguing that there is no longer a proper ground to mention hegemonic masculinity in its referred meanings as 'orthodox masculinities' are no more in fashion. On the contrary, he insists, "inclusive masculinities are gaining cultural, institutional and organisational power among white, middle-class, university-attending heterosexual men" (*Inclusive Masculinity* 153). According to Anderson, in Western societies, either subordinated or marginalised masculinities are no longer excluded or othered. These societies have already welcomed differences among men.

Thomas believes that racism is no longer an issue in Britain, yet he speaks from an advantageous position as a white man. Although people of colour can enjoy public places, discrimination still prevails in different aspects and notably accelerated after the arrival of the Windrush generation. Sophie King, for example, belongs to that generation, and she is not welcome in England due to covert racism in the rigidly hierarchical organisation of the state. She desires to be employed as a nurse, but “Britain hadn’t given her what it had promised” (*TWF* 306), as she becomes a cleaner due to the prevalent discrimination.

Despite his ‘secure’ identity as an English man, Thomas suffers from a fear of displacement, too. He experiences writer’s block because of his insecurity about the loss of meaning[50]. One might further argue that Thomas also feels insecure due to his doubts about his masculinity in the contemporary condition of England. While affirming the death of meaning, his “mind began to drift. Sex snapped on to it, like a magnet” (*TWF* 27). Obsessed with Melissa’s body, he desires her as if she were submissive to men: “I could protect her. I could look after her” (*TWF* 28). He presumes that Melissa likes her, although he “had little to offer [except] his amazing penis, currently unused, needing tenderness, loving, licking” (*TWF* 28). If Thomas is not an explicit racist, he is undeniably sexist and strives to save the decaying power of men. He wants to prove his ‘male’ power by having sexual intercourse with different women. In a sense, he is searching for his true masculine identity by ‘colonising’ women’s bodies.

Being the sons of the same generation, Thomas and Darren’s confrontation significantly contributes to the story regarding men’s fear of displacement. These men could talk to each other about everything and share their feelings, weaknesses, hopes, and plans. However, they still have different agendas for their individual feelings. They tend to reserve the precarity of their manhood. There is an unseen, cold conflict between these men, which reverberates the repercussions of several distinctive features of masculinities

[50] Thomas might be an allusion to ‘Doubting Thomas’ of the Bible, “who cannot believe through faith, but needs physical proof” (Özyurt Kılıç, “Of the Two Nations” 138), as he seeks answers to a fundamental question of whether there is a meaning in life and text. He does not give up searching for meaning and wants to do something meaningful. They plan to compile a storybook for children with Melissa. The book aims to object to racism at schools.

and their relationship with race, sex, familial relations and individual success. In the Italian restaurant where they sit for some time, Thomas's inner voice reveals how nationalism and racism are fluid terms and how privilege is prioritised in race relations: "I'm never quite certain where I come from (with a rugby team of genes on my father's side – Jewish, Scottish, Italian, Spanish? There was even a rumoured great-grandma from Barbados) but walking in here I know I'm British" (*TWF* 168). Although Thomas is unsure about his heritage, he can easily define himself as English since neither his skin colour nor accent reveals any ambiguity for society. For Thomas, being a white man in contemporary Britain hides many privileges.

However, Thomas's 'whiteness' does not save him from the fear of displacement. He needs an influential father figure to identify with and make himself a room in the masculine hierarchy. Ashamed by his biological father, who was "unfit for National Service" (*TWF* 171), Thomas envies the children of the Whites: "I longed for parents like May and Alfred. Alfred-and-May. May-and-Alfred. But Darren didn't seem to have learned much from it –" (*TWF* 168). Beyond his global success, Thomas also admires Darren for his family and parents. On the contrary, Darren talks about Alfred and how he hates him and resents how "he wrecked [his] life" […] It's taken [him] years to admit it. Years. [He] used to be in awe of him. Working-class hero, and all that crap" (*TWF* 170). For Thomas, Alfred is the true hero of the country, unlike his biological father to whom "he had never managed to tell […] about the million ways he failed [them]" (*TWF* 173). Both men confess that their fathers have inevitable effects on them. Darren further suggests that their pernicious masculine practices are retrieved from fathers and they are inevitably passed trhough their children: "Look, it's all handed down. They dole it out, we pass it on. The bloody therapists are right about that much" (*TWF* 172). Thomas and Darren find ways to reaffirm their masculinity by constantly challenging and supporting each other. They share stories of triumph and defeat, acknowledging their vulnerabilities and strengths. Along with blaming their fathers for mistreating them, they seek validation and belonging through male bonding with a desperate hope of finding their place within society.

Meanwhile, Alfred recalls his memories of the family and his fatherhood. His anxiety of 'displacement' echoes in his nostalgia concerning the 'good, old' days when everything seemed stable and fixed for men's privilege and power. He constantly dwells on past disappointments and failed expectations. When weakened, Alfred is often consumed by thoughts of the past, specifically what went wrong and led to the present disillusionment. He finds himself reflecting on the expectations he had and how those were not met, leaving him feeling stuck and unable to move forward:

> I was young, and hopeful that the world would get better. We were sure there would be miracles, after the war. I thought we'd all walk into a golden future. Where did it go? What happened to our future, the one so many people suffered and died for? There was something wonderful we all meant to share, after going through so much together. But it just … evaporated. That was it (*TWF* 184).

As the quotation shows, Alfred's nostalgic longing for the past is a recollection of memoirs illusioned by 'a golden future'. Nonetheless, "like all nostalgic fiction, [his obsession with nostaliga] is fuelled by a feeling of despair and disappointment about the present rather than longing for the past. [Therefore,] the narrative of a golden age for men can only be a discursive fiction produced by patriarchy and a harbinger of defeat rather than salvation" (*my trans*.; Göç, "Bir Distopya Olarak Erkeklik" 68). Likewise, Alfred's nostalgia might stem from a regretful awareness of a time when masculinity was unchallenged and when men could find 'replacement' rather than 'displacement'.

Men and men as fathers had long managed to (re)compose and 'replace' their masculine identities and thus reconfigured their patriarchal power until recently. However, in contemporary London, it is seen that the taken-for-granted privileges of these men are challenged and can no longer be replaced. In *The White Family*, heavy emphasis is placed on Victorianism through May's reciting Alfred Lord Tennyson's remembrance of those times when the patriarchal family structure was seemingly stable and each family member would feel secure. The lines May repeats throughout the novel reflect the change in hope, despair, national identity, and the failure of traditional family, as decadence is a recurring theme.

Irene Perez Fernandez argues that "Gee's depiction of contemporary British social space is an excellent example of the way in which people negotiate their sense of space and identity in a changing society" (184). Both the narrative technique and the structure of the novel present an opportunity for the author to effectively accommodate distinct and personal sentiments of characters towards specific places. Despite major transformations and improvements, Hillesden is still a small town, and people mostly know each other. However, it used to have an identity before the immigrants, as May and Alfred witnessed the gradual transformation of the town. May misses the old days, the local community she would live in.

In Thatcherite England, the economic recession ended with the closing of the local shops through which a sense of belonging would have been strengthened in the past. The new condition of England lacks identity since the rising shopping malls around Hillesden Rise symbolise globalisation and the demise of the local identities of the English towns. Consumerism emerges as the new quality of the contemporary youth; the hunger for shopping replaces love, care, and bonding, which appear as contradictory qualities of peculiar characters from different generations throughout the novel.

