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5 Immigrant Men and Domestic Life
Renegotiating the Patriarchal Bargain?

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I examine domestic practices in migrant families through interviews with immigrant men who were asked to talk about the impact that migration and displacement had upon their attitudes and behaviour in relation to their gendered roles. How are their personal and domestic relationships with women affected by migration? How do they feel about any changes in gender roles and the division of domestic labour? How do they feel about the perceived and experienced changes in gendered power?

The aim of the chapter is to explore how gendered power operates within particular immigrant groups. Given that the literature argues that migration influences the relations between men and women (Shahidian 1999), a critical examination of immigrant men's experience of masculinity may shed some light on how gender based inequalities in migrant communities are enacted. It has already been noted in this book how little we know about the effects of migration on men's domestic relations (Hibbins and Pease in this volume). Hibbins and I have argued that immigrant men need to renegotiate their gender identity as they relate their own cultural understandings of masculinity to the meanings and practices in the dominant culture. In this chapter I explore what this process of negotiation means for immigrant men's involvement in domestic work and family life.

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY

Masculinity is understood in this study as being socially constructed within specific historical and cultural contexts of gender relations. This approach emphasises the variation of masculinities between different cultures and within different historical moments, as well as the range of gender differences arising from race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, region of the country within particular cultures. If men's subjectivities are socially constructed, they are open to change. I am thus concerned with how this process of
change occurs for immigrant men who are subordinated and marginalised within hierarchies of male dominance.

When men migrate to another country, they bring with them assumptions and practices associated with manhood in their culture. When they arrive in Australia they have to engage with a different set of assumptions and practices (Coleman 1998). The men in this study came with ideas about masculinity quite different from the white Anglo expressions of masculinity in Australia. Thus, the immigrant men find their assumptions about gender challenged as they settle in a different environment. As men often engage in a process of reflecting on their masculinities in the context of challenge and contestation, I hope to learn something about how these men negotiate change.

Kandiyoti (1988) refers to the way that men and women negotiate the rules governing gender relations as the ‘patriarchal bargain’. The patriarchal bargain includes the domestic division of labour, economic contributions to the family, and authority and decision-making in the family. How is this ‘bargain’ affected by migration? Is patriarchal authority eroded as a result of migration?

Many writers argue that migration provides women and men with the opportunity to transcend traditional sex roles. Boyle and Halfacree (1999: 9), for example, note that it can ‘act as an escape route from oppressive patriarchal societies’. Willis and Yeo (2000: xv-xvi) emphasise how ‘a new location provides a space in which gender relations can be renegotiated’. A number of studies of immigrant families in Western countries note that men become less patriarchal as a result of the cultural influences of the host country (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Shahidian 1999; Conway-Long 2006). Shahidian (1999) observes that profound changes in the relations between men and women in relation to gender role behaviour and the sexual division of labour occur as a result of migration. There is then a perception of gender relations becoming more egalitarian as a result of migration. An important cause of this shift is that women’s economic power is often increased at the same time that men’s financial contributions to the family are diminished due to either unemployment or low-paid jobs.

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994), for example, have observed that Mexican male immigrants in the United States found that their patriarchal privileges were significantly diminished by the process of migration. They no longer exercised a monopoly over decision-making and became more involved in domestic labour. However, other studies have demonstrated that while the ‘patriarchal bargain’ can be ‘renegotiated’ upon arrival in a new country, “many elements of gender relations remain the same” (Willis and Yeo 2000) and may even be reinforced.

Some studies also indicate that immigrant men may enact dominant expressions of masculinity in the home, as a consequence of their devalued status in the economy. Messner (1997), for example, discusses how Mexican men in the United States displace their antagonism resulting from their class on to their relationship with their female partners. Because they are unable to challenge their class oppressors, Mexican immigrant men display an exaggerated masculinity to enact power over women within the context of their relative powerlessness. Similar arguments have been advanced about other groups of marginalised and subordinated men. However, in representing aggressive displays of masculinity as a form of resistance against race and class oppression, these studies neglect the impact of their behaviour on women (Messner 1997). This chapter endeavours to address that neglect.

