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Too Soon for Post-Feminism: The Ongoing Life of Patriarchy in Neoliberal America

Sherry B. Ortner

In this paper, I seek to bring "patriarchy" back into focus in ways that make sense to a twenty-first century American audience. In the first part of the paper, I discuss the ways in which "feminism" has fallen, or is being pushed, off the contemporary political agenda, leaving a political vacuum with respect to, among other things, patriarchy as a system of power. In the second part of the paper, I use a number of films as texts to show how patriarchy in this sense persists quite vigorously and often brutally in contemporary society, not only as a thing in itself, but also as a form of power that intersects with, and organizes, major institutions of twentieth- and twenty-first-century capitalism: the industrial production site, the military, and the corporation. Finally, I reflect on the films not only as cultural texts, but also as political interventions that at least partially counter the post-feminist tendencies discussed in the first part of the paper.

Keywords: Patriarchy; Power; Capitalism; Intersectionality; Film

Feminism can be seen as one of the great resistance movements of the twentieth century. It was tremendously successful, both in the sense of achieving many of its goals and in the sense of attaining a virtually global reach. Now, however, feminism appears to be in a state of crisis. Young women are said to be "post-feminist", while those who identify as feminists are under attack as handmaidens of neocolonialism and neoliberalism.

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But patriarchy is still with us—"us", for purposes of this paper, being the USA in the early twenty-first century—in many spheres of life. I emphasize the issue of patriarchy as a particular way of focusing feminist theory and politics. Most people think of feminism as being about "women", and of course that is true, but it is only part of the story. In addition, many people think of feminism as being about "gender", about the cultural division of the world into male and female persons, and—here linking up with queer theory—about other forms of gendered identities (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Butler 1990). Of course that is true too, but again it is only part of the story. For both "women" and "gender" exist, at least in the modern world, only as elements of a larger formation of power called patriarchy, and that will be the focus of this paper.

Again this paper is confined to patriarchal formations in the USA in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While arguably patriarchy is a global, or near-global, phenomenon, its significance in other parts of the world is the subject of intense debate, as will be discussed briefly later in this paper.

Patriarchy in the USA today is more fragmented than it once was, less monolithic and homogeneous, as a result of a century or so, on and off, of feminist activism. Yet it continues to play an often invisible, but highly damaging, role in contemporary social life. The main point of this paper, then, is to try to bring patriarchy back into focus in ways that will make sense to, and perhaps have a galvanizing effect on, a twenty-first century audience. In the first part of the paper, I will discuss an expanded version of the idea of post-feminism. In the second part of the paper, I will try to show how patriarchy persists quite vigorously in contemporary society, not only as a thing in itself, but also as a form of power that organizes and shapes major institutions of twenty-first century capitalism: the industrial production site, the military, and the corporation. The intertwining of patriarchy with other forms of power and dominance is the other key point of the paper. I see this intertwining as a kind of macro-version of Kimberlé Crenshaw's very productive concept of "intersectionality" ([1991] 2007), in which various forms of power cross-cut, cross-fertilize, and amplify one another.

Varieties of Post-Feminism

Starting in the late 1980s, feminist scholars began identifying a condition they called "post-feminism" (Rosenfelt and Stacey 1987; Traube 1994; Tasker and Negra 2007; McRobbie 2009; for summary, see Ortner 2013, Ch. 6). Originally it was meant to describe a new consciousness among younger generations of women. The argument was that younger women today have both incorporated the fruits of the earlier ("second wave") feminist movement and rejected the idea of, or the necessity for, continuing to pursue feminist goals. Put more strongly, younger women are said to view that earlier movement as embodying and advocating a style of femininity/femaleness with which they do not want to be associated: "[P]ostfeminism signals more than a simple evolutionary process whereby aspects of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture … It also simultaneously involves an 'othering' of feminism … , its construction as extreme, difficult, and unpleasurable" (Tasker and Negra 2007, 4). Although we have little solid data, ethnographic or otherwise, on what "young

women today" are actually thinking, and although we do not even know which "young women today" are in question, in terms of class, race, age, etc., two things seem fairly clear: that even if younger women have not completely rejected feminism, they are extremely ambivalent about it (see Aronson 2007; Ortner 2013);[1] and that most younger women find the label itself extremely problematic. For one small example of the latter point, in a recent interview with the American Idol (talent show) winner Kelly Clarkson (b. 1982), Clarkson was asked whether she viewed herself as a feminist. "No", she replied, "I wouldn't say feminist—that's too strong. I think when people hear *feminist*, it's like, 'Get out of my way, I don't need anyone'" (*Time*, 11 November 2013, 60).

But here let me expand the scope of the idea of "post-feminism". At the same time that younger generations of women are said to be distancing themselves from feminist ideals, or simply from the feminist label, there are challenges coming from other directions as well. The first of these stems from long-standing tensions between "Western feminism" and scholars of gender in other parts of the world, going back at least to Chandra Talpade Mohanty's path-breaking essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" (1984). The issues here, to condense severely, include the idea that Western feminism is excessively focused on female autonomy, which is not necessarily seen as a desirable goal by women/feminists in the global south; and that Western feminism is excessively focused on challenging "patriarchy", when other issues, such as poverty, have greater priority for many women/feminists in the global south (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod 2002, 2013).