The change May and other inhabitants in Hillesden Rise experience is contradictory. On the one hand, the town has become livelier and more colourful through international investments. It is grey and hopeless in older parts where only the English live. Some other parts where many immigrants live appear more lively and colourful as they bring apparent change. Foreign investments, capital, and gentrification perpetuated a vast transformation as a result of which local shops closed, and 'Gigamart' replaced butchers. Even the bakery brings bread from Kilburn, which leaves May in a great shock of apprehension: "Rise was over, over, and May found the tears welling up again, and realized she was crying for herself and Alfred and the silly young couple they had once been. We liked it here. It was our – El Dorado. Once upon a time, it had all we needed" (*TWF* 100). Within the urbanised landscape of London during the 1990s, public spaces were subject to either outright denunciation or a lack of meaningful engagement by different characters in the novel. Alfred, May, and Dirk could not get accustomed to living in the new formation of

Hillesden Rise. They yearn for the older forms, the family, and the share they used to get from the Welfare state and its patriarchal organisation.

Throughout the novel, May is depicted as a devoted wife to Alfred. Her devotion exceeds interpersonal love, and it becomes a respect for the masculine deeds and values Alfred entitles. Hidden behind love and respect, May has often been complicit in Alfred's configuration of patriarchal power. She benefits from the patriarchal dividend by signing an invisible contract with her husband, in Deniz Kandiyoti's terms, a 'patriarchal bargain'. Kandiyoti suggests that some women use particular strategies to negotiate the constraints imposed by patriarchal systems: "They would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximise their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband" ("Bargaining with Patriarchy" 280). These women choose to conform to and accommodate gender norms and expectations to secure certain advantages or to minimise disadvantages within a given patriarchal system. These choices are influenced by the specific forms of patriarchy they live within. While these bargains may offer certain benefits or protections, they often come at the cost of accepting and perpetuating restrictive gender norms.

Many women might take subordinate roles in public in exchange for protection or elevated status within their households. The nature of these bargains can differ vastly depending on the cultural, social, and economic context. Several women, especially women in the contemporary Global North, have more complicated relations with patriarchy, which might simultaneously reflect resistance and complicity. While bargaining with patriarchy emphasises women's agency in navigating oppressive systems, these bargains do not always denote passive acceptance. They continuously negotiate, resist, and redefine mutual consent depending on changing contexts and personal circumstances. Even when some of these women seem to conform to patriarchal norms, their complex strategies of negotiation are born out of a need to maximise benefits and minimise harm within the given patriarchal structure.

Similarly, May benefits from Alfred's masculine entitlement in many ways. Her love and respect for Alfred fuels her nationalistic attitudes, which often overcome her individual

feelings: "I'm proud of him. The job he does. A big job for a little man. Looking after the Park. It's the best thing we've got. In summer I almost start to hate it, because I don't like his being out till ten, but I know the Park matters more than us" (*TWF* 13). May's unwavering sense of nationalism often takes precedence over her emotions. She holds Alfred in high regard, mainly due to his 'esteemed position' in the park.

May perceives Albion Park as a microcosm of the entire nation, and as such, she views herself as a small part of a greater whole. Her devotion to her country is evident in her actions and beliefs. Not only Alfred but also May is obsessed with a sense of duty: "Women spent their lives looking after men. And even that tiny skin-tag of irritation was comforting, because entirely familiar" (*TWF* 17). She does not prioritise her needs and feelings because she devotes herself to her husband, family, and nation. Therefore, May is complicit with Alfred's masculinist traits regarding her role in the national epic, as "Alfred could always depend on her. She had brought back his boots, when he asked her to. Had shoved them in his cupboard with the blooming greatcoat" (*TWF* 96). It is suggested that in the reproduction and reconfiguration of nationalist ideologies, women play a significant role. Apart from serving as symbolic figures for the nation, women embody particular sites for male honour. They are crucial in collectively delineating a nation's boundaries as protectors of their race through 'reproduction' and various cultural practices, such as raising children and participating in religious and cultural ritualistic practices. These practices construct and perpetuate specific ideas of national and cultural traditions which comply best with welfare states.

After the Second World War, the national concept of Britishness maintained itself in two main vital words: Welfare and the Empire. Alfred and May White, the 'gatekeepers' of the nation, struggle to keep these symbols alive. However, as the Empire loosened and the welfare state collapsed, the Whites faced a tragic dissolution in the neoliberal order. The neoliberal configuration of the state devastated numerous working-class and underclassmen. Because neoliberalism celebrates individual success, 'accepts' plurality, serves 'equal opportunity' for everybody regardless of their race and sex, and promotes possibilities of being upwardly mobile in contrast to sharp class divisions, especially the

white underclassmen began to lose the privileges they used to have since the foundation of the welfare state.

In particular*, The White Family* resonates with the ‘crisis of displacement’ of the white working-class Englishmen who felt victimised in the new order in peculiar ways. For Alfred White, all his family and the whole country metaphorically suffer due to the immigrants and recent policies to support them after the collapse of the welfare state. Because his self-definition of masculine identity is obtained from the power of the welfare state, he feels weakened and emasculated in the new order. Alfred believes that men of colour are responsible for decay:

> They’ve kept cutting down, the council have, they’ve gone on weakening us, year by year. […] That’s why they took the dogs away. The whole of the building at the back of our yard used to be kennels for the Alsatians. We used to patrol the Park in pairs, and each pair had an Alsatian with them. But no, they said people were getting upset, they said people felt we looked like policemen. They meant coloured people were getting upset. […] It’s because of them they took our uniforms away. […] Those uniforms were a godsend to us. One look and people could see what was what. So they didn’t argue the toss, did they? (*TWF* 173).

As seen in the quotation, Alfred feels the collection of values as the bricks of his masculine identity is eroding. The ‘godsend’ uniform, the aversive Altasians, and thus his power as a privileged white man is taken away. On a metaphorical level, Alfred dispatches himself on a mission to protect the collective values of the white Englishmen from invaders by “shooing them off it” (*TWF* 9). Alfred’s intolerance of foreign interference in Albion Park is manifest to his unwavering stance against ‘the other. For Alfred, who even discriminates between the British birds, flowers, trees, and foreign animals and habitats, those who are not English are mere threats to the whole nation.

Alfred’s anger and hatred against the ‘other’ reverberates men’s recurrent anxiety of displacement in contemporary England. When London became a multicultural metropole, many white English men felt threatened and developed some mechanisms to defend ‘their country’, ‘their families’, ‘their women’, and their masculine identities; in short, their ongoing power under the shadow of emasculatory threats. For these men, excessive nationalism became one of the most potent signifiers of masculinity. In such socioeconomic unrest, many men, especially white working-class men, end up with

discriminatory beliefs and attitudes. The growing hatred against the 'other' accelerated in the last few decades of the previous century, as the period was marked by a discernible shift towards challenging issues for men when their uncontested privileges were questioned or challenged.

In the Global North, most men found themselves helpless due to the rising unemployment rates, precarious working conditions, female empowerment by feminist gainings, and losing their authority as breadwinner fathers in patriarchal families. These men felt displaced when the symbol of patriarchal, legitimised and absolute power of the Great Empire gradually died:

> With the collapse of British power (and the end of the empire), Englishness, its fortunes seemingly linked to the standing of what had by then become the *United Kingdom*, lost its anchorage and is still (on the verge of the twenty-first century) unable to come to terms with the country's reduced standing and importance in the world (Haseler 2).