DOING RESEARCH WITH IMMIGRANT MEN

This research is part of a larger Australian Research Council funded comparative inquiry into the gendered subjectivities of men who have migrated to Australia from East Africa, the Middle East, Southern Asia and Latin America. This chapter is based on qualitative interviews conducted in 2004 and 2005. My research assistants and I conducted individual in-depth interviews with a purposive non-probability sample of sixty men (fifteen men from each of the four regions). The purposive criteria used for selecting interviewees were that the men had been at least eighteen years old when they migrated to Australia and that they had been resident for at least three years prior to the interview. The men’s ages at the time of interview ranged from twenty to fifty four. These interviews were complemented with eight focus group discussions and four life history interviews. Data in this chapter is drawn from some of the individual interviews and some of the focus group discussions and is analysed in relation to the themes that follow.

The men were asked to reflect upon whether any changes had occurred in their attitudes and behaviours in relation to their female partners and their involvement in paid work and family work. I wanted to uncover the way in which they understood shifts in their gendered power and how they regarded the appropriateness of the division of labour. We asked the men what they regarded as the roles of men and women in society. How have their roles changed since immigrating to Australia? To what extent do they regard these changes as positive or negative?

BEING A PROVIDER

It is widely noted in the literature on masculinity that men’s experience of paid work is directly linked to their conception of masculinity. Thus, it was not unexpected to discover that one major theme emerging from these interviews with men was the significance of the provider role. Given the significance of paid work on their lives, one would expect that unemployment and unskilled work would have major consequences on immigrant men’s sense of manhood (Hibbins 2000). Men’s power is experienced as being
founded upon their paid work, whereas women’s roles are seen as being based in child care and domestic work (Conway-Long 2006). For all of the men we interviewed, whether they were from Africa, Asia, Latin America or the Middle East, being a provider was essential to being a man. Being a man was based on providing for a family and being a “family-man”; that is, by “having kids—you become a man”. Being responsible and having employment to ensure economic stability were the prerequisites for starting a family. As one man from the Latin American focus group said: “You’re supposed to be the provider in South America and that changes here”. Furthermore, a man from Chile said:

_I always wanted to be the man who . . . supported a family._

Another man from Argentina said:

_We’re talking about South America. You have to be married and have kids and work and maintain the family and your wife has to be at home._

A fourth man from Bolivia commented:

_[Paid work] is the fundamental basis . . . for any man._

The migration experience often challenged the ability to live up to these ideas, with some men being forced to take up employment below their qualifications and expectations. At the same time, though, this reinforced the importance of employment in their sense of themselves. The importance of paid work figured very high in their sense of masculinity. A Cuban man remarked that it was hard to come to Australia and “become a father and head of family almost overnight”. His assumed role as the head of the family was challenged by the fact that he couldn’t find work for the first twelve months and had to stay at home and look after a young baby while his wife went out and worked. This was a difficult experience for a man used to being looked after by the women in his life and being told that men had no place in the family kitchen.

_If you are . . . growing up as a boy, they don’t let you into the kitchen. The idea is that the women should work at home and the men outside the house._

The men contrasted their own focus on the family with their perception that men of the older generation did not really help out with the raising of children or the care of the household, as they now did. Migrating to Australia contributes to these shifts in the household division of labour. Men’s authority in different realms is challenged by a change in their public status and by the nature of socially legitimated forms of behaviour, as the following comments illustrate:

_I had my own chauffeur in Mexico. I had power . . . coming to Australia I was known by no one._ (Man from Mexico)

_So overnight from gallivanting around Havana, I had to be stuck in my house twenty-four hours a day, mowing the lawn, and cleaning the dishes and cooking . . . I had to change my whole background, my whole identity._ (Man from Cuba)

_It would be better to be a man in Bolivia . . . There’s a saying in Bolivia, that it’s better to be the head of a mouse than the tail of a lion. In Bolivia at least, I would be the head of a mouse. Here, I am pretty close to being the tail of a lion._ (Man from Bolivia)

Many of the men mentioned that their initial period in Australia was very difficult in terms of their ability to provide for their family and to get accustomed to the different social and cultural environment. The increase in opportunities for women and their greater economic and social independence provided a further challenge to their ‘traditional’ social roles. Some men talked about feeling let down and cheated because they had left careers. As one man from Bolivia said:

