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### **Masculinism and the Antifeminist Counter-movement**

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# Masculinism and the Antifeminist Counter-movement

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**ABSTRACT** *Little research has been done on antifeminism, whether from the perspective of the sociology of social movements or even of women's studies. Yet, a particular form of antifeminism has been at work for a number of years, more specifically, masculinism. Its discourse claims that men are in crisis because of the feminization of society and it mobilizes primarily around issues pertaining to the interests of fathers and spouses (divorce laws, alimony, child custody, violence). This article examines two alternative explanations of the masculinist phenomenon: (1) men have real problems, and masculinists scapegoat women and feminists instead of targeting the true causes of their problems, such as the transformation of the labor market; (2) masculinism is openly opposed to feminism and is thus the result of counter-movement dynamics. While referring to other contexts (UK, the USA, etc.), our paper takes the situation in Québec (Canada) as a case study. The feminist movement and masculinism are dynamic there and stand in sharp opposition to each other. The essay applies the theory of counter-movements in order to better understand the oppositional relationship between these two political forces and demonstrates ultimately that masculinism's effects on feminists are at times paradoxical.*

**KEY WORDS:** Antifeminism, masculinism, men's crisis, men's movement, fathers' rights movement, counter-movements, women's movement

There continues to be very little research done on antifeminism, which consequently remains a poorly understood phenomenon. On the *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses* database, as of April 2011 there were 4909 references to the keyword 'feminism' and 69 to 'women's movement' (4978 in total), but only 31 references to 'antifeminism' and 47 to 'men's movement' (78 in total). Yet, antifeminism is a concern for many feminists, as indicated by over 50% of the 54 Québécoise feminists who were polled in 2005 on the state of the women's movement (Blais, 2012). An inquiry conducted in Québec in 2007, among 80 women's groups, concluded that 30% of them had been the targets of antifeminist actions (St-Pierre, 2008). In addition, a study that we conducted in 2010–2011 using semi-directed interviews with 15 feminist activists, including several leaders of national organizations, showed that antifeminist actions in Québec take a variety of forms: insults proffered in emails or on the telephone, systematic denigration of feminism in the media, Internet disclosure of confidential information (e.g. addresses) on resources for battered

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women, publication on the Internet of unauthorized photos of feminists, threats of legal action before the Human Rights Commission, legal prosecutions, anti-Choice vigils in front of abortion clinics, invitations launched on the Internet to disrupt feminist events and actual disruptions of such events (St-Pierre, 2008), attempts to enter women-only spaces, complaints lodged with the police for discrimination against men, graffiti on buildings of feminist organizations, nails strewn over the parking lot of a feminist organization. Several of the interviewees had received death threats or were aware of such threats being made. Following the denunciation of a piece of sexist publicity, a feminist received an email expressing the wish that she 'die in a fire'. A women's centre received a number of telephone threats framed in these terms, 'We will shoot you, the female workers.' Another group received telephone messages from a man who simply said, 'I want to kill you.'

As is true of feminism, antifeminism is a heterogeneous current, traversed by various ideologies, and present on several fronts. In ideological terms, antifeminism is generally posited on the existence of a higher order, be it the will of God, human nature, national destiny, or social stability. Since the 1980s a new form of antifeminism has emerged: the so-called 'masculinist' movement, or 'masculinism'. Masculinism asserts that since men are in crisis and suffering because of women in general and feminists in particular, the solution to their problems involves curbing the influence of feminism and revalorizing masculinity.<sup>1</sup> The goal of this article is to describe and analyse the masculinist phenomenon. We will challenge the argument that masculinism is a social or cultural trend that, rather than dealing with real problems such as the transformation of the labour market, scapegoats women and feminists. We will then focus on the concepts of countermovement and backlash to account for the political dynamics at work among masculinism, feminism, and the patriarchal system, especially with regard to the family and divorce.

It is true that the 'men's movement' is made up of disparate and autonomous components, which are not all motivated by antifeminism. But this does not invalidate the proposition that the masculinist component of the antifeminist countermovement impacts on the feminist movement and women in general. Indeed, the interviewees in our study explicitly or implicitly identified masculinism as the most dynamic form of antifeminism in Québec in recent years. Furthermore, our discussion draws extensively on a multi-disciplinary investigation of masculinism in Québec, where this form of activism has been especially dynamic since the early 2000s. Historians, jurists, political scientists, sociologists, and social workers took part in this project, which led to the publication of a collection of essays (Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2008). Moreover, since about 2005 several feminist organizations in Québec have conducted investigations on antifeminism in general and masculinism in particular, through workshop discussions as well as qualitative and quantitative researches. Our own analysis is based on our participation in some of these projects. More studies will be needed to document the activities of similar phenomena in other countries, but it is possible at this time to refer to examples in Australia, UK, and the USA, where comparable social phenomena have been observed (Palma, 2008).

It should be pointed out that our definition of *masculinist* or *masculinism* is based on the French usage of these terms (for a history of the terms in French and English, see Dupuis-Déri, 2009). In English, they generally designate either a way of thinking whose referent is the masculine or simply a patriarchal ideology (Watson, 1996), rather than a component of

the antifeminist social movement. In English, ‘men’s movement’ is the most common term, though some, like Warren Farrell, use ‘masculist’ or the more restrictive ‘fathers’ rights movement’. Some French-speaking feminists (Langevin, 2009) refuse to use the terms ‘masculinist’ or ‘masculinism’, claiming that to do so might give the impression that this type of antifeminism is as important and legitimate as its feminist counterparts. It is our view, however, that confusing antifeminism and masculinism makes it difficult to grasp the particularities of masculinism. We believe that masculinism is one of several constituents of antifeminism, including religious, conservative, nationalist, and other currents. Finally, there is a growing consensus in the French-language media and among French-speaking feminist activists and specialists in women’s studies, in favour of naming the movement *masculiniste*.