These concerns have played a major role in shaping several influential recent ethnographic studies (Ong 2003; Abu-Lughod 2005; Mahmood 2005). These studies prominently critique "feminism" in some form as seeking to impose anti-patriarchalism, as well as Western and/or middle class and/or "liberal" values of personal autonomy, on non-Western women and communities. These critiques may well be quite justified in their specific contexts, and in any event the issues behind the post-colonial critique of feminism are intellectually, ethically, and politically very complex. Space forbids engaging with them substantively here; what I point to with these examples is not the substance of their arguments, but their *effect*: another kind of post-feminism.[2]

Finally, and most recently, we have Nancy Fraser's attack on feminism as having become "a handmaiden of neoliberal capitalism" (2013). Fraser provides an interesting capsule summary of second wave feminism as promising "two different possible futures", one in which "gender emancipation went hand in hand with participatory democracy and social solidarity", and the other in which "it promised a new form of liberalism, able to grant women as well as men the goods of individual autonomy, increased choice, and meritocratic advancement" (p. 2 of printout). Now, however, "feminism's ambivalence has been resolved in favour of (neo)liberal individualism" (p. 3 of printout). The poster child for this shift seems to be corporate executive and billionaire Sheryl Sandberg whose best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) focuses on what women need to do to get ahead in the corporate world. I agree with Fraser that both tendencies were present in second wave feminism, although unlike Fraser, I think they are both still actively in play. But again, this is not

the place to engage substantively with these issues. Rather I introduce Fraser's argument as one more version of, and contributor to, the broader post-feminist climate.

Looking at these diverse, partially converging, and apparently intensifying aspects of what amounts to not only a post-feminist condition but also a post-feminist movement, one wonders whether the idea, and/or the label, of "feminism" is so fatally tainted by now that it could not or should not be revived. Feminism seems to have become what Erving Goffman once famously called a "spoiled identity", which many are evidently eager to reject.[3] And yet the original *raison d'etre* of the feminist movement, the gender inequalities produced and reproduced within a particular formation of power called "patriarchy", lives on. Indeed I argue that it is patriarchy and not feminism that, *pace* Fraser, thrives under neoliberal capitalism. This brings us to the rest of this paper.

Patriarchy as a System of Power

One of the successes of the earlier feminist movement was to put the idea of male dominance and/or patriarchal power on the table, and to argue that gender inequality worked in much the same way as racial inequality: one group (people of color, or women) was considered in some way to be essentially and fundamentally inferior, and thus open to control and domination, or discrimination and exclusion, by the other group (white people, or men). The original feminist political project then was to work towards a state of gender equality in which neither sex was considered superior/inferior, and in which neither sex had the right to dominate or discriminate against the other. But the American feminist movement has gone through many changes since that time, under the impact of challenges from minority, queer, and (as just discussed) third world women. One way to summarize these changes is to say that the issue of male dominance or patriarchy has become on the one hand more muted, and on the other hand more complicated, more intertwined with other forms of inequality like race, class, and sexuality. This intertwining, which Crenshaw ([1991] 2007) called "intersectionality", is a critical characteristic of all contemporary forms of inequality and it will be central to the present paper as well.[4]

I begin with a few definitions and clarifications. First, I have so far been using the term "patriarchy" very loosely, as an umbrella term to cover the whole range of ideas subsumed within phrases like "male dominance", "male superiority", "sexism", and so forth. Technically, patriarchy is only one form of male dominance, lodged in the figure of the father, and often enveloped in an ideology of protection and benevolence as well as domination and control. But the other terms have their own problems, and I choose "patriarchy" as having the particular virtue of evoking the idea of a social and political formation, rather than the image of a cave man with a club.

Second, while issues of patriarchy may seem irrelevant or of secondary importance to some groups, sectors, and classes of women, for a wide variety of reasons, I will argue later in this paper that the global macro-structure, the overarching system of states, corporations, and military organizations, remains a massive patriarchal system, and has to be addressed as such. That is, many women may feel that they experience little

patriarchal oppression in their personal lives; many other women may feel that a patriarchal family and kinship system offers more benefits than costs in the modern world; in both cases—and others—there may be a sense that the important political struggles lie elsewhere. My point, however, will be that that "elsewhere" is itself organized on complex patriarchal as well as political–economic principles that need to be identified and challenged.

At this point, then, I need to focus down on the classic definition of the term, which literally means the rule of the father. Within this definition, patriarchy can be seen as having a particular structure, a particular organization of relations of power that involves not only men over women, but also men over other men. Furthermore, while one can think about patriarchy in pure form—and many all-male institutions approximate that form—in general it is always intertwined with other structures of power: colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, racism, and so forth.

I begin by sketching out a model of patriarchy assembled from a variety of scholarly and popular representations, everything from Freudian theory and feminist theory to ethnography, myth, and movies. I do not try to provide a systematic genealogy of the concept here, as it would take us much too far afield. I simply seek to expose a model or structure that is common to all the representations. In the present section, I will present the basic architecture of the model. In a later section, I will look at three films to consider a variety of elaborations, extensions, and nuances of the basic model, as it plays out in different contexts.

Although patriarchy is a system of social power, it is also a system of cultural categories and personal identities. As a system of cultural categories, it is grounded in a conceptual division of the world into two (and only two) kinds of gendered persons, "women" and "men", defined as both different and unequal. "Women" and "men" are shown in quotes, highlighting the culturally constructed, and normatively imposed, nature of these categories (Ortner and Whitehead 1981). Furthermore, the categories, which are defined as fundamentally and essentially heterosexual, function as both classifiers and identities. It is through the play of life by real people within patriarchal social formations that those categories/identities are reproduced.