The collapse of the Empire resulted in a loss of power in the global competition for economic wealth, and such decadence was also mirrored at a national level. For many English men, what is in crisis is the crisis of the authority which they demanded in terms of economic safety, social rights, and legitimisation of patriarchal power. Similarly, Alice Ferrebe suggests that although "its mechanisms might be mistrusted for their interference with class hierarchies and paternal control of the family, [the welfare state]was for the most part accepted as the inevitable apotheosis of rational and patriarchal statehood" (*Masculinity* 106). In contrast, the neoliberal system promotes individual success and independence as the state quits its former responsibilities, leaving many men in unfair competition due to structural inequalities.

Such socio-economic conditions precipitate crisis discourse among disadvantaged men when the culture of production grows into the culture of consumption; thereby, most underclass young men have to learn how to serve in the "menial service operations [which] are regarded as unmasculine and demeaning" (McDowell 205). Accordingly, many young working-class men would define their masculinity to the extent they participate in the labour force. However, after the significant change in working conditions that the Global North has witnessed over the last fifty years, these young men

have begun to feel that they are ‘serving’ rather than ‘labouring’. Therefore, men’s contradictory experiences of work and labour and their association with masculinity contradict each other. It feeds debates on the ‘masculinity crisis’ due to the dominant fear of displacement of their historical roles as breadwinners.

In *The White Family*, Dirk epitomises the fear of these men, who cannot make room for themselves in a contemporary urban setting:

> So here was yet another thing I couldn’t get into. Every fucking thing has been closed to us. Jobs, football games, everything that matters. Girls, women, they’re closed to us. Not that I care, they stink of minge, but why should they think they’re better than us? We need money or photocards or qualifications or pass-words that we can never learn. We need skills or languages or posh bloody accents or cars or computers or ties or suits (*TWF* 214).

As the quotation shows, Dirk’s ongoing hatred is directly linked to his incapability to fit the norms of hegemonic masculinity in the neoliberal order. Dirk has neither a proper job, enough free time, nor financial sufficiency. This is because when George pays Dirk an extra fiver and lets him have a free afternoon, he feels different than before: “A free man. I’ve never really felt that. Free, or a man” (*TWF* 152). Nevertheless, when George decides to sell the “frigging shop” where Dirk “had been a frigging slave” (*TWF* 211) to a Pakistani investor, his racial hatred accelerates. For Dirk, the simple reason for his victimisation is the immigrants, as he believes “they took [his] job. They took [his] future” (*TWF* 284). Having difficulties integrating social life, Dirk is displaced and influenced by Alfred’s micro-nationalism. Inherited from the father, his hatred is based on the ungrown jingoistic fallacies:

> They’re all in it together, of course. Look around this bus and you can see it. Ninety per cent coloureds. Well, fifty, at least. And the driver’s coloured, so they’re on his side. And he has the fucking cheek to talk about English. As if they owned it. Our speech. Our language. (Tender exact money … that’s not proper English. Does a normal bloke use a word like ‘tender’?) The trouble is, they do own most things. They’ve taken over the buses, and the trains. And the bloody streets. You can’t get away from them (*TWF* 25).

Dirk feels as if the country was colonised by others, such as people of colour, Pakistani, Indians, and any other ethnic and racial minorities. He wants to conserve the language

and places where he has a 'natural' right as an English man. Dirk's hatred of minorities and immigrants results from his growing xenophobia, a fear of losing his privileges as a white Englishman.

Even in its simplest form, privilege is directly linked to a complex web of intersections such as race, class, gender, and sex. It is fascinating that privilege is almost always invisible to whom it should concern: the beholder. Men, as a group, are privileged due to their 'unmarked'[51] sex. However, there are many differences among distinct men who benefit from their sex. The disabled, the racialised, the non-binary, and the working-class men reflect significant peculiarities, and the idea of privilege becomes more and more complex for those men since they already benefit from the gender order as men. Yet, they cannot take an equal share of the 'patriarchal dividend' due to their marginalisation for specific reasons.

The removal of privilege due to marginalisation involves a fear of emasculation for men. In this respect, there is a reciprocal relationship between emasculation and marginalisation. The expectations men should meet include normative constraints and ideological function. Hence, hegemonic masculinity appears as a complex phenomenon which simultaneously operates in terms of constructing an identity and enaction. It is performative, an ongoing accomplishment reinforced by daily interaction and a concept shaped by social constructs and norms. People 'have' and 'do' gender simultaneously.

For West and Zimmerman, "doing gender involves a complex socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine natures" (126). Therefore, societal expectations of behaviours and characteristics based on gender are ingrained in individuals. Whether deliberately or not, these norms become integral to one's identity. Validation of gender identity occurs

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[51] According to Todd W. Reeser, men have long managed to remain in an 'unmarked' category due to their ability to stay hidden in gender enquiries. He further argues that " in Western culture, women are considered to have a gender, while men are more often considered genderless" (*Masculinities in Theory* 9). The remote operations of masculinity's dominant influence can also be challenged, destabilising male power and creating experiences beyond the dominant ideology. An understanding of the nuances of masculinity provides insight into crucial elements of culture and individuals, which have an impact on everyone in some way.

through daily interactions with others. Men, in particular, may feel compelled to demonstrate their masculinity to those around them consistently.

Many men in the Global North still hold onto traditional gender ideologies. Some of these men may face marginalisation when they do not conform to norms regarding economic sufficiency. However, it is worth noting that these men may have access to other forms of privilege based on their demographics. For instance, a working-class man may also be white and simultaneously benefit from the privileges of whiteness and maleness. What is fascinating is how these men navigate and utilise their privilege despite being limited, devalued, stigmatised, and marginalised by their social roles when they cannot meet the most celebrated norms of masculinity.

Marginalising the stigmatised hides and protects the privileges of some men over other men and women. Kimmel and Coston explain how marginalisation functions in hiding the privileges of some men over other men and women:

> Marginalisation requires the problematisation of the category (in this case, masculinity) so that privilege is rendered invisible. And yet, at the same time, marginalisation also frames power and privilege from an interesting vantage point; it offers a seemingly existential choice: to overconform to the dominant view of masculinity as a way to stake a claim to it or to resist the hegemonic and develop a masculinity of resistance (Kimmel and Coston, “Seeing Privilege” 163).

In highly gendered societies, the commonalities between people belonging to arbitrary categories such as race, class, and sexuality are often exaggerated. The behaviour of the most dominant group of wealthy, straight, and white men is idealised as the only appropriate way to fulfil one’s social role, which is then used to exclude and stigmatise those who cannot meet these standards. This way of differentiation is perpetuated through constant interpersonal interactions that reinforce and reproduce the social structure and end up with the marginalisation of some men and women concerning hegemonic masculinity.

It is crucial to notice that masculinity is not a singular, static, or unvarying concept. Instead, it is a highly diverse and multifaceted phenomenon, consisting of various versions that can coexist within and among different groups across different historical

periods. Nevertheless, this diversity and coexistence often necessitate the marginalisation of certain forms of masculinity; as Cheng suggests, “the dominant group needs a way to justify its dominance—that difference is inferior” (300). These men, primarily white, heterosexual, middle-class men, justify their superiority by emphasising the ‘inferiority’ of the marginalised men and women.