### **What is Masculinism?**

Masculinism focuses primarily on masculinity and the place of white heterosexual men in North American and European societies. Yet, it is concerned as well with the supposed ramifications of feminism and the alleged domination of women in both the public and private spheres. Indeed, a basic assumption of the spokesmen for masculinism is that women, women’s values in general and feminists in particular, dominate men and contemporary society at large. Men, seen as currently grappling with an ‘identity crisis’, are depicted as the victims of feminist struggles, which have resulted in the supplanting of patriarchy by matriarchy. This discourse is produced and disseminated in popular magazines (Faludi, 1992) and numerous books written by academics and freelance journalists (see, among others, Farrell, 2001; Sommers, 2001; Nathanson & Young, 2002, 2006; Hise, 2004; Parker, 2008; Synnott, 2009).

The advocates of masculinism call upon men to rally in defense of a masculine identity that has been spurned. In France, the essayist and polemicist Éric Zemmour very happily observes the emergence, in the USA, of a ‘masculinist revolution’ that is part of a wholesome ‘reactionary revenge’ (2006, pp. 131–132, 134 [our translation]). In a book published in Québec, the French author Patrick Guillot suggests the men’s movement should bring together the psychological support network for men, activist groups, experts on the male condition, and ‘male victims, especially “battered men”’ (2004, p. 152 [our translation]). He, furthermore, states that men ‘should also exert pressure on public authorities’, ‘convince the media to provide them with space where they could express their views’, ‘continue to fight for alternating residency [of children]’, ‘circulate information’, and ‘hold international conferences’. He adds ‘the establishment of an “International Men’s Day”’ would be ‘an occasion to organize various activities and events where the new male aspirations could be voiced’ (2004, pp. 153–154 [our translation]).

With regard to demands, many masculinists consider the abolition of co-educational schooling necessary for the well-being of men, or they suggest there is a lack of funds for men in need because assistance and rights advocacy networks for women and feminist institutions receive too much public funding. Masculinists lament the high level of suicide among men and decry what they view as the concealment of the widespread phenomenon of male victims of domestic violence, contending that there is in fact symmetry of violence between the sexes. In addition, the masculinist movement more or less explicitly appropriates the myths and theses of ‘evolutionist psychology’, which postulates that the

need for human beings to adapt to a hostile environment in prehistoric times resulted in men and women having different but complementary roles and attitudes, a balance that unfortunately has been upset by feminism since the 1960s.

Ultimately, the measure of masculinism's influence can be taken in the dissemination and endorsement of its ideas both in the media and commercial cinema, and increasingly in university departments of psychology, social work, and sexology (on the influence of masculinist discourse in media in several countries, see Bouchard *et al.*, 2003; in women's magazines, see Mayer & Dupuis-Déri, 2009; on websites, see Menzies, 2007; Jobin, 2008; Langevin, 2009). Yet, there are those who do not believe that masculinism constitutes a trend within the antifeminist social movement. They see it, rather, as a diverse, unstructured collection of isolated, marginal, even psychologically unbalanced individuals, who mistakenly lend social significance to their personal experiences and do not warrant special attention. Others, however, believe that masculinism is in fact the consequence of scapegoating, while a few do in fact identify masculinism with a social movement, specifically, antifeminism.

### **Scapegoating or Social Movement?**

According to the scapegoat thesis, men feel cheated or threatened because of their deteriorating socio-economic situation and their resulting inability to secure the things they consider their due. They are thus liable to single out women, whose success in the public sphere, they believe, ousts men from what they assume to be their rightful place. The scapegoat thesis asserts, however, that masculinists are wrong to target women and feminists, who are not responsible for the problems faced by these men (Faludi, 2000). It is important in this connection to recall that the rhetoric of a so-called 'crisis of masculinity' surfaces regularly at critical historical moments marked by economic, social, and political upheavals – the French Revolution (Lampron, 2008) being a prominent example – together with the situation in late nineteenth-century North America and Europe (Maugue, [1987] 2001; Kimmel, [1995] 2006).

It would be instructive in this regard to reflect on the upsurge of racism in the USA of the late nineteenth-century and in Germany in the 1930s. In these cases, recently freed Afro-Americans and assimilated Jews were blamed for the putative degeneration of, respectively, the 'white race' in the USA and the Aryan race in Germany. Yet, Jews did not hold sway over Germany in the 1930s, nor did the former Afro-American slaves in the USA pose a threat to the 'white race', either in the late 1800s or during the 1960s. In Germany, the turbulence was a consequence of the First World War, economic and financial crises, unemployment, and bloody political clashes between the extreme Left and the extreme Right. In the USA, the turmoil was rooted in the War of Secession and its aftermath, urbanization, industrialization, as well as the introduction of new technologies. Jews and Afro-Americans were then used as scapegoats. The USA witnessed the growth of racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, dedicated to the supremacy of the white race, and Germany saw the emergence of an anti-Semitic movement, Nazism, whose purpose was to revive the Aryan identity. Despite the obvious differences between masculinism and these racist movements, the scapegoating of women and feminism for the major social ills facing men does warrant certain comparisons (see Le Rider, 1982 on the crisis of masculinity in Germany; see Pinar, 2001 on the crisis of masculinity in the USA).