Patriarchy as a formation is very old, but probably not (as Freud would have it [1950]) primordial. While pre-state societies probably had varying forms and degrees of male dominance, from virtually egalitarian to highly unequal (Ortner 1996), patriarchy as defined here—minimally as organized around the power of a father-like figure—probably emerges as part of the origins of the state in prehistory (Ortner 1996). If one were going back to nineteenth-century theory on the subject, the relevant theorist would be Engels ([1942] 1972) as much as Freud, although both of them are quite far from contemporary understandings.

Most contemporary societies are not patriarchal from top to bottom, if they ever were. Most are more complex, with multiple arrangements of gendered power, as a result of both the fragmenting forces of modernity and the recurrent cycles of feminist politics. But one does not have to look far to find very clear-cut examples of patriarchal structures of power at work *within* virtually every society in the world today, as it

remains a formidable way of organizing not only gender relations, but also other major forms of power and domination.

Patriarchy is a "structure" in the technical sense; it is a set of relations between relations.[5] It is organized around three dyads and their many kinds of interaction: (1) the relationship between a patriarchal figure of some sort and other men; (2) the many homosocial but heterosexual relationships among the men themselves; and (3) the relationships between men and women. In the most classic form of the patriarchal structure, there is a leader who both rewards and punishes the men; there is a body of men who compete among themselves for status and power within the group and in the eyes of the leader; and there are relationships and non-relationships with women, who are either excluded from the group, or included on condition of being subordinated and controlled.

The ethos of different patriarchal structures can vary a great deal. A Buddhist monastery is a patriarchal structure in all the ways just described, but it is (meant to be) productive of peace and spirituality. An elite all-male college is a patriarchal structure, but the emphasis is on the production of a kind of genteel upper class masculinity. In many cases, however, patriarchal organization is mobilized in the service of producing a kind of aggressive masculinity, capitalizing on and intensifying the competitiveness endemic to the male group in these formations. In such cases, the exclusion of women tends to be more absolute, and the boundaries between "men" and "women", "masculinity" and "femininity", tend to be more heavily patrolled. Any breach of these boundaries, like the entry of women into all-male occupations, or into the military, tends to provoke very strong reactions.

The question of breaching social boundaries will be central to several of the film interpretations to follow, and needs a few words here. The issue was very powerfully theorized by Mary Douglas, whose book *Purity and Danger* came out in 1966 but remains relevant and useful to this day. Building on an earlier work by Arnold van Gennep (1960), Douglas argued that the breaching of social boundaries creates "pollution", a state or condition in which the integrity of the group has been weakened or degraded. The underlying model here is the body, which is vulnerable to both the entry of potentially dangerous matter from the outside (food, poison, etc.), and the loss of vital matter from the inside (blood, semen, etc.). From this perspective, the borders of certain kinds of strongly bounded groups, and strongly fortified identities, are similarly fraught with danger; violation of those boundaries will tend to provoke strong, and sometimes, violent reactions. The relevance of this will be clear shortly.

Brief Detour: Films as Multi-Purpose Texts

In the next few sections, I will be using films as texts that tell us something real about patriarchy in the contemporary USA. Two of the films are documentaries, and one is a feature film based on a true story. I will be using the films primarily as ethnographic and/or cultural texts, that is, as in one way or another displaying the patriarchal dynamics just described. This requires some explanation, although I will have to be very brief.

I have recently completed a study of the world of American independent film, devoted to making films that stands outside of the Hollywood mainstream (Ortner

2013). As I discuss at length in the book, independent film people see themselves as trying to tell the truth about the world today, as opposed to (stereotypical) Hollywood, which is invested in fantasy and illusion for the sake of "entertainment". The world of independent film includes both features (fiction) and documentary, although even with features there is a commitment to an ethic and aesthetic of realism. As several observers have remarked, there is a kind of documentary impulse throughout much of independent film, across the feature/documentary divide.

As in much of film studies, one could approach these films by, in a broad sense, deconstructing them—taking them apart for their ideological biases, for their modes of subjectivation of viewers, and so forth. Even documentaries, which claim to be factual, have been the subject of this kind of deconstructive work; in fact they make especially inviting targets for ideology critique. In response to this, however, there is a very interesting literature in film studies about the truth and reality claims of documentaries: On the one hand, scholars agree that documentaries are constructed and manipulated like all (filmic) texts; on the other hand, scholars also agree that documentaries must be understood as pursuing a truth-telling agenda in ways that are different from other kinds of film, and must be interpreted at least in part from that point of view (Nichols 1991; Williams 1998).

Following this latter line of thinking, then, I will treat the films as critical realist accounts of the world we live in. This approach has a number of different components. First, I treat some of the films as "ethnographic", as describing some social and cultural reality (in this case patriarchy), represented at least in part from the point of view of those who inhabit that reality. Second, I treat one of the films as a cultural text, that is, a text not explicitly about patriarchy, but revealing it upon interpretation.

At the same time, all films must be seen as interventions in the public culture, that is, as representations within a space of other representations, aligning with some and contesting others (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). Thus I treat the films not only as realist accounts, but also as critical realist accounts, taking a position vis-à-vis both the object being described and the other representations with which they are in conversation. A dimension of this critical stance applies specifically to political films, mostly but not entirely documentaries: the films are meant to provoke action, either in the sense of getting people politically activated, or in the sense of having some kind of impact on policy, or both (Nichols 1991; Gaines 1999).