_It’s a new reality under which you live. Change brings with it positive things. For instance you have to accept nowadays that women have to work alongside men. But you also wonder if something isn’t lost in that respect because there was sort of a logical sequence to having the man work and the women stay at home and take care of the kids._

Another man from Chile reported:

_I had to adapt into many different things that happened here and didn’t happen there. But initially that thing of being a provider . . . It’s a very important thing for the family about being a provider and I think it’s a man’s role to provide it. For Chilean people it’s very important._

The Vietnamese men also talked about the importance of providing support for their families in terms of ‘bringing home the bacon’ and finding a job and bringing home the food while the women stay at home and “do the housewife thing”. This division of labour was seen by the Vietnamese men as “being the main objective of Vietnamese society”. Nghe et al. (2003), commenting on the experiences of Vietnamese men, noted that Vietnamese migrants often hold multiple low-paid and labour-intensive jobs. Because these men are unable to be the sole provider they
often experience considerable anxiety and feel a sense of failure. As Nghe et al. (2003: 252) note:

Because his wife is earning equal to or more than he does, he may now have to share his power within the household. Consequently, he may not be able to maintain his identity as the head of the household, with unquestioned authority, as was traditionally prescribed by the hierarchical structure of a Vietnamese family.

This Latin American and Vietnamese male socialisation that requires men to take on the role of provider and establish themselves as head of the household is replicated in other cultures as well. African men also talked about how being a man required them to be able to support their family. As one African man expressed it:

Being a man is being a provider. That’s one of the most basic and significant roles of the man. It is to be head of the family, even in the absence of the family, you have to shown the ability to be able to provide, not only for yourself, but also for your siblings and your brothers and your sisters.

The Middle Eastern men similarly talked about their responsibilities to provide for their families. As one man from Iraq put it:

The feeling of myself as a man will be improved if my wages improved. The increase in my salary enhances the feeling of myself as a man . . . As man works and gets wages, his thinking of himself as a man and being responsible are getting better and he feels that he has prestige.

Another man from Iraq said that he was unable to find work here and that this means: “there is no recognition even to my humanity . . . Those who do not work are like dead people”.

LOSING AUTHORITY AND RESPECT

Many of the men had clear views of male authority in the family. One man from Africa commented that:

The man is the head of the house . . . There are things that the men are entitled to say and do. African women respect that. When you come to this country, I think you find that it doesn’t work.

Another African man commented that his perfect partner was someone who made it possible for him to be head of the family:

As I always say, you can’t have two lions in the same den. It doesn’t work. I mean you come home from work, where somebody is your boss. So you get harassed the whole day. You don’t want to come home where there is another boss to boss you around the whole day. I mean you will never win.

A third African man also thought that gender equality in the home would not work:

It’s like a country. You have to have a leader. You can’t just have everybody standing there and saying what they have to say.

Men from all countries commented that a loss of their status as head of the house meant that their partners no longer respected them. As one Cambodian man commented:

The women don’t respect them particularly. Being a man in Cambodia, women respect them. Here, they don’t respect them.

Other Cambodian men also felt that they were not valued by their wives in Australia because the women felt that they were equal. As another Cambodian man reported:

The relationship between man and wife is different in Cambodia. Cambodian women always respect their husbands. But not like here. Everyone is just like a partner.

One African man regarded this loss of authority as a major contribution to family breakdown. This was because the men recognised that they have to operate as equals and that they don’t have a higher status to be respected and obeyed without question.

Many of the men spoke about the importance of respect in their lives. In fact some said that a man by definition was someone who was respected. One Kenyan man said that ‘back in Kenya’ he got more respect because he was head of the home. Another African man commented that in Australia he lost authority because he had to ask his partner’s opinion or seek her permission. Two other men from Kenya both captured this succinctly:

I prefer to be in Kenya. That’s for sure . . . There are many things that I can do back at home that I can’t do here. There’s respect back at home . . . There’s respect in society because you know your place within the society.
And the second man, on going back to Kenya:

It’s coming from a place where you don’t have authority to a place where you have absolute authority. It takes time to get used to it.

Most men tend to take their superior status and their advantages as men for granted. They believe that in their role as the head of the family, they should and will be obeyed unquestioningly. However, in a new country, where women articulate their rights, relations of respect have to be renegotiated and men have to earn respect (Seidler 2006). Many of the men interviewed found this difficult to come to terms with.