Antifeminism, like racism, interacts with other social, economic, and political dynamics, which heighten its virulence. The contemporary masculinist movement made its appearance in western countries in the 1980s, at a time when progressive movements (such as the workers' and women's movements) were stagnating or even in retreat, the labour market was shrinking, aggravating the living conditions of numerous workers, and conservatism – Margaret Thatcher in UK, Ronald Reagan in the USA, Brian Mulroney in Canada – held sway. These trends arguably stoked the resentment of many men and led some of them to blame feminists and women for their troubles, rather than ponder the actual causes of real problems. Yet, the scapegoat thesis alone cannot account for the core rationale of masculinism. The interests of the accusing groups and individuals in this case, white heterosexual males, in relation to the targeted group, women and feminists, must be factored in, something the scapegoat thesis does not do.

Masculinists not only scapegoat women and feminists for the problems men face, for instance, because of transformations in the job market; they also mobilize to defend male privileges (such as those related to the gender-based division of labour) and to oppose the real advances achieved by women, since these force men to share power and give up certain prerogatives. The masculinist movement is grounded in political, economic, and social power relations between men as a class and women as a class. It combats feminism and the progress women have achieved with the help of feminists, just as neo-Nazism strives for the domination of one group (the Aryans) over another (essentially the Jews), or as the white supremacist movement fights against the legal and social gains accomplished by the descendents of Afro-American slaves, which entail a loss of advantages for whites.

#### *Masculinism as Part of a Social Movement*

What emerges upon closer examination is the picture of a new force within the antifeminist social movement. Seven criteria can be used to determine whether a social phenomenon follows the typical pattern of social movements (Rocher, 1997, pp. 505–512; Mathieu, 2004, pp. 17–25; Snow *et al.*, 2007, p. 6): (1) activists, (2) organizational units (committees, associations, etc.), (3) the representation of a collective identity (e.g. women, students, etc.), (4) the advocacy of a common cause, (5) conflict and opposition to adversaries, (6) extra-institutional protests, and (7) the goal of affecting social relationships, either to change the social system or to defend it against threatened changes. This last element makes it possible to distinguish progressive social movements from reactionary ones. Masculinism, as manifested in Québec at any rate, meets all seven of the above criteria.

*Activists.* With respect to the first criterion, the masculinist movement includes various types of activists. The leaders make up a kind of vanguard. They carry out the most spectacular operations, such as climbing up urban superstructures, sometimes in a super-heros costume, and unfurling a banner. They put themselves forward as more or less official spokesmen and are acknowledged as such by both the media and a number of feminists that we questioned on the subject. They give interviews, run websites, make submissions to parliamentary commissions, undertake legal actions, lodge complaints with the Human Rights Commission (against government departments and feminists) on grounds of defamation, discrimination, or hate speech targeting men. Finally, they play the martyr, some of them having been arrested, tried, and sentenced for their direct actions or involvement in domestic violence (Dufresne, 1998). Rank-and-file activists often join men's or fathers' groups in the hope of finding psychological and legal support

(Kenedy, 2005, pp. 64–65; Crowley, 2006); then, they might be recruited by the leaders to take part in antifeminist actions, such as rallies, shows of solidarity, and attendance at the trials of men indicted for their militant actions or for having harassed or assaulted ex-spouses. Allied activists, specifically members of second spouses' associations, mobilize (in their capacity as spouses) in defense of men who have supposedly been wronged in divorce cases by judges and ex-wives (Crowley, 2007). Moreover, organic intellectuals – often working in the field of social work or (popular) psychology – write books and give talks on the male condition and the difficulties men must currently cope with in a society supposedly dominated by women's values. Their connection with the masculinist movement is due to their own identification with it or to the fact their work is frequently cited by masculinist activists. Lastly, men who utter death threats against feminists over the telephone or by email often do so anonymously, making it impossible to ascertain whether they are isolated individuals who endorse masculinist ideology or are associated with masculinist groups.

*Organizational units.* Masculinist organizations (support groups, committees, websites, etc.) are as a rule independent of each other, but could be part of a national or international network. Fathers-4-Justice is today the most militant organization, with committees in UK, Canada, the USA, and elsewhere. Separated or divorced fathers' groups make up the most militant section of the movement. Other organizations, displaying varying degrees of militancy, devote themselves, sometimes entirely, to spreading via websites masculinist discourse and analyses, particularly the critique of feminism, along with information on masculinist activities and actions (Jobin, 2008; Langevin, 2009). In the French-speaking world, the Paroles d'hommes convention enabled the creation of an international network of intellectuals through the holding of conferences in different locations (Switzerland in 2003, Québec in 2005, Belgium in 2008). In Québec, groups such as L'Après rupture (meaning, 'after the break-up') have become increasingly active, posting on their website analyses of men's contemporary situation and critiques of the women's movement and feminism, giving interviews to the media, demanding access to documents and data on battered women's shelters (which they accuse of squandering public funds) on the basis of access-to-information laws, regularly writing to ministers and government managers to ask for increased aid to men's groups, presenting submissions to parliamentary commissions dealing with, for example, the reform of the Council on the Status of Women in 2006–2007 or the enshrinement of the principle of equality between men and women in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 2008.