All of these functions of film, and especially of the kinds of realist films characteristic of American independent cinema, will be visible at one point or another in the discussions that follow. I will sometimes treat the films as descriptive ethnography, sometimes as texts requiring interpretation, and eventually as political interventions in American public culture on the subject of patriarchy today.

Patriarchy in Neoliberal America

I turn now to three films in order to make a number of points. I want to show first that, unfortunately, patriarchy is alive and well in the USA today and still doing a lot of damage. Second, I will use the films to look at variations in the basic model, and to

bring out more clearly the variety of harms a patriarchal order inflicts, not only on women, but also on many men, and on persons who do not neatly fit the gender categories. Finally, I want to show how the model or structure plays out both in itself and in parasitic ("intersectional") relationships with other forms of power in an advanced capitalist society: the class structure, the military, and the predatory neoliberal economy.[6]

North Country (Caro 2005)

North Country is a fictionalized account of a true story (Bingham and Gansler 2002) about a woman, called Josie Aimes in the film, who leaves a physically abusive husband and takes a job in the iron mines of Minnesota. The year is 1989, with still only a handful of women working in the mines. The male miners are misogynist in the extreme, but when Josie (Charlize Theron) complains about this to her higher ups, they try to shut her down. After endless and violent harassment, she finally quits, but hires a lawyer and brings a class action suit against the mine owners. The suit succeeds, and establishes one among several legal precedents for all subsequent sexual harassments suits in the USA.

The film is recognizably "feminist" in the classic sense, telling a story of a woman's struggle against discrimination, not as some autonomous neoliberal agent, but on behalf of the working women in general. Again I will return to the overt politics of this and the other films in the conclusions. Here I want to use the film as an ethnographic text, providing a virtual textbook illustration of a well-developed patriarchal order. I said above that a basic patriarchal structure has three intersecting components: the relationship of the patriarchal figure to the group, defined as a group of heterosexual men; the organization of relations among the men, bonded but also competitive among themselves; and the exclusion of women or their inclusion only under male control. Let us then start with the patriarchal figures, the "fathers".

The film is full of fathers, literal and metaphoric, and indeed has a hierarchy of fathers, all of whom are problematic vis-à-vis Josie. After being beaten by her husband, Josie returns to her parents' house. Her own father (Richard Jenkins) looks at her bruised face, seemingly with concern, but then says, "So … Did he catch you with another man?" We understand immediately that the father, who is a miner himself, is with the men. Next, after being both harassed and threatened by the men in the mine, Josie complains to her immediate boss, who gives her no sympathy and tells her she must learn to take it. This is the second father who sides with the men and will not help. Finally, after further and more severe harassment, Josie plucks up her courage and decides to call on the owner of the mine, who had led her to believe she could come to him with her problems. But when she gets there, he is surrounded by men, including her boss, and is told that she must either learn to get along or quit. The mine owner is of course the father of fathers, the boss of the boss; further both the owner and the boss are the bosses of her own father, and all of them have power over Josie.

Now let us look at the group of men, in this case the miners. They appear in the extreme form of the homosocial/heterosexual male group: highly misogynistic, solidary among themselves, and hostile to Josie and the handful of other women miners. They harass the women at work in the most extreme ways short of raping them. There is also a meeting at which they curse the women with vile language, yell with rage, stamp their feet, and altogether seem like a mob about to lose control. Here I want to make two different points.

First, the forms of harassment at work fit Douglas's model of pollution sketched briefly above. There is a virtually visible boundary around the male group and its territory; the women have breached the boundary, and the men respond by mobilizing the material signs of pollution: faeces are smeared on the walls of the women's locker room; someone masturbates on an article of clothing in one of the women's lockers when she is not there, leaving a pool of semen; a woman is locked into a portable toilet, which is rocked back and forth as she screams for help, and then finally turned over, covering her with shit.[7]

But the second point to be made about the men's behavior is historical. As noted above, patriarchal male groups, although always to some degree misogynistic, are not always and necessarily violent. In this case, however, two forms of pressure have been put on the whole arrangement, as both a patriarchal and a capitalist structure. In terms of the patriarchy, we learn at the beginning of the film that the first woman had taken a job in the iron mines in 1975, clearly an effect of the feminist movement of that era. The film is set in 1989, and we understand that Josie is only the most recent in a line of intrusions by women into this male territory, threatening the men in terms of their masculine identities. But the 1989 date is also relevant for the men as workers. The 80s are the time in which the American industrial economy is beginning to collapse, with the closing of factories and other industrial facilities (such as mines) becoming a regular occurrence (as summarized in Ortner 2013, 17, with references). The men then are doubly threatened, as both men and workers; they close ranks and react in ways predicted by Douglas's model.

And finally, what about the women? Within the family we see Josie's mother (Sissy Spacek) as a traditional wife, accepting of the husband's authority. She initially does nothing to contradict or undermine the father's hostile treatment of Josie, and in the early part of the film actively supports the idea that Josie should try to patch things up with the abusive husband. At the mine, as already discussed, we see women excluded from the male group of miners. Those who are "inside" are clearly irritants to the men, and have adopted various adaptive strategies so as not to rock the boat and to avoid retribution. From the women's point of view, Josie is a problem, and they do not support her. But this being the late twentieth century, we also have a third type of woman in the form of Josie, the woman who rocks the boat and threatens to undermine the structure.