Several men who feel marginalised due to their poor conditions precipitate multiple crises to overcome their fear of emasculation. The crises of these men are often politicised through several means. “The development of this ‘crisis’ discourse”, Michael Ward argues, “overtakes other issues of poverty, racism, and structural inequalities that impact on wider society” (53). What is in crisis is the new socioeconomic conditions. However, the ongoing structural inequalities are concealed through multiple discourses perpetuated by the politics and policies of the conservative, authoritarian, populist leadership of the neoliberal age.

Such discourses help emerge masculine identities among disadvantageous men who appear as “a re-traditionalisation of older displays of working-class masculinity, through pain, heroism, physical toughness, and acts of homophobia” (Ward 54). Hence, working-class men might appear as a significant reference group. These men are often expected to be incredibly masculine, physically strong, stoic, and hard-working, and there is something particularly masculine about what they have to do in their daily practices. When members of the working-class men cannot meet such expectations, they are stigmatised and disenfranchised in the gender hierarchy.

In *The White Family*, distinct men feel disenfranchised due to their incapabilities of ‘doing gender’ as ‘real’ men and fail to enact masculinity regarding their sexual orientation, race, class, and physical inadequacy. Dirk embodies disenfranchisement from his physical weakness and inadequate skills for manly occupations and interests. He is marginalised and cannot find acceptance in the family, despite Alfred’s efforts: “He’d tried to teach Dirk football, rugger, cricket – Dirk was useless at all of them. He’d tried to teach Dirk right from wrong. He was a man of principle. A man with backbone […] and he never thought Dirk had much of it” (*TWF* 60). However, Dirk takes his father as

an ideal masculine figure, "[his] other claim to fame" (*TWF* 91). Concerning Alfred's false beliefs about the superiority of white men, Dirk aspires to "make [his] mark [and] get into the history books" (*TWF* 91). Dirk's ideas regarding white men's superiority over women and racialised men are fuelled by his father's racist views and discriminatory practices. Hence, he simultaneously subordinates women and people of colour: "Women and coloureds. They were everywhere. He'd never liked women" (*TWF* 25). Negotiating the father and accepting his ways of being a man, Dirk perpetuates racist, violent, and homophobic attitudes in his practices. Dirk harbours an intense hatred towards people who are different from him despite not having any specific beliefs about national or racial differences. He believes in his superiority over them and has adopted jingoistic ideas passed down to him by Alfred. Dirk is determined to save his generation during times of decolonisation.

Dirk believes that he must defend the 'fort' after Alfred: "The older generation is on its way out. Up to us lot now to keep the torch burning. […] Up to us to dam the flood" (*TWF* 154). His affinity with the father symbolises the sense of belonging to the nation wherein men have had uncontested authority and power. Symbolically, Dirk sees Alfred as a collection of values and power mechanisms that men have owned for a long time: "I want my dad to live to a hundred. I want my dad to go on and on. I used to pop into the Park on my lunch break and eat my sandwiches with him. It felt good, being with the Park Keeper. Being with the man in charge" (*TWF* 91). In the absence of his father, as Alfred is hospitalised and is close to death, Dirk lacks an exemplary male figure who would guide him towards 'manhood'.

As an underclassman, Dirk lacks most of the significant traits of masculinity in the new order his father once assumed. He wants to take his share of hegemonic masculinity, and he needs a cause to reconstruct his masculine self. Hence, he strives to be a member of "an army of men who accepted him" (*TWF* 211). A desire to be a group member might give him a heroic cause, which might look like a mission to save the nation from invaders. In this context, 'invaders' are immigrants who are possible obstacles for underclass white men regarding their economic privileges and employment opportunities in their local setting.

Dirk's animosity against immigrants intersects with class conflicts. While it is accurate to claim that underclass white men may experience some level of male privilege, they are not necessarily the primary beneficiaries. These men are often viewed as 'expendable' rather than 'valuable'. Berthold Schoene observes that experiencing the crisis of individual authority, many angry young underclassmen often turn their anger, violence, and hatred towards "the less privileged groups, such as women […] and homosexuals" (Schoene, *Angry Young Masculinity* 90). The 'crisis of masculinity' for underclassmen is often revealed through violence and hatred, as they are not sure of the power inherited by their sex. Fear and loathing of those men grow into hatred towards the 'weak'.

Dirk's struggle to save the country from the invaders may result from a fear of losing individual authority as an underclassman. He tends to instrumentalise his hatred with sexist assumptions, labelling the other as not being 'man'. His ignorance and hatred towards the 'weak' precipitate a crisis, which grows into xenophobia and homophobia. He fears that homosexual immigrants will colonise the whole country: "'They're poofs. They are, all Paki men are poofs'" (*TWF* 92). On the one hand, he defines himself as the victim of 'the other'; and, on the other hand, he feels victimised in the masculine order due to his homosexuality as an 'other' himself. Stuck between an endless desire to "prove to his father that he has a backbone" (*TWF* 36) and the wider expectations of society regarding hegemonic masculinity, Dirk feels detached from the gender order and doubts his masculinity in fear: "I am not a bloody wimp. I am not a bloody woman" (*TWF* 215). What Dirk suffers from is 'internalised homophobia'.

In his influential essay, "Homophobia: On the Cultural History of an Idea", Daniel Wickberg emphasises the complexities and contradictions of the term 'homophobia'. For Wickberg, homophobia has been quite different from other prevalent discriminations, such as sexism and racism, in that it "designates homosexuals as its objects and victims" (Wickberg 44). However, definitions of sexism and racism are not that blurred. While

racism refers to discrimination against a particular race, and sexism stands for discrimination against a specific sex, homophobia does not affirm clear-cut definitions[52].

Wickberg further argues that although racism, sexism, and homophobia are abundant issues in the Global North, and there have been numerous homophobes, sexists, and racists, it is interesting that there is no tendency for the logical theorisation on the rights of being one or explicit defends of such hate crimes. The reason for this covert support is the fact that "racism, sexism, and are widely recognised as negative and disparaging terms, terms that racists, sexists, and homophobes would not use for themselves" ("Homophobia" 42). Many groups that support 'white supremacy' and initiatives that are 'pro-family' would not name themselves by what their rivals call them. More importantly, among different ways of discrimination based on race, class, and sex, homophobia differs since it unpacks a cultural sensibility by giving explicit clues about sensitive attachments with religion and moral codes as social and hierarchical organisations of society.