*Representation of a collective identity.* Masculinists identify themselves first and foremost as men and it is in this capacity that they see themselves as victims of women and feminists. Their sense of belonging to the class of men transcends secondary male identities (e.g. fatherhood), as well as other social identities such as age or profession. This collective identity is defined in opposition to the undue influence of feminist values. For instance, the *Manifiesto Masculinista*, written in Spanish and published as of 2002 on an Italian website, calls for 'the emancipation of men from female domination';<sup>2</sup> for a member of Fathers-4-Justice in Montréal, 'Québec is the opposite of the Talibans, which means the oppression of women; in Québec, on the other hand, it's the oppression of men. That's the truth'.<sup>3</sup>

Most masculinists believe that human beings are divided into two naturally different and complementary sexes. And it is this complementariness that justifies the hierarchy of the values, attitudes, and behaviours associated with each of the sexes (see, for example,

one of the founders of the website *Homme d'aujourd'hui*; Gélinas, 2002, pp. 14–15). According to masculinism, the male approach is all about natural aggressiveness, competition, and hierarchy. Thus, the emphasis on kindness and mutual aid in business, apparently due to feminization, inhibits the intrinsically male competitive spirit and, thus, the sound operation of the capitalist economy (Dallaire, 2001, 2005, pp. 125–126). Feminists are thus blamed for having denied the supposedly fundamental difference between men and women. In keeping with this approach, masculinists accuse pro-feminist men of being traitors to their sex, self-haters, haters of their maleness, in sum, not ‘real’ but ‘castrated’ men, and probably gay (see Bastien Charlebois, 2008 on homophobia and masculinism).

*Advocacy of a common cause.* An analysis of masculinist discourse (in books, websites, etc.) shows the main issue to be ‘the cause of men’, which in fact coincides with the title of Patrick Guillot’s book, *La Cause des hommes: Pour la paix des sexes* (2004). This is supplemented by a number of secondary issues – education, suicide, violence, divorce, and child custody – that are explicitly and systematically explored in texts by intellectuals or in the discourses of various groups. Their female allies, pro-masculinist women, come to the movement because of their support for the cause of men. These women join the masculinist movement after hearing partners, sons, or other men close to them recount their problems with their former spouses, or because, as new spouses, they have a vested interest in their husbands’ struggles against divorce and custody laws (Crowley, 2007).

*Conflict and opposition to adversaries.* Conflict is a recurrent theme of masculinism, one that emerges whenever masculinists specify that they are opposed to feminist ‘extremists’ or ‘feminazis’<sup>4</sup> or even when they deny being ‘antifeminists’, instead presenting themselves as simply activists for the ‘rights of men’ or of fathers. Yet, the contents of their websites and the testimony of feminists that we questioned confirm that masculinists are generally critical of even moderate feminists and feminists at the head of official feminist organizations. Indeed, historian Micheline Dumont notes that for a dozen years ‘the very label “feminist” has undergone changes, such that all feminism is now considered radical’ (2009, p. 27 [our translation]). Conflict takes the form, above all, of opposition to the network of battered women’s shelters, which are accused of indoctrinating the women who use them and of lying about male violence against women to more easily secure public funding, an accusation echoed in the media by spokesmen for the group L’Après-rupture, which champions divorced and estranged fathers (Boucher & Gagnon, 2010). They are also in conflict with various institutions, actors, social, and political forces – politicians (especially those on the left), judges, lawyers, and the media – which, according to the masculinists, are consistently biased towards women or manipulated by the feminist lobby. More alarmingly, a member of Fathers-4-Justice went so far as to declare in an interview, ‘It’s only a matter of time before a judge gets killed. And I can tell you this is the truth because I went down that path – I considered it myself’ (Barry, 2006). A few years later, during a trial in Montreal, the same man told a judge, ‘If I was in Iraq I wouldn’t waste any time with legal paperwork. I would pick up a machine gun and blast their heads.’ He was referring to family court jurists as well as feminists.<sup>5</sup>

*Extra-institutional protests.* Masculinists engage in protest activities, including different types of militant action – such as demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes, the conspicuous unfurling of banners, graffiti, open letters to newspapers, politicians, and journalists – lobbying, and even the fielding of their spokesmen as election candidates. Some of their actions are quite radical. Fathers’ rights activists have bombed family courts



in Australia and have proffered dozens of bomb threats in the UK, although it is not clear whether public and organized militant groups were involved in these actions (Bunting, 2004). It is noteworthy that according to the BBC (2006), some members of the London committee of Fathers-4-Justice discussed the possibility of kidnapping Prime Minister Blair's five-year-old son. Activists of Fathers-4-Justice also disrupted House of Commons proceedings by sprinkling purple-coloured powder on Tony Blair from the public gallery. They then went out and hurled eggs at police officers in the street (BBC, 2004). In 2008, two Fathers-4-Justice activists, dressed up as super-heroes, climbed onto the roof of Labour's deputy leader Harriet Harman's house, in London, displaying a 'Stop war on dads' banner (Rouse & Marsden, 2008; Daily Mail Reporter, 2008).

In Québec, in addition to the actions previously mentioned, including death threats, masculinists have carried out several disruptive direct actions. On three occasions, masculinist activists, either alone or in groups of two or three, scaled the Jacques Cartier Bridge, a major link between Montréal and its southern suburbs, forcing police to halt traffic for hours and causing massive traffic jams. Masculinists have disrupted events organized by feminists – for instance, on 8 March, International Women's Day – to demand more resources for men from public authorities. Some have demonstrated in front of Montréal's City Hall to support a city councilor's motion (ultimately rejected) proposing the inauguration of a Men's Day. In addition, masculinist activists have filed lawsuits against feminist academics, activists, or journalists, and men's groups have engaged in lobbying and addressed parliamentary commissions.