In the end, the women miners and the mother come around (as does the father, but that is a different part of the story); Josie becomes part of a legal "class"; the class action suit is successful; and a piece of feminist history is made. But my point here is not to follow the narrative of the film or the real-world history. Rather I have been using the

film to show a patriarchal structure at work in a major sector of contemporary American society, both in relatively pure form and as it is intertwined with capitalist relations of power. We saw this intertwining on the dimension of the "fathers", where there is a kind of slippage between Josie's father of kinship, the boss at the mine, and the owner of the capitalist enterprise, all of whom say and do virtually the same thing vis-à-vis Josie, up and down the line. And we saw this slippage at the level of the group of miners, who are threatened as both men and workers, or in other words in terms of both their masculine identities and their material livelihoods, without a clear distinction between the two.

The Invisible War (Dick 2012)

The Invisible War is an award-winning documentary film by Kirby Dick on the subject of rape in the military. In the film, Dick provides both statistical data and the personal testimony of victims to show that the rape of women soldiers in the military is extremely widespread. According to a statistic provided in the film, over 20% of women veterans have been sexually assaulted while on active duty. (The figure for men is a little over 1%; more on male-on-male rape later in this paper.) Some of the more psychologically inclined commentators in the film tend to emphasize that the rapists are "predators", and no doubt some are; one title panel tells us that "15% of incoming recruits attempted or committed rape before entering the military—twice the percentage of the equivalent civilian population". But Dick keeps his eye on the big picture: the patriarchal structure of the military (though he never uses the terms "patriarchal" or "structure"), the ways in which it fosters this behavior, and the fact that the military seems either unwilling or unable to clean it up. Here again I want to show the workings of patriarchy as we see it in the film, within the very particular context of the armed forces.

Let us look first at the "fathers". Once again the film is full of fathers, layer upon layer of patriarchal authority, from lower ranking to higher-ranking officers, what is called in the military "the chain of command". Military commanders at all levels have what one commentator in the film called "an unbelievable amount of power". Their authority over their unit is virtually absolute, and there is almost no way to go outside, around, or over them. Specifically with respect to sexual assault, they can decide whether to believe the victim and take the complaint seriously enough to forward it for investigation or not; in the vast majority of cases, they do not. They either cast doubt on the woman's story, or they tell her it is her own fault, and either way she is urged or even commanded to get over it and get back in line. In some cases, the officers actually turn around and bring legal charges against the women. Many women in the film said the only thing worse than the rape was the commanding officers telling them it was their own fault, refusing to report the rape, and covering up the story. Thus as in *North Country*, we see that patriarchy is not simply the violence of individual men against individual women. On the dimension of the "fathers", here the military officers, it is a hierarchy of power and authority in which superior officers support lower level officers, and all of them support the men.

Now let us look at the relations among the men. In the model I am forwarding here, patriarchy is not just about the authority of the patriarch(s) but about the solidarity of the homosocial/heterosexual group of men. The solidarity of the military unit is an ultimate ideal and value; the men often describe themselves as a "band of brothers" who must be able to depend on one another without question. In 1979, the entrance requirements for women and men in the military were equalized and, except for being banned from combat, women began to enter on the same footing as men (Wikipedia, "Women in Combat"). The date is significant, once again suggesting an effect of the feminist movement of that period. The entry of women into the military appears to have had an effect similar to what we have seen in *North Country*: it violated an invisible boundary and destabilized a central feature of the patriarchal order, the solidarity of the male group. The rapes in turn appear in this context as at once punishments for this act, attempts to expel the intruders, and/or attempts to forcefully establish that if the women are to be "inside the boundary", they must be dominated and controlled. The Douglasian logic, in which the problem is violation of social boundaries, still holds.

Assuming this is correct, one may ask why the retaliation takes the form of rape, rather than the kinds of things we saw in *North Country*. I would suggest that this relates to the specific ethos of the military, which is—unlike the ethos of, say, an iron mine—explicitly an ethos of violence and domination. We see some of this in the film, including an extremely violent recruitment ad for the Marines, and some footage of brutal basic training. Even here, however, we may perhaps see a more specific aspect of the pollution logic at work. After all, rapes are not merely violent assaults on the victim's person, but specifically involve (violently) penetrating the bodily boundary.

The interpretation in terms of boundary violation may also help us think about the relatively high incidence of male–male rape in the military. As noted earlier, male–male rape in the military is also very common; although the film is mainly focused on the women, it also brings this out very clearly. According to one account, men actually make up a larger percentage of sexual assault victims than women—53% to 47% (*The Washington Times*, 20 May 2013). In addition, because of the gender imbalance in the military, the absolute number of men who are sexually assaulted is higher than the number of women. The *proportion* of women raped is much higher than the proportion of men (20% vs. 1%), but it is nonetheless clear that male-on-male rapes represent a significant part of the story.

The issues here are complex in relation to standard American assumptions about heterosexuality and homosexuality. As there does not seem to be any data on the sexual orientations of victims and perpetrators, we can only discuss this question hypothetically. For example, if it is assumed that the victims are homosexual, then the interpretation would be similar to that concerning the rape of women: that they are being punished for intruding in, and polluting, the homosocial/heterosexual group. And in fact they are actually more polluting to the male group than the women, as they have not only violated the social boundaries of the group, but have also challenged the gender binary that is at the basis of the group's identity.