In the broader perspective, Artur Brittan contextualises homophobia along with the formation of the bourgeoise class. When the bourgeoise class dominated Europe, they tended to mark themselves as the ideal human, as their self-image was equated with humanity. Hence, "in a disguised form, this self-image has also filtered into the Marxist account of the universal nature of class" (Brittan 167). When men as a marked group equated themselves with the universality of humanity, such 'transcendental pretence' grows into the body of a "male epistemological stance" (Brittan 167). Men who assume themselves as ideal put the normativity, and they never let the subordinated men access economic resources, decision-making mechanisms, and institutional power. Hegemonic

[52] The complexity of the term 'homophobia' is about the ambiguity of homosexuality per se. Homosexuality is a relative term, fluid in its definition. It connotes different meanings and understandings for peculiar regions and cultures. While it refers to same-sex intercourse for most European, white cultures, homosexuality is defined as highly controversial among several ethnic and religious groups. For example, within the macho culture of Latino men, only the penetrated are called homosexual, while the penetrator is called manly or masculine (Durell et al. 301). Hence, it depends on the role that partners assume themselves. Furthermore, discourses on the 'victimisation' of homophobes stem from the medicalisation of phobias in general. Because any phobia denotes a 'pathology', an irrational fear, a mental illness, homophobes often appear as victims rather than perpetrators of hate crimes. The pathology discourse helps homophobes get rid of their moral and legal responsibilities. For further interrogations on the terminology and its historical (re)configurations, see Gregory M. Herek's essay, "Beyond 'Homophobia': Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century" (2004).

masculinity determines who deserves what and claims the right to particular resources and opportunities. It is all about the privilege of some men over other men (in this context, homosexual men), women, and children.

The Foucauldian approach of subversion of the assumed 'reality and truth' concerning sexuality has foregrounded that 'transcendental pretence' is a mere illusion, which has been constructed through philosophy and science by men for the benefits of men. After Foucauldian deconstruction of the ideas about sex and its so-called 'nature', the rise of feminism and the gay rights movement directly challenged the traditional concept of heterosexuality as the default norm in political and cultural spheres. The emergence of this new concept has led to a more detailed understanding of how heterosexuality is constructed and reinforced as the dominant cultural and social norm and has highlighted the need for continued efforts to challenge the status quo.

Along with the rise of the gay rights movement and political deconstructions of feminism, although homosexuality begins to speak for itself, it does not mean that perversity discourses are challenged or subverted. The 'male epistemological stance' has found a new cause in recognising heterosexualism, which becomes the 'marked' feature of humanity. Despite several gains of the feminist and gay movements, 'hierarchic heterosexualism' is ready to counterattack. More advanced discourses and practices have been developed to counter these challenges and strengthen the existing defences for heterosexuality. In different settings, moral panic was fuelled when discourses on racism and fear of HIV dominated the 1980s and the 1990s, as the 'red scare' and 'anti-semitism' functioned similarly in previous decades.

According to Brittan, "the juxtaposition of anti-gay discourse and racism is not accidental. In both, there is an attempt to objectify and trivialise human intentionality" (172). The Nazis perpetuated hatred against the Jews by claiming that because Jews were sexually deviant and powerful, they corrupted the Aryan women. Akin to the traces of anti-semitism, homophobia embraces fierce passion and strong feelings. It is not simply a collection of disparaging remarks among some men or whimsy jokes told by a celebrity in mass media; instead, it is the contempt and hatred that gay men and women experience

daily. Like men of colour and Jews, gay people are perceived as a dangerous and deliberate insult to traditional masculinity. All are regulated through the norms of compulsory heterosexuality. At times, when the family and a particular marriage are under threat, 'the male epistemological stance' functions as a social glue by emphasising the 'importance' of families for nations and societies (Brittan 172).

The reason why men contempt and hate gay people is directly linked to 'hierarchal heterosexualism'. If one believes in the social construction of gender, it threatens the existing gender order, as gender identities are fragile. Therefore, 'hierarchic heterosexualism' describes the construction of a hierarchical system by the masculine self, which positions itself at the top of the hierarchy above all other genders and sexualities. This self is portrayed as being transcendental, rational, and unwavering in its place within the defined hierarchies of men. Thus, the enforced male identity, which is often defined by compulsory heterosexuality, does not tolerate contradictions or ambiguities about one's sexual orientation. Any deviation from heterosexuality is seen as a threat to the masculine identity. Because several power mechanisms of the state play a significant role in configuring sexual identities, questioning one's sexuality opens up the possibility of challenging moral authority. In other words, interrogating sexualities might reinforce a 'blurred' sexual identity and lead to losing control over the subjects in society.

Moreover, homophobia indicates a heterosexual ideology in that it is a direct threat to 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasised femininity'. The prevalent trait among heterosexual ideology that is reproduced by male bonding is that men define masculine identities by positioning themselves as the opposite of femininity and homosexuality. As Lynne Segal puts it: "To be 'masculine' is not to be 'feminine', not to be 'gay', not to be tainted with any marks of 'inferiority', ethnic or otherwise" (*Slow Motion* x). Hence, men seldom enact masculinity by refraining from assigning blame to any marginalised or subordinated group. Any form of 'pure' masculinity cannot be asserted except concerning what is defined as its opposite; therefore, masculinity is contingent upon the perpetual renunciation of 'femininity' and "the forced repression of the 'feminine' in all men" (Segal, *Slow Motion* 114). Currently, the identity of heterosexual men is often rooted in a chronic detachment from women and gay men, often institutionalised in their behaviour,

and such detachment results in misogynistic and homophobic attitudes. The links between sexism, homophobia, and compulsory heterosexuality establish the widespread belief that gay men are not real men. As heterosexuality is integral to the way contemporary societies in the Global North are organised, it is often seen as a natural, learned behaviour. When a man defines himself as being gay, he rejects the compulsion toward heteronormativity.

Furthermore, Kimmel and Coston argue that "[g]ender-nonconforming gay men may often feel marginalised within gay culture itself from other gay men, who are most likely to have experienced stigmatisation and may have been effeminate earlier in their lives" (172). For this reason, there have been hierarchies among gay communities, such as being effeminate and masculine the former of which "is highly stigmatised in the homosexual subculture" (Lehne 68). The history of camps among gay men dates back to the liberation movement when these polarised groups were divided into 'masculinists' and 'effeminists'. While the former tend to hold on to the hegemonic modes of masculine qualities, the latter oppose and challenge hegemonic masculinity by displaying gender nonconformity. Since then, masculinist gay men have secured their power by being complicit with hegemonic masculinity and subordinated effeminate gay men and women by assuming heterosexual masculine roles.

In *The White Family*, Dirk appears as a masculinist homosexual who assumes superiority to effeminate homosexuals and women due to his 'internalised homophobia'. His hatred is sometimes accelerated when he feels that he is not 'manly' enough. When his friends invite him to go to a football match, he thinks he is "invincible. He [is] more than himself. He [is] enough, at last" (*TWF* 210). However, noticing that they would be a gatecrasher, as they lack tickets, Dirk has to show his ability to jump over a wall. All his friends manage to enter the stadium, but Dirk fails and crashes his face into a cold stone. Left alone by his friends, Dirk feels emasculated and immediately turns his anger towards the 'weak': "That was the end. Then I knew I had to kill them. It didn't matter who, I would have to fucking kill them" (*TWF* 215). Dirk's hatred is triggered by shame due to the feeling of 'insufficiency' as a man. He compensates for his 'lack' through violence. The fear of unacceptance among other men leads him to prove his manhood by attacking the 'weak'.

Another example displays Dirk's unreasonable hatred and violence against the 'other'. When he gets drunk at the local pub, he sees his friends running after some men of colour. He joins them through a muddle of motives and chases the unknown 'enemy', as "the hunt was on" (*TWF* 251). During random wranglings and beatings, Dirk neither feels fear nor pain: "he was like invincible [again], one of the Dad's words for the British army, and he was a soldier, he was like Dad" (*TWF* 253). What is significant here is that Dirk's constant rememberings of the father recur when his courage, pretensions, and thus masculinity are tested.