*The goal of affecting social relationships.* In sum, masculinism is an influential current of the antifeminist social movement whose members share common ideas and values, notwithstanding their disparate tactical goals, internal diversity embodied in different tendencies displaying varying degrees of radicalism, and a lack of consensus on the most appropriate name for their movement. Clearly, the masculinist movement's objectives encompass the social relations between men and women, more specifically, the consolidation of male privileges and power over women. As a spokesman of L'Après-rupture explained in an interview, 'men adapt their environment to themselves, women adapt to their environment, and for society to function this principle needs to be applied. Men have to be allowed to shape the environment and to say to women, "listen, live, adapt to the environment that we create for you"'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Countermovement**

Having demonstrated that masculinism follows the pattern specific to social movements, we will proceed to marshal the theories on countermovements to get a better grasp of its militant and political rationale. Social theorists have proposed the term 'countermovement' to designate a movement that reacts, usually along conservative or retrograde lines, against a prior movement. For theorists with an ideological approach, such as Alain Touraine, social movements are synonymous with progressive movements of emancipation (the labour movement, for instance), whereas 'countermovements' are associated with the dominant and oppressive forces of society (the putatively authoritarian and illegitimate employers; Touraine, 1973, pp. 360–376; Mottl, 1980, pp. 620–635). Using this approach, one could describe masculinism as a 'countermovement', since it is conservative, reactionary, and opposed to the progressive feminist movement, whose goal is the emancipation of women. Under the guise of an egalitarian discourse advocating true

equality between men and women, the masculinist movement actually strives to block or reverse certain gains of the feminist movement. So, unlike feminism, masculinism is hardly the custodian of a progressive project founded on justice and equality.<sup>7</sup>

However, there are other theorists who, taking a different analytical tack, have stressed the importance of defining a countermovement not in terms of its political alignment, but simply according to the mechanical relationship maintained through the dynamic of conflict between a, first, movement (e.g. feminism) and a, second, reactive movement, that is, a countermovement (e.g. masculinism). In other words, a countermovement is simply a movement that arises and acts in response and opposition to a previous movement. Hence, a countermovement may be progressive or reactionary, left-wing or right-wing (Zald & Usee, 1987; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996).

The mechanistic approach to countermovements is frequently applied to the analysis of the relationship between feminist' and their adversaries, focusing on discourses (Goulet, 2011), structures of political opportunity, mobilization of resources (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Blakley, 2008), actions of organizations involved in conflicts (Schreiber, 2000), and collective identities (Kenedy, 2005, p. 151). This approach also stresses the importance of studying the interactions between movements as well as the position of dependency in which countermovements find themselves. As underscored by Green (1992) in her analysis of the anti-suffragist movement in the Southern USA from 1890 to 1920, suffragists and anti-suffragists developed a relationship quite comparable to a table tennis match, in that each camp obliged the other to respond to its actions (see also Dugan, 1999). Moreover, a countermovement is more likely to mobilize around an issue on which the social movement that it opposes has made gains. This is what Meyer & Staggenborg (1996) conclude with regard to the conflict between the pro-choice and anti-choice movements over abortion in the USA. In the case of masculinism, it will be shown below that this countermovement began to mobilize over the issue of 'fathers' rights' in the 1980s and 1990s in reaction to women's and feminists' success in having child custody payments enforced by law.

The fact remains, however, that an overall assessment of power relationships is made more difficult by a mechanistic and an ideologically neutral conception of what a countermovement is. Also, mechanistic theories obscure large areas of the political logic intrinsic to a countermovement such as masculinism. The works of Mottl (1980, p. 627), Smith (2008), and Mason (1981) are relevant here because of the ideological dimension included in their analyses of the interactions between movements and countermovements. Mottl (1980, p. 621) observes that countermovements are often directed against challenges coming 'from below' and express a 'resistance to the loss of advantages'. In other words, 'countermovements are related to social divisions resulting from socio-economic decline, threatening the position of those who mobilize'. With a view to furthering the discussion on the notion of 'countermovement', it henceforth becomes plausible to propose a hybrid conception of what a countermovement is: at once a mechanistic and an ideological reaction. Hence, as a countermovement, masculinism is *reactionary* with regard to power politics and the social order, that is, it mobilizes on behalf of or in the interest of a dominant class and in opposition to forces of dissent.

As for anti-feminists, they represent a dominant group reacting against a perceived threat to its privileges and in defense of a traditional social project that has been disturbed by the feminist movement. Although such an approach obliges us to attribute distinct political and normative values to the two movements, it nevertheless appears

methodologically feasible to perform a contextual analysis by relying on classical indicators of inequality and discrimination in a given society. In investigating the dynamic encompassing the women's movement and the men's movement, for instance, it is possible to assess the preponderance of either men or women in positions of power, privileges, and wealth in the different sectors of a given society: public institutions (including governments and political organizations), industry, finance, the media, religion, science, the army, the police, etc.

Granted, women over the past few generations have, through protracted struggles, won a number of important rights. Some have gained access to what were exclusively male spheres of activity, while some men have become more involved in domestic and parental tasks. Yet, in Québec, an over-developed society noted for its dynamic feminist movement, men still dominate politics, with 70% of parliamentary seats and 84% of mayorships (Conseil du Statut de la femme, 2011, p. 16). Men also hold economic sway: 92% of the CEOs of the 100 largest Québécois corporations listed on the stock exchange (Morin, 2010) and 84% of the board members of those companies are men (Conseil du Statut de la femme, 2011, p. 18), while in 28% of them there are no women at all (Radio-Canada, 2010). Sixty per cent of small- and medium-sized businesses are headed by men (Morin, 2010). More generally, men's average yearly income is over \$10,000 CDN higher than that of women,<sup>8</sup> and there are proportionally more 'low income' women than men in Canada.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, women devote more time than men to housework (Conseil du Statut de la femme, 2011, p. 16), Canadian men own 86% of firearms,<sup>10</sup> and women are more likely than men to be subjected to domestic violence, which affects women more often and more severely, as indicated by the fact that, each year on average, the female–male ratio of conjugal homicide victims is 5 to 1 (Drouin, 2008; Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009).<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in spite of the widespread discourse to the effect that 'equality already exists' between men and women (Delphy, 2004), that 'liberty already exists' for all women or that 'feminism has gone too far', the masculinist countermovement operates within societies that are still heavily patriarchal, that is to say, societies where there is an overwhelming preponderance of men in positions of privilege and power. Moreover, Béchard (2005, p. 178) observes that in Québec the average activist in fathers' groups belongs to a privileged social category, specifically, that of upper middle-class, heterosexual, white males, aged between 35 and 60.