According to one commentator in the film, however, most of the perpetrators and victims are at least nominally heterosexual. In this case, then, we must resort to the more straightforward account of the kinds of relationships involved in any band of brothers: the endless competitive jockeying for status, power, and authority that goes on in tandem with the claims of, and often subjective experience of, solidarity. As one (female) marine officer says in the film, "This is not an issue of sexual orientation, this is simply a matter of power and violence." In other words, the male–male rapes make sense simply as extreme versions of the direct domination of one man over another, regardless of sexual orientation, that is a standard part of the male group within a patriarchal order. Although such domination does not normally take the form of rape in ordinary life, the ethos of violence that is endemic to the army (or prisons) both feeds, and feeds on, the more basic state of endless competition for relative power and status within the male group.

And finally, what about the women? By definition, and in keeping with the basic patriarchal model, women were entirely excluded from the military, except in supporting roles, until recently. Once women began entering the military, it is clear that they have tried to keep their heads down, fit in, and not rock the boat. Along these lines, some of the more depressing parts of an already depressing film are segments involving the women who have headed up something called the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), which was created in response to Congressional pressure to do something about the endless series of sex scandals in the military, the rape epidemic being only the most recent.

SAPRO seems at first to be a step forward, potentially offering the rape victims an alternative to the dead end (or worse) of reporting to their own commanding officers. It turns out, however, that this is not part of its mandate, and that it has no power whatsoever to make the military do anything at all; it can only "strongly suggest". Instead it puts all the emphasis (and, as one commentator wryly remarked, most of its budget) on the "prevention" part of its mandate, for example by producing posters and other kinds of publicity advising women to take precautions so they do not leave themselves open to rape. One ad they produced emphasizes the importance for women of always walking with a buddy after dark, thereby both blaming the victim and normalizing rape in one fell swoop.

This programme has been headed by women since its inception. The first director, a Dr. Kaye Whitley, PhD, talks on screen about the posters and the prevention campaign, but is unable to answer any other questions at all, and comes across as both ignorant and not quite in touch with reality. She is later replaced by a military officer, Major General Mary Kay Hertog, who praises Whitley and says she intends to carry on her work. The effectiveness of the work of this unit may be judged by the fact that, among other things, the head of the Air Force wing of this programme was himself arrested on charges of sexual assault (*Huffington Post*, 16 May 2013).

But the film having been made in 2012, there are several progressive women in the story who in fact are trying to bring about changes. We meet a Captain Anu Bhagwati (ret.), who is the director of the Service Women's Action Network of the US Marine Corps, who clearly takes this very seriously and is trying to make something happen.

We also meet Susan Burke, a lawyer and the daughter of a military family, who brought together several of the victims in a lawsuit against the military. The case failed but Burke plans to continue working on this problem.[8]

The military appears as an almost pure patriarchal structure, a system for the production of violent masculinity, supported by a hierarchy of patriarchal authority, and deployed against any enemy within or without. A military entity has no inherent mission and can be put in the service of any group, nation, or cause. The mission of the American military is to defend the American nation, and the American nation's interests, but that of course brings us back to the connection with capitalism; for the American "nation's interests" are to a great degree the interests of capital, and that brings us to our final film.

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (Gibney 2005)

With this film we leave the grime of the iron mines and the physical violence of the military and enter the world of money and ideas. No locker room will be smeared with faeces, and nobody will be raped. Yet we will see once again the basic outlines of a patriarchal structure, and a different kind of brutality that it can produce.

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room is based on a book by the same name by two senior writers for *Fortune* magazine, Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind (2004). It is the story of the rise and fall of the Enron Corporation, a company that dealt in gas and electric power, which was at one time the seventh largest corporation in America. It is specifically the story of a corporation that was organized as much as possible to pursue profit at all costs in an ideally deregulated, free-market neoliberal economy. But the company systematically engaged in accounting and other business practices that ranged from merely questionable to highly unethical to completely illegal, all designed to make the company appear to be in a better financial condition than it was. The point of all this was to keep the price of the stock constantly rising, since most of the wealth of the executives was in Enron stock options. But as various reporters (like McLean) began probing into Enron's finances, the investment banks eventually became less willing to prop the company up with loans, the market analysts eventually became less willing to promote the stock, and the whole thing collapsed.

The culture of the corporation was completely dog-eat-dog, both internally and with respect to their customers and clients. As one trader said on screen, "If I was going to see my boss about my compensation, and I knew that if I stepped on somebody's throat along the way my compensation would be doubled, of course I would do it." Those who did well within the company were richly rewarded with large bonuses, and many individuals became enormously wealthy in the process. At the same time, something like 20,000 employees, who had been encouraged (or in some cases forced) to put all their pension funds in Enron stock, lost not only their jobs and their medical insurance but also all of their retirement savings when the company went broke.

Now let us look at the question of Enron and patriarchy. The story here will be different from those in the films discussed earlier. This is not primarily a story about how women were marginalized or harassed (although they were). In fact women

play a relatively small (although ultimately very important) role in the story and I will discuss them first. As usual in a patriarchal structure, there were relatively few women inside the boundaries, except those in supporting roles. Almost all of those who made it to higher levels seem to have slept with their bosses or colleagues, which in general did no harm to the male party's reputation but undermined the credibility of the female party. The most successful of the women executives, one Rebecca Mark, seems to have been as aggressive as many of the men, and was several times listed as "one of *Fortune*'s 50 most powerful women in business" (McLean and Elkind 2004, 253). Mark made a lot of deals, and made a lot of money, but she nonetheless kept running afoul of one or another of the top men, and was not only eventually fired but also blamed by some for the bankrupting of Enron.