Dirk's reverberant memories of his father during his peculiar actions recall Michael Kimmel's explanation of masculinity as "a homosocial enactment" ("Masculinity As Homophobia" 187), whereby he observes a strong correlation between the root causes of homophobia and men's fear of emasculation before the eyes of the father and other men. As Kimmel argues, the boy abandons his desire for his mother due to his fear of losing power and identifies with the father. The boy's identification with his father suggests being masculine and leads him to seek sexual relations with women to prove his heterosexuality. This lies at the root of one's sexual orientation that intersects with the successful performance of gender identity. Besides, the boy's fear of the father (and other men) does not end up with a closer affinity with the mother in search of protection. Instead, the boy believes he can overcome fear by identifying with the father. Hence, boys become men by identifying themselves with their oppressors ("Masculinity As Homophobia" 187).

Kimmel further argues that "the father is the first man who evaluates the boy's masculine performance, the first pair of male eyes before whom he tries to prove himself" ("Masculinity As Homophobia 188). A boy's father is the first man to assess his masculine abilities. He seeks validation primarily from his father, whose judgement will continue to influence him throughout his life. As the boy matures, other male role models, such as relatives, schoolmates, neighbourhood friends, teachers, and colleagues will also observe his actions. Moreover, countless past and present men constantly scrutinise his performance, making it impossible for him to be utterly free from masculine evaluation.

Many boys and men suffer from the constant fear of being seen as inadequate by others. This fear often stems from a sense of deception in their masculinity. To prevent others from seeing through them, they engage in hypermasculine practices, going extreme in their practices to prove their masculinity in the presence of other men.

At this point, it is crucial to emphasise that almost all men in *The White Family* suffer from their (absent) fathers, as they lack exemplary male figures to initiate them into manhood and strive to validate their masculinity in the eyes of other men. The mutual point among these men is the fact that they either grow homophobic tendencies to feel a belonging to a larger group of men or suffer from internalised homophobia as they cannot make room in the masculine hierarchy and remain subordinate to other men. Homophobia intersects with race in more complicated ways since subordinated men could also feel superior to marginalised men. Both the black and the white blame each other for being homosexuals, as heterosexual masculinity marginalises the other. Winston resents that homophobia is a prevalent issue among men regardless of their race: “At first he thought that only white men were queer because his brother said it was a white thing, that only white men were dirty perverts” (*TWF* 232). Likewise, Shirley has difficulties understanding the prevalent homophobia in black communities: “But what was it, she wondered, about black people and homosexuality? It was as if they thought only white men did it” (*TWF* 300). It can be challenging for Shirley, as a white woman, to fully comprehend and distinguish the complex power dynamics that exist within different groups of men. Although she acknowledges the existence of racial discrimination among men, she may not grasp its intersection with gender in shaping the prevalent notions of hegemonic masculinity.

However, despite being a highly educated man with a PhD in comparative literature, Kojo would have fallacies regarding gender and race. Although he “was liberal about most things, [Kojo] had been very uneasy about gay men” (*TWF* 300), and he sometimes “joked that all white men were gay, they didn’t envy [a black penis], they wanted it” (*TWF* 294). Because heterosexuality is still regarded as the normative gender and one of the fundamental traits of hegemonic masculinity, it functions to subordinate and marginalise ‘queer’ subjectivities while securing itself as an ‘unmarked’ category regardless of racial

and class differences. For several men, assuming a masculine identity is about a sense of belonging to a group of men with shared beliefs (in this context, a group of heterosexual men) and thus indicates unquestionable differences concerning others.

As a final remark, the resolution part of the novel reflects how several complexities, such as national identity, race, class, gender, and sex, intermingle with each other. Dirk murders Winston using Alfred's knife in Albion Park. Alfred and Winston are buried in the same cemetery on the same day. Hence, Gee successfully depicts the widespread ramifications of discrimination, which are socially constructed, constantly perpetuated, and appropriated by peculiar men. Besides, she also leaves little room for hope. Shirley is pregnant by Elroy and Thomas on the same day and gives birth to twin babies and finds her late daughter once forced to have her adopted. After Alfred's death and Dirk's self-mutilation, these two families from different races unite and remain under the same roof.

In conclusion, *The White Family* represents how the British reflect on the post-colonial condition concerning migration, xenophobia, homophobia, class struggles, and a sense of belonging. To a great extent, it operates to ask new questions about what it means to be men and men as fathers in contemporary Britain, as the novel could be read as a powerful reflection of the masculinity crisis caused by peculiar men's fear of displacement. The story successfully portrays the despair felt over the loss of the empire and the fear of economic recession that some indigenous inhabitants attribute to the presence of black migrants. Through the lens of the Whites, the novel offers a panoramic view of multicultural Britain, a bold and noteworthy addition to the collection of literature that explores British perceptions of life in a culturally diverse society. Although the novel is set in very few days, the memories and recollections of each character enable one to discern how precarious contemporary men feel in Britain, at times when the idea of the almighty British Empire demised, at times when the powerful monarchy has loosened; and thus, at times when men have recognised that they had already lost privileges for which they have hopelessly been searching for.

CONCLUSION

A brief survey of literary history reveals the profusion of father-son relationships that share similar themes. In their peculiar representations, fathers are frequently depicted as the founders of civilisations, institutions, communities, and households. They are often portrayed as powerful, influential figures who derive their authority from divine power and/or political legacies. Being the father of an idea, a belief, an invention, a constitution, a theory, a craft, a literary genre; in short, doing or making anything 'influential' and 'normative' has long denoted men and masculinities as figures of authority and power have long been in men's monopoly. Similarly, boys are expected to bear masculine qualities by sharing the father's power. Either negotiating with the father, accepting his power, learning how to be proper men from him or negating, overthrowing, and leaving him to attest their manhood, boys initiate themselves to manhood from boyhood and 'prove' their masculinity. The power struggle between fathers and sons has caused many conflicts between these men and boys, which have long remained hidden in plain sight.

Therefore, the primary aim of this dissertation has been to discuss men's hidden power as fathers by making their 'invisible' privileges 'visible' in literary representations. Enquiring three contemporary British novels, the study analysed the conflicting relationships between fathers and sons through relevant critical theories on men and masculinities. It has been observed that despite vibrant and fruitful research, discussions, and theorisations on mothers and daughters and mothers and sons in British novels through a feminist lens, the significance of the relationship between fathers and sons has been relatively under-researched. Despite men's historical authority and close affinity with power, enquiries about men and men as fathers as gendered beings have long remained out of interrogations, as critical theories on men and masculinities in different fields of social sciences and literary studies to shed light on men are quite recent. Thus, this dissertation addresses this particular gap in the current academic literature.

Within the emerging interrogations on men and men as fathers, many scholars, intellectuals, activists, and independent researchers from distinct fields have been currently delving into the complexities of father-son relationships to gain a more

comprehensive understanding of men and the challenges they cause and confront in contemporary society. Men have become the objects of inquiry in gender relations with the emergence of second-wave feminism, which brought light to the unequal distribution of power and wealth between men and women. Discussions on the differences between sex and gender have paved the way for analysing men as gendered beings, which yielded three perspectives: Men's Rights, The Mythopoetics, and the Profeminists. While defenders of Men's Rights have supported the superiority of men by emphasising either biological differences or discourses of monotheistic religions, the Mythopoetics have accepted unequal distribution of power between men and women. Yet, they blamed the contemporary conditions of post-industrial societies. Hence, it is seen that while the former group naturalise male supremacy, the latter argues that not only women but also men are the victims. However, the profeminist perspective attempts to challenge masculinist and sexist assumptions, critically analysing men in a network of gender relations and ultimately questioning the fundamental tenets of men's power, which has been detrimental not only to women and children but also to other men. Problematising men and masculinities regarding their relationship with politics, policies, and decision-making mechanisms enables us to see how women and some men remain disadvantaged in their access to opportunities such as economic resources, education, and legal rights.