One could therefore legitimately identify masculinism as a trend within the antifeminist countermovement mobilized not only *against* the feminist movement, but also *for* the defense of a non-egalitarian social and political system, that is, patriarchy. The literature on the subject of 'backlash' sheds light on the ideological and reactionary dimension of the antifeminist countermovement (Thomas, 2008). Mansbridge and Shames (2008, p. 625) identify links between theories on backlash and countermovements, stating that a backlash arises when a dominant group feels threatened by groups who are disadvantaged by the status quo and seek to reform or transform the power structures. According to these researchers, those in dominant positions endeavour to protect or restore their ability to decide and act in line with their preferences and interests. The backlash can be triggered simply by a threat to their privileges because they perceive the actual or apprehended loss of privilege as an outrage (Mansbridge & Shames, 2008, p. 627). Basing herself on an intersectional analysis, Sanbonmatsu (2008, p. 636) concludes that a backlash against women can particularly affect racial groups and lesbians. Masculinist discourse, for its

part, resorts to racist language and lesbophobic or, indirectly, homophobic attacks (Bastien Charlebois, 2008, pp. 136–139; Blais & Dupuis-Déri, 2008, pp. 248–251).

Accordingly, masculinists can be viewed as activists working for the restoration of a masculinity purportedly in crisis. Masculinism therefore constitutes a countermovement in the service of patriarchy and of men as a class. Their goal is to resist and reverse the feminist movement, and some masculinists have gone to the length of targeting women's groups. In Quebec, some masculinists have applauded the most spectacular and radical antifeminist act in recent memory, the murder of 14 women at the École polytechnique de Montréal on 6 December 1989 (Blais, 2009a). Armed with a semi-automatic rifle, the lone killer walked through the school, entered a classroom, and ordered the men to leave. When he was alone with the women, he told them he hated feminists, and then opened fire. He did the same thing in another classroom before taking his own life. The 25-year-old man had written a letter in which he explained his antifeminist motivations. A content analysis of the major dailies and student newspapers in Canada and Québec published during the year following the shooting, and when it was commemorated 10 years later, shows that the predominant discourse concerning the event was, overall, explicitly or implicitly antifeminist (Blais, 2009a). Moreover, 20 years after the tragedy the killer is at times still held up in masculinist discourse as an icon for men experiencing an identity crisis (Dupuis-Déri, 2010) and occasionally even as a heroic role model. Indeed, one man was arrested in December 2009 for maintaining a website entirely dedicated to the memory of 'Saint Marc', that is, Marc Lépine, the terrorist who had perpetrated the mass murder in 1989 (CBC, 2009; Zerbisias, 2010). Certain individuals have laid claim to his legacy, asserting, for example, that they are his 'reincarnation', and threatening feminists, women's groups, and child protection centres (see Blais, 2009b for an analysis of this phenomenon).

### **Women Who Choose to Divorce: Prime Targets of Masculinism**

Masculinists have targeted women over the issue of divorce, even though, as a result of feminist campaigns, this has been an acquired legal right for women in many countries for nearly two generations. It is revealing that certain masculinist intellectuals insist that it is women who choose to divorce in most cases, with adverse consequences for men, children, and even the nation. Thus, the right to divorce is not denied in legal terms, but women who actually exercise this right are systematically blamed for causing severe problems, including men's suicides, according to groups such as *Pères Séparés* (Separated Fathers) and *Fathers-4-Justice* (F4J) Québec,<sup>12</sup> as well as some masculinist intellectuals such as the psychologist and sexologist Dallaire (2001, pp. 147–148) and Georges Dupuy, president of the *Coalition pour la défense des droits des hommes du Québec* (Quebec Coalition for the Defence of the Rights of Men). Dupuy has concluded that domestic violence is as lethal for men as for women, although the means used are different: men attack directly whereas women kill by abandoning their men.<sup>13</sup> It is hard to imagine a more radical denigration of women's right to freely choose to be part of a (heterosexual) couple or not (see Dupuis-Déri, 2008 for an in-depth discussion of the masculinist discourse on suicide among men).

Child support is another battleground for the masculinists. A number of militant groups of separated and divorced fathers, representing the vanguard of the masculinist countermovement, came into being in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in response to the

more stringent judicial and administrative measures introduced in various countries with respect to child support payments. Women won the right to divorce and to exclusive child custody, whereas in other times or places children could be considered a father's property. Nevertheless, divorced women who obtain child custody experience a sharp decline in their standard of living and are hard put to collect the financial support owed to the child(ren) by the father. In the mid-1980s, 40% of mothers in the USA who petitioned for child support were turned down by the judge. Only 60% of those who were granted such support actually received the full amount. In fact, estranged fathers were more conscientious about their car payments than their financial responsibilities towards their children (Mitchell & Goody, 1997, pp. 207–208).