UNSETTLING THE ‘NATURAL’ ORDER

Men from all the countries represented viewed women’s roles as being naturally based in the home. In response to the question: “What is the role of women in your culture?”, one African man said:

Their role is cooking, fetching firewood, looking after the babies.

The Latin American men also talked about women’s roles being at home, whereas men’s roles were in their paid work. Similarly, the Middle Eastern men commented on the differences of roles. A number of the men made specific reference to this division of labour as being particular to their culture. At the same time, however, such a division of labour was naturalised. Women did the housework and child care, “according to her nature”. It was also claimed by a number of Middle Eastern men that all women preferred to stay at home to look after their children and their husbands. One man in the Middle Eastern focus group said that the tasks that men perform “are those that a woman cannot do”. Commenting further, he said:

A woman will never be a man and a man cannot be a woman. Man is man and woman is woman.

Chapman (2004) notes that when domestic practices are transplanted from one culture to another, there is likely to be conflict as men and women are influenced by alternative perspectives on how to organise their domestic responsibilities. Given the change in men’s employment status and the rhetorical notion of gender equality in Australia, the men interviewed felt pressured by women to share the child care and domestic work at home. An Asian man commented:

Here for some men, it’s very difficult to change their behaviour, to do things around the house... It’s women’s work. I don’t want to do that work... But women keep insisting that the man help with this kind of work.

Many men had stereotypes of Australian men and women and thought that domestic and paid work were shared equally in Australia because both women and men worked. Some even suggested that in Australia women were able to be better providers than men. As one Vietnamese man remarked:

It’s very unusual to see a man cooking in our culture... Whereas here, I get up and do all the cooking... It’s the way we adapt to this culture.

One Vietnamese man observed that it was hard for Vietnamese men in Australia because, in the context of being head of the family, they now had to cook and feed the children. Similarly, one man from Cambodia reflected on how, in Cambodia, women normally stayed at home and that they took their husband’s advice. Whereas for him:

It’s different. I’m working. My wife’s working. We both work. So when we come home, we share the work together.

A Salvadorian man had undertaken a similar adjustment.

Yeah, it changes a lot of Salvadorians... When people go to El Salvador, they tell me that over there, people get like shocked when they see them washing the dishes or serving food to their wives... They think: “what’s wrong?” It’s something for them that shouldn’t happen. It should be the other way around. But when you are here, you get used to cooking for your wife and cleaning the house... It’s a break in the rules of manhood for us in a way.

LOSING POWER TO WOMEN

A number of African men commented on the significance of women’s greater financial independence and how this created conflict between men and women in families. It was recognised by the men that women’s subservience to them was in part related to the man’s ability to be earning more money than the woman. Where the woman was earning as much or more money, she became less subservient. They also commented that women’s access to money from Centrelink gave them independence from the male wage and that this led to a lot of conflict.

The Latin American men commented that they felt “displaced by women” because they were more easily able to find a job (albeit a low-skilled one).
than the men. The high level of unemployment among Latin American
men was noted by a number of participants. As one Salvadorian man com-
mented, in relation to men's unemployment:

Men feel really useless within the family. They are no longer able to
provide the way they used to. So for many Latin American men, they
feel this is the worst country to be in. They see the legal system and
the welfare system . . . against them, displacing them from what their
traditional role used to be.

A number of Latin American men expressed concerns about women having
"more opportunities in this culture" and that the legal system protected
women in ways that were not available in Latin America.

So very often this impacts on relationships, people separate because
men feel displaced by the system and by women. Women suddenly
take different roles. They're able to get a job. They're able to get money
from Centrelink.

Similar comments were expressed by African and Middle Eastern men,
respectively:

We've got a lot of incidents where there are divorce cases because the
man who brings the money for the whole family and the respect from
that point of view is no longer there . . . There is another man which is
Centrelink. Because you and your wife are both women, because you
are both having the money from the same source.

As a man, we want to feel that we are the lion of the zoo. Our wife is
the zoo keeper . . . As a man from a Middle Eastern background, we
want to feel that we are a man and that we are the responsible person
in the house . . . But here it's hard to cope with the society, the system
and the law, especially the family law.

Many participants commented that women's liberation and feminism had
progressed more in Australia than in