Taking fatherhood as a core theme, this study has interrogated fictional representations of men and masculinities in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical context of (post)Thatcherite Britain. For specific reasons, the men and boys in the given novels experience conflicts in their relationships with each other and broader society. Their ongoing struggles reverberate the fear of losing privileges and rights as men and men as fathers. Hence, these men's anxieties are analysed in tandem with the repercussions of the 'masculinity crisis', perpetuated by particular discourses since the last few decades of the previous century.

Based on several research, analyses, reports, and theorisations in distinct fields such as legal studies, law, political studies, history, sociology, and literary studies that have been documented and discussed in separate chapters so far, it is crucial to acknowledge fathers as gendered beings and fatherhood as an establishment that has traditionally operated for

many men to exercise control. In contemporary British society, fathers can take on various roles. They may serve as protectors, preservers of tradition, providers for their families, and instructors for their children. Yet, it is seen that these fathers may also behave tyrannically, abuse or neglect to maintain their power, limiting their children's ability to fit into societal norms as healthier men and women. In many cases, these fathers serve as reinforcers of patriarchal structures, perpetuating the marginalisation of certain groups of men and women. Hence, throughout this dissertation, representations of fathers are discussed as neither innate nor biological but rather performative as social constructs. Distinct forms of fatherhood have been intricately linked to the metamorphosis of masculinities and practices of men.

Amidst emerging narratives written by men or about men, the novels examined in this study remain significant for peculiar reasons. Through chronological and critical examinations of *Amongst Women* (1990) by John McGahern, *About A Boy* (1998) by Nick Hornby and *The White Family* (2002) by Maggie Gee, this study has provided a panorama of a slightly more than a critical decade, the 1990s and onwards, that overlaps with notable structural and cultural changes reflected by these award-winning novels. Although each novel takes highly diverse topics as their subject matters, fatherhood is manifest as a common theme, whereby discourses on the 'masculinity crisis' unfold, as several men and men as fathers struggle to (re)place themselves in the (re)organisation of the family institution in contemporary Britain. The mutual point among these fictional narratives is their representations of men's 'crises', the 'crises' that reveal men's fear and precarity in neoliberal Britain, when the effects of politics and policies on reconfiguring fatherhood roles, fathers' rights, legal responsibilities such as alimony and custody issues and men's distinct practices were among the hottest debates.

Throughout this study, it has been observed that the conflicts between men and men, men and women, and men and boys in these novels are caused by struggles for power in the contemporary formation of the family. When these men feel that they are on the verge of losing their authority, they engage in different forms of violence, disobedience, and neglect, and they often assume themselves as victims rather than perpetrators, which echoes the discourses on the 'masculinity crisis'. Men's perpetuation of 'crisis' discourses

in (post)Thatcherite Britain intersects with several issues such as nationality, sexuality, religion, class, and race in tandem with politics and policies regarding family and fatherhood. Men and boys in these novels instrumentalise such issues either to maintain their authority and power or to voice the victimisation of men to regain their lost rights as men.

In this context, the first chapter of this dissertation has discussed that national identity moulded by Catholicism appears as a recurrent instrument for reconfiguring hegemonic masculinity, which is manifest in the perpetuation of the 'masculinity crisis' in *Amongst Women*. The analysis of the novel has unravelled the close association between nationalism and hegemonic masculinity, which are often intertwined and reinforced by one another. In *Amongst Women*, the transformation of the Irish State, the concept of family and the precarity of men in its new formation can be seen. It has been observed that men and boys in this novel struggle to make room in society at times of conflict when the historical reign of patriarchy among Irish families began to lose relevancy. During a very long period under Eamon De Valera's rule, the Republic of Ireland celebrated patriarchal families wherein men ruled with unquestionable authority. Assuming themselves as the founders of the Irish nation, many men attached themselves to specific attributes of hegemonic masculinity, which denoted the cult of hardman, a strong, brave, hardworking breadwinner of the Irish family. For Irish men, these qualities were the most celebrated norms of fatherhood, as they signified the collective values of the Irish State. The formation of the Irish State prioritised many privileges of men in patrimonial families who could rule in the household as the defenders of their nation.

Meanwhile, some women in *Amongst W*omen are submissive to men, and they are kept at the bottom of the hierarchy. Yet, others question the father's authority and challenge it to some extent. When men and men as sons in the novel are scrutinised, it has been noted that negotiation and negation are evident. Negotiation with the father would enable men to acquire and maintain their power, while negation allows them to assume new masculinity traits to maintain power. The father and his sons are in an endless struggle to secure their authority. When the idea of nation-states is replaced by the neoliberal states, men who had long configured their masculine identities through the values of nationalism

felt displaced and struggled to adapt, as they felt insecure in contemporary conditions. In this novel, the younger generations who depart to England to pursue better opportunities for education and occupation were perceived as a direct threat to the nation and its founding fathers, who felt emasculated and disillusioned.

Throughout the second chapter of this dissertation, it is acknowledged that the 'masculinity crisis' has also been recurrent among middle-class secular white men. The precarity of these men has been unravelled when many women preferred to pursue a single life, having children out of marriage, and seeking their rights for custody and alimony from biological fathers. Focusing on the metropole life in Britain under the harsh conditions of neoliberalism, the chapter has foregrounded that middle-class men have been searching for exemplary father figures, as they have already lost an essential power domain, the patrimonial family. Absent/present fathers and 'not good enough' mothers have triggered discourses on the 'crisis' perpetuated by these men.

Making particular emphasis on the reconstruction of new masculine identities that align with politics, policies, and discourses on gender and family in the last two decades of the previous century, the chapter has foregrounded how these men and men as fathers assume fatherhoods in the frame of rights rather than responsibilities. In the wake of the new millennium, when class boundaries blurred, when living in metropolised London required different abilities and skills to survive, and when women resisted for their equal rights to access education, economic resources, safer professions, and independent lives, some men, especially white middle-class men, resented for being victimised out of the fear of displacement. The representations of 'new man' and 'new lad' display how men could reconcile with the new conditions in urbanised London. While the former rejects traditional father figures, underestimates biological fatherhood, and seeks an exemplary man as a 'new father', the latter rejects maturation and pursues a life as a late adolescent.

The fictional characters in *About A Boy* embrace 'new man', 'new lad', and 'new father' to reconfigure their masculine identities without exemplary father figures. Throughout the chapter, it has been discussed that disseminating such male stereotypes in fiction is not arbitrary. Instead, they are the products of a culture industry backlashed against

progressive discussions on gender equality and the family institution. When many women participated in the professions that had been defined as ‘manly’, when they began to engage more in academia, business, and commerce, and when few of them achieved higher positions in companies and organisations, when they began to access economic resources and power mechanisms, and when they rejected to be named as wives of other men and to be burdened with all responsibilities in the household, several men have founded themselves in ‘crisis’ and pursued official rights and asked for legal improvements for equal opportunities. Hence, on the one hand, these stereotypes have operated to whitewash men’s historical practises and affinities with power. On the other hand, they have functioned to teach middle-class men and boys how to cope with the new conditions by offering a few ways for amelioration, as men have also been burdened with overwhelming responsibilities for long. It is noted that what matters is not families but emotional connections and supportive environments for boys, as being a father in the new formation of families comes up with new burdens.