The heroines of the story are once again the boat rockers, an executive of one of the dirtiest of the subsidiaries, and an accountant by trade, called Sherron Watkins, who blew the whistle on some key illegal practices (Swartz and Watkins 2004), and the *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Bethany McLean, who wrote one of the earliest critical pieces, declaring Enron stock to be overvalued in relation to the actual worth of the company, and thus opening the company to scrutiny.

Now let us look at the "fathers". The founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the corporation was a rather affable man called Ken Lay. The President and Chief Operating Officer (COO), and also by all accounts the villain of the piece, was a brilliant and ruthless man called Jeff Skilling. These and others at the top were important not only as a patriarchal hierarchy of fathers/bosses/officers who kept the women and the lesser men down, but also in establishing what can only be described as the violent ethos of the corporation. Lay preached the religion of the neoliberal free market, unencumbered by any human considerations other than the brainpower to make it work and the millions to be made from it. Skilling shared this vision, but conjoined it with a culture of extreme machismo. Among other things he periodically took some favoured male executives and friends of the corporation on dangerous, long-distance, overland motorcycle trips. In the world of Jeff Skilling, to be a successful Enron executive or trader you needed to have both a brilliant mind and (as one executive was said to have) "balls of steel" (McLean and Elkind 2004, 46). Skilling himself said he liked to hire "guys with spikes" (McLean and Elkind 2004, 55).

This brings us to the traders. When Skilling came aboard, Enron was a relatively staid company that owned natural gas production facilities and pipelines, and transacted the movement of physical gas from Point A to Point B. Skilling's "big idea" (and he very much believed in the "big idea") was to turn Enron into something like a financial market in gas products, in which value was determined not by actual supply and demand in real time, but by gambling on supply and demand under future, and thus not fully knowable, conditions. With this transformation, Enron became something like a stock exchange in gas and other forms of energy, and as a result hired large numbers of traders to engage in the trading of the "stock". The trading operation in turn became the biggest and most profitable part of Enron, and the traders ultimately came to wield a great deal of collective power. As the authors say, "They were like a

powerful high school clique that terrorizes even the principal." And as one executive says, "They didn't appear menacing … but they were a mob" (McLean and Elkind 2004, 213). Towards the end of the book, Skilling says, "The traders have taken over. These guys have gotten so powerful that I can't control them any more." (McLean and Elkind 2004, 335)

With the traders then we meet once again the virtually all-male, homosocial/heterosexual group, here with an ethos of both great solidarity and tremendous, cutthroat competition. Their immediate leader was a former army tank captain by the name of Greg Whalley, described by one of the traders as a "screaming stud" (McLean and Elkind 2004, 214). Here is one account of life among the Enron traders:

> [One trader said,] "We were very competitive, and we just didn't feel that we could fail a lot." An executive named Bill Butler used to stalk the floor with an eight-foot-long black bullwhip, jokingly threatening traders who didn't seem to be spending enough time on the phone. Their esprit was such that the traders took great pleasure in outsmarting other parts of Enron, and they didn't show much mercy for one another, either. "If you showed any weakness, the antibodies would attack," says a former trader. "Life at Enron," says another, "was the purest form of balls-out guerrilla warfare". (McLean and Elkind 2004, 217)

As we can see from all the language and stories thus far, we are already well into the jungle—that is to say, the culture of the workplace—in which patriarchy and capitalism are deeply feeding off one another at Enron. Now let us look at how this works out when Enron does business with its customers in the outside world. Here the traders will appear less like the military band of brothers on the home front, threatened by the intrusion of polluting others, and more like the military in action, a group of men whipped up by their leaders and turned loose on the enemy with orders to take no prisoners. This is what happened most famously when Enron entered the electricity market of the State of California.

Enron had been involved, through lobbying, in promoting the deregulation of gas and electricity in California. Eventually the state was partially but not totally deregulated, leaving a situation where the rules were extremely complicated and unclear. It became a particular point of pleasure for the Enron traders to game the system and to make in the process an enormous amount of profit for the company and themselves. As part of subsequent investigations, audio tapes of conversations between traders about the California situation were recovered, and this is where we come back to the synergy between the patriarchal and capitalist mentalities in play. One of the traders' "games" (their term) called Ricochet involved exporting power out of the state when the price was low and then bringing it back when demand rose and prices soared. In one conversation we hear one of the traders say, "So we fuckin' export like a motherfucker." Another says, "Gettin' rich?" and the first says, "Tryin' to." Another strategy involved asking local power stations to go offline "for maintenance" in the middle of the shortage, again pushing the prices up. We actually hear two conversations in which a trader speaks to a man at a local plant asking him to go offline for a while, and the man readily agrees to do it. In yet another conversation, someone in California tells a trader in Houston that there is a fire under a major

power line, causing further disruption. The trader is heard to say, "Burn, baby, burn! That's a beautiful thing!"

Even when there was no sexual language, there seemed to be a rape-like quality to the whole thing, a kind of violent and gleeful ravishing of a helpless victim. Nor was I the only one who heard it this way. At one point in this segment of the film, journalist Bethany McLean says, "The Enron traders never step back and say, 'Is it in our long term interest if we totally rape California like this?'" And then we hear the following conversation. The first trader says, "All that money you guys stole from those poor grandmothers in California". And the second trader says, "Now she wants her fucking money back for all the power you've charged her up her ass".