In light of this situation, the laws and regulations were amended to oblige fathers to fulfil their financial duties, and fathers' groups arose in reaction to this. In UK, for example, a broad coalition was formed in 1991, when the Child Support Agency (CSA) was inaugurated. The CSA had been established to deal with a situation where 70% of absent parents, 90% of whom were men, made no support payments whatever. The others paid about £15 (US\$25) a week on average. The Agency's mandate, therefore, was to ensure that the parent who had custody of the child(ren), almost exclusively single mothers, would receive payments on a regular basis (Mitchell & Goody, 1997, pp. 201–202). The coalition opposed to the creation of the CSA comprised a variety of organizations, including Dads After Divorce, the Men's Movement of the UK, Families Need Fathers, Children and Male Parents' Society, Men in Crisis Help-Line. Some of them were affiliated with the International Men's Movement. The bulk of the demonstrators were separated and divorced fathers, largely middle-class, sometimes supported by their current spouses. In addition to voicing their positions in public, some of these groups resorted to various types of direct action: street rallies, a carnival in front of the House of Commons, tire-slashing, the mailing of excrement-filled packages, threats against politicians and their children. The director of the CSA (a woman) was pronounced 'guilty of torturing innocents' and her employees (also women) were called 'SS members' (Mitchell & Goody, 1997).

In Canada, the provincial legislatures enacted reforms of the divorce laws in the 1980s. The provincial governments passed laws on the mandatory collection of child support payments, following the publication of studies showing that mothers had trouble securing these payments from their child(ren)'s father. In 1985, the first Fathers-4-Justice committee was founded in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario (Kenedy, 2005, pp. 3–11). Two years later, the Canadian Council for Family Rights, another divorced fathers' defense organization, was established (Baker, 1997). In Québec, as of the early 1980s, the Association des hommes séparés et divorcés du Québec (Quebec Association of Separated and Divorced Men, AHSD) encouraged divorced fathers not to make their child support payments, in protest against allegedly unfair divorce orders (Dufresne, 1998, p. 129). Significantly, despite the new divorce laws, judges refused to grant support payments to two-thirds of the women who requested them (Baker, 1997, p. 66). During the 2000s in Québec, judges ruled on child custody in only 15% of divorce or separation cases. Approximately 80% of cases were settled out of court because the majority of fathers did not seek joint custody, still less primary custody (Rousseau & Quéniart, 2004, p. 9), and 5% of cases were settled by default, usually because the father had failed to appear in court. In sum, the main responsibility for child rearing falls primarily to women, entailing

additional domestic and parental tasks; hence, greater difficulty reconciling paid employment and unpaid parental work (see Lavoie, 2008).

Now, during the late 1990s and the 2000s men actively defending the rights of fathers became the most active and strident masculinist militants. The president of the Office des droits des pères ('Bureau of Fathers' Rights') went on a thirty-day hunger strike in 2001 to protest against the purported fact that separated and divorced fathers had been turned into no more than 'automatic banking machines' (Breton, 2001). Others engaged in actions already described above: unfurling banners on bridges, demonstrating in front of Montreal's City Hall or the law courts, and so forth. Such actions are carried out in the name of the children's interests – with slogans such as 'Daddy loves you!' – and equality between mothers and fathers. Bertioia & Drakich (1993), who interviewed members of Canadian fathers' groups, identified an inconsistency in the fathers' rights movement's rhetoric on the subject of 'equality'. The interviews revealed that, in general, what these men sought was not an equal sharing of domestic and parental tasks, but rather to maintain and even heighten their control over their ex-wives after the divorce or separation, sometimes through the children; hence, the demand for, among other things, mandatory shared custody, regardless of the family's history (Bertioia & Drakich, 1993).

Many of the feminists whom we interviewed identified fathers' groups as the source of masculinism's most active elements and as a pool for the recruitment of masculinist leaders. By way of example, one of the feminists questioned explained that a friend of hers had left a fathers' group after realizing that they were 'a bunch of crazies; I went there as a father who had been through a break-up, but this isn't a support group. Its aim is to raise the pressure level and make us say that women are malicious' [our translation]. The women who took part in our investigation also observed that much of the time and energy invested in masculinist mobilizations to support divorced and separated fathers is devoted to hindering the network of support for battered wives and victims of sexual assault. Thus, spokesmen for divorced and separated fathers' groups have filed for injunctions against public awareness campaigns to prevent sexual assault on the grounds that they convey a negative image of men.<sup>14</sup> The group L'Après-rupture has also engaged in the administrative harassment of dozens of battered women's shelters and women's centres, resorting to access-to-information laws to demand disclosure of confidential and sensitive information, thereby threatening the safety of support workers and women who use these services. Such tactics tend to confirm the thesis that masculinism actually functions as a 'lobby for male aggressors' (Dufresne, 1998 [our translation]; concerning the situation in the USA, see Crowley, 2009).

### **Conclusion: Impacts on the Feminist Movement and Gender Relations**

As suggested by mechanistic theories on the relationship between movements and countermovements, the masculinist current of antifeminism emerged and was constituted primarily in reaction to the advances of feminism. Masculinism was consolidated when the state began to oblige men to pay for child support and when feminists, independently at first and then with state assistance, developed a large network of resources for women who had been subjected to male violence (perpetrated mainly by spouses and ex-spouses). This dynamic is evidenced by the focus of masculinist mobilizations: to contest divorce laws, to guilt women who divorce by blaming them for male suicides, and to sap the legitimacy of resources for women who have been assaulted by spouses or ex-spouses. The masculinist

current can also affect women and feminists by reducing their financial resources through calls to choke off their government subsidies. Certain organic intellectuals of masculinism and groups like L'Après-rupture seem to play on these vulnerabilities when they cast doubt on the public funding of women's groups, which they consider excessive in a time of budget cutbacks (see, e.g., Trottier, 2007, pp. 138–139; Boucher & Gagnon, 2010).