Despite their awareness of men’s privileges in contemporary society, these men have resented for lacking ‘emotional’ bonds with women, children, and other men. They recognise that men should grow closer friendships with women and other men, share their feelings, and eliminate the traits of traditional masculinity, which are harmful rather than beneficial. On the one hand, the (dis)functionality of traditional families and their necessity for children during their maturation process are questioned. On the other hand, men and boys yearn for families through which they can (re)configure their masculinities and maintain the power they have obtained for a long time. In the absence of their fathers, these men (re)generate masculine identities in homosocial settings, learning how to share their feelings and emotions and fit better in society, whose values have been redefined in the context of ‘Cool Britannia’. Hence, the initiation to manhood from boyhood has been accomplished by negating the biological father and negotiating with example father figures who have been identified with the *zeitgeist* of the era.

The third chapter of this dissertation has delved into the representation of men, masculinities, and the peculiar meanings of fatherhood in *The White Family* in the context of post-colonial Britain. It has been observed that the novel embodies representations of

masculinities in complex and multifaceted ways, reflecting a range of attitudes and experiences of men and fathers in 'crisis' in contemporary London. The 'crisis' generated by these men has resulted from a fear of 'displacement' and aligns with the perpetuation of different forms of violence and hatred. It has been noted that being a 'true' Englishman was degraded to heterosexuality and whiteness, and men's fear of displacement was directed towards the 'enemy within', the homosexuals and racial subjectivities. Hence, perceptions of race, class, and sexuality have been questioned along with the new formation of the traditional family, which had long been reigned by figures of authority and power.

However, it has been suggested that the new formation of the family, in tandem with the neoliberalisation of the state, interferes with men's ongoing privileges. Men, especially white English men who lost their previous status, have been mobilised by the Conservatives and perpetuated the fear of emasculation. Assuming themselves as the real owners of the country, the white English men blamed immigrants and the racialised men for the economic collapse, whether of African, Caribbean or Asian origin, became the target of white men's anger.

Moreover, among the vast and diverse themes in *The White Family*, class conflicts and their interconnectedness with discriminating attitudes have been highlighted. It has been observed that the reflections of the creed of the New Right in Thatcherite Britain overlap with the attitudes of many men and women in the novel. Since Margaret Thatcher's radical economic attempts raised great expectations among the British, her views on social and moral issues remained hidden as the public focused on the myth of individual prosperity. Regular indications of immigration control were not acknowledged as a fundamentally racist issue, constant emphases on the British identity were underestimated, and grave insistence on going 'back to basics' in terms of moral values was seen as a marketing strategy to sell her economic program. Feeling victimised by the immigrant policies of the previous governments, affected by the economic recession, experiencing insecurity in their precarious jobs or unemployed in large numbers, many working-class and underclass communities are mobilised, fuelled by the homophobic and xenophobic discourses perpetuated by politics, policies, and culture. Paralysed in the new

condition of Britain, when the footprints of the glorious Empire were eroding, when the idea of the welfare state was collapsing, when the myth of the patriarchal family was shattering, white Englishmen lost their founding fathers and dispersed into different directions. Through the analysis of *The White Family*, it has been noted that those who negotiated with the father and assumed the masculinity traits retrieved from him ended up in a catastrophe. The ones who negated the father and the collective values he embraced have felt the fear of displacement and regenerated new masculine identities far from being progressive.

Overall, when interrogated together, these three novels portray a picture of commonalities between fathers regarding the conflicting relationships with their sons. It has been acknowledged that men in these novels are not the victims of the new order, and their crisis tendencies are neither natural nor biological. The so-called masculinity crisis is a collective fallacy which is often perpetuated deliberately. It is about men who confront losing taken-for-granted privileges at a specific period when class boundaries are blurred, when fatherhood is (re)defined by responsibilities rather than rights, and when identities concerning gender, nation, and ethnicity are questioned. Therefore, if there is no masculinity crisis but only discourses of crisis articulated by men for the benefit of men, and if these discourses accelerate at specific times in particular settings, then it is crucial to scrutinise representations of men in fictional narratives of the same era. Written in slightly over a decade, analysing these three novels regarding their representations of men and fathers has provided the benefit of understanding how masculinities have been constructed in contemporary society. If writing fiction and creating fictional characters in a fictional world opens up endless possibilities of imagination, then there is a potential to tell the 'untold' and voice the 'unvoiced'. In this regard, this dissertation has followed the footprints of the textual strategies that these authors (un)intentionally pursued to delineate men and fathers in a network of power relations. Finally, there is still a considerable gap in the field. Further interrogations need to explore the literary representations of men, masculinities, and fatherhood as a power domain at the intersection of issues such as ageing, disability, and same-sex marriages.

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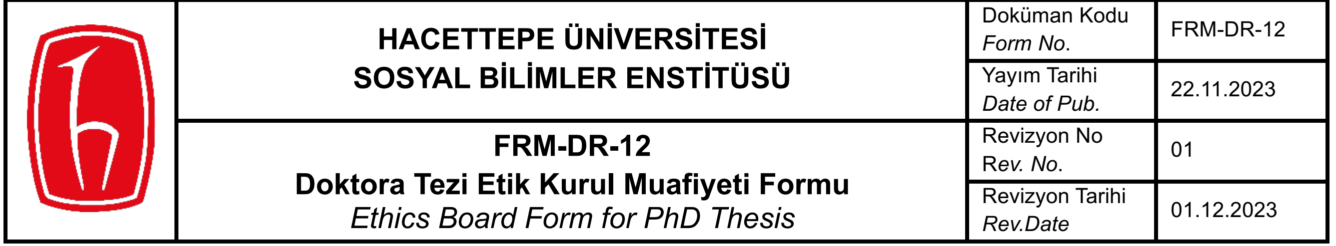

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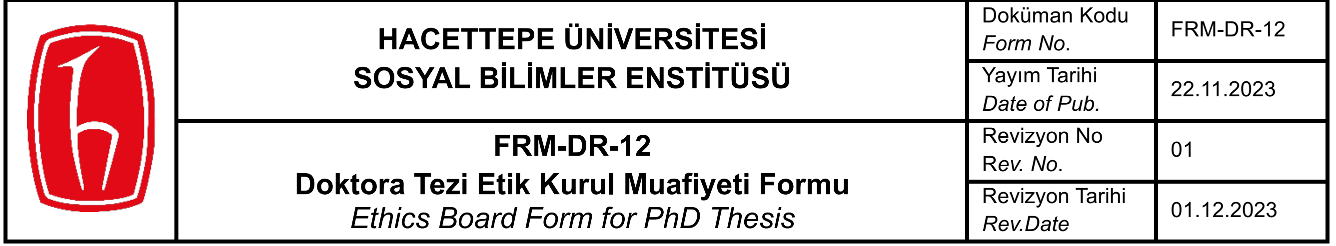

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