As with the other two films, the playing out of the patriarchal structure is clear, as are the ways in which the wielding of corporate economic power intersects and is infused with the sexuality and aggression of patriarchal relations. Now it is time to pull this all together.

Conclusions

I began this paper with a discussion of several forms of post-feminism, including the ambivalence of younger women about identifying with the feminist label; the negative representations of feminism in some important recent monographs coming from a broadly defined post-colonial perspective; and most recently the charge that feminism has become complicit with neoliberal capitalism. I presented these points not to discuss them substantively—impossible in the present paper—but simply to draw attention to the multiple, and seemingly proliferating, vectors of "post-feminism".

Insofar as feminism has survived as a scholarly and/or political project, it is almost entirely concerned with women and/or gender. What has largely disappeared is a concern with patriarchal power, a concern that was so central to early feminist work. Yet in the course of watching a large number of American independent films, as part of a different research project, I was struck by the degree to which patriarchy is still virtually everywhere. The first point of this paper, then, was to try to make patriarchy visible (again) and to show that it is something we cannot afford to dismiss or ignore. While it can appear in a relatively benign form (though always grounded in an assumption of male superiority and female inferiority), it is often the basis of aggression and violence. Using some of the films as ethnographic and/or cultural texts, I presented three examples of patriarchy in action: the extreme harassment of women in an industrial workplace; the rape of both women and men in the US military; and the ruthless internal competition and predatory business practices of a corporation. In all cases, I showed not only how patriarchy works as a specific arrangement of power relations in its own right, but also how it is deeply enmeshed with other systems of power in this advanced capitalist society. We could clearly see in the examples how the different forms of domination blurred into one another, or fed off one another, each intensifying the effects of the other.

One subtext, or in some cases the explicit text, of some of the post-feminist literature, is a growing sense that other political agendas have become more urgent.

Neoliberal capitalism, environmental degradation, American militarism, and more have begun to capture intellectual and political attention on an ever-growing scale. I share a sense of the tremendous urgency of these issues, which I have written about at length elsewhere (Ortner 2013). My concern, however, is that the momentum of the new movements may completely push a feminist agenda off the table. There is a way in which feminism and anti-neoliberal capitalism (or anti-US militarism, or pro-environmentalism—name your issue) are being set up in some contexts as either-or propositions. But my examples in this paper have shown not only, as I said earlier, that patriarchy is alive and well in neoliberal America, but also that it is inextricably and aggressively intertwined with so much else that is bad in the contemporary world.

As a final point, however, we must return to the films, not as texts for our ethnographic or interpretive use, but as political interventions in American public culture. *North Country* and *The Invisible War* explicitly challenge patriarchal violence and injustice, and the anti-patriarchal subtext of *Enron* is very close to the surface as well. The films may be seen then as implicitly talking back to the post-feminist tendencies I emphasized in the earlier part of this paper. Made in a period when feminism in its classic form seems to be over, and made by men as well as women, they are perhaps harbingers of a new anti-patriarchal politics, for which we do not yet have a name.

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Notes

[1] In an earlier work (Ortner 2006), I discussed the factor of ambivalence in resistance movements. The ambivalence we see in post-feminism is thus not new, but where it was recessive at the height of second wave feminism, it is apparently dominant today.

[2] Another aspect of post-feminism in anthropology can be seen in the declining number of journal articles on subjects related to women and gender. I had a discussion of this point in an earlier draft but had to cut it for reasons of space. The discussion was based on Laura Ahearn's article on keywords in *American Ethnologist* (2014).

[3] But see a very important project coming out of the University of Michigan that has attempted to rethink the feminist agenda in a global perspective, in response to the post-colonial critique: Lal et al. (2010) and Stewart et al. (2011). I regret not having the space to discuss this work in this paper.

[4] An earlier version of this insistence on the intertwining of gender and other forms of inequality came from the work of so-called Marxist-feminists in the 1970s, who emphasized the linkages between gender and class under capitalism. See especially Eisenstein (1979).

[5] The only recent work to explore the question of patriarchy as a "structure" in some sense is Pierre Bourdieu's *Masculine Domination* (2001). But Bourdieu spends a great deal of time on the question of "symbolic domination", that is, of the degree to which women internalize patriarchy as habitus, rather than on patriarchy as a system of social power, which is the primary focus of the present paper.

[6] In Crenshaw's original discussion of intersectionality, race was a central component. In the three films that follow, however, racial difference is held constant (that is, everyone is white), thereby highlighting the patriarchy factor. Thanks to Abigail Stewart for emphasizing this point.

[7] One of the elements of the film that I do not have time/space to discuss is that the events in the film are set during the Anita Hill sexual harassment hearings, and we see Hill on television in the background in several scenes. One detail of Hill's allegations, which for some reason always stuck in my mind as strange, was that Clarence Thomas left a can of Coke on Hill's desk with a pubic hair on top. Thinking about it in the context of the present discussion, it makes sense as another material sign of pollution.

[8] Another female boat-rocker, not in the film, is Senator Kirsten Gillibrand who, according to a *New Yorker* article, was inspired by the film to develop legislation to address the epidemic of rape in the military (Osnos 2013). The legislation failed but Gillibrand has continued to press the issue.

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