By applying the countermovement approach, one can deduce that a countermovement's actions affect the priorities and actions of the movement it opposes. Thus, over the past few years the feminist movement in Québec has been obliged to respond in various ways to masculinist actions. According to one of the participants in our investigation, all such actions create 'a climate of fear, [and] when you find yourself in a climate of fear you are inclined to change your behavior' [our translation], choosing at times to censor yourself, specifically, by refraining from speaking out in public events or the media. The feminists that we interviewed described how their organizations had taken security measures (locks on doors, confidential telephone numbers, not travelling alone, security marshals at events, etc.), lodged complaints with the police, hired lawyers, organized group discussions, and undertaken research to better understand antifeminism and masculinism. Furthermore, analyses of masculinism have been written and published by feminist groups, workshops have been held on the subject, a day-long study session on masculinism was convened by the Council on the Status of Women, and a campaign was launched to aid the journal *À Babord!* and a feminist freelance writer and activist in their defense against a libel suit, following the publication of an article on masculinism.

It is noteworthy, moreover, that the discourse on men in crisis has been so effectively propagated that feminists themselves have fallen prey to it. Evidence of feminists taking up masculinist issues includes, for example, recently published introductions to feminism, some of which devote an entire chapter or section to the problems encountered by men subsequent to the gains made by women (Goyet, 2007, pp. 196–197; le Blanc, 2007, pp. 39–40). The official journal of the Council on the Status of Women, *La Gazette des femmes*, has in recent years offered its readers special in-depth discussions on themes concerning men, such as '*Unisexe, la violence?*' (Is Violence Unisex?) (Carrier, 2007). Even more troubling is the fact that some feminists have challenged the exclusion of men from previously women-only organizations or groups, such that a parliamentary commission was held on the mandate of the Conseil du Statut de la femme du Québec (Québec Council on the Status of Women), which was subsequently opened up to include men (Foucault, 2008).

What's more, some masculinist intellectuals have explicitly asserted that feminists should take care of men and help solve their problems as men (Shearmur, 2007; Trottier, 2007, p. 43). But isn't this precisely the role women traditionally have been asked to fulfil: to care of men, to devote time, energy, and attention to men? The sociologist Colette Guillaumin (1992) has proposed the concept of *sexage* (after the French words for serfdom and slavery) to describe the relationship between the sexes, which is the collective and individual appropriation of women by men – women's bodies, the products of their bodies, and their labour power. As a result, then, of masculinism and the discourse on men in crisis, women are being asked, implicitly or explicitly, to go back to taking care of men. This, then, is how the masculinist countermovement strives to (re)appropriate women who are so lacking in grace as to fight for their emancipation.

However, it is not always easy to measure the exact effects, positive or negative, that the mobilization of a countermovement may have on dominated classes and dissident

forces within a society. With regard to the feminist movement in Québec, the masculinist countermovement has damaged the solidarity among certain feminists, as explained by one of our interviewees, ‘Some feminists want to dissociate themselves from radical feminists like me because, look, there’s no question that we’re at the top of hate list of those guys’ [our translation]. Another interviewee, while not downplaying masculinism’s negative impact on feminism, observed that it may also radicalize certain feminists. Just as a social movement can produce unwanted effects, such as the formation of a countermovement (Chabanet & Giugni, 2010, p. 149), masculinism has spurred solidarity among feminists and countermobilizations, as evidenced by the creation in 2005 of an anti-masculinist coalition in Montreal. It organized rallies protesting the *Paroles d’hommes* convention and held a counterconvention. The same dynamic also occurred in Brussels in 2008 (Pape, 2010). Indeed, feminists who mobilize in response to masculinist actions take the opportunity to demonstrate the renewed relevance of feminism, including its more combative current, radical feminism. Hence, the masculinist countermovement may ultimately have the effect of encouraging the mobilization of feminists.

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## Notes

1. This is nothing new: see Symes (1930).
2. Available at <http://www.uomini3000.it/68.htm> (accessed 18 December 2009) [our translation]. Thanks to Marcos Ancelovici for this reference.
3. From an interview in the documentary film *La domination masculine* (2009), Patrice Jean, dir. [our translation].
4. The term ‘feminazis’ is also used by the conservative commentator Rush Limbaugh, in the USA.
5. Personal notes made during the hearings, 4–6 June 2008 [our translation].
6. In the documentary film *La domination masculine* (2009), Patrice Jean, dir. [our translation].
7. For further insight into the fathers’ rights activists rhetoric of equality, see Bertoia and Drakich (1993).
8. Statistics Canada (2011). Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11388/tbl/tbl001-eng.htm>
9. Statistics Canada (2011). Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11388/tbl/tbl012-eng.htm>
10. Available at <http://www.prevention-violence.ca/English/PDFsEnglish/DomesticViolenceandFirearms.pdf> (accessed 25 July 2011).
11. Statistics Canada (2011). Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11416/tbl/tbl003-eng.htm>
12. ‘Suicide’. Available at [http://fathers-4-justice.ca/portail/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=75](http://fathers-4-justice.ca/portail/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=45&Itemid=75) (accessed August 2007).



13. This is what G. Dupuy claimed at the 'Consultation générale sur le document intitulé Vers un nouveau contrat social pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes', *Journal des débats*, Commission permanente des affaires sociales, Québec, 28 September 2005, 38(155). See also Dupuy (2000, pp. 106–111, 2010, p. 64).
14. See, for example, <http://www.lapresrupture.qc.ca/ArchivesLettresOuvertes.html#injonction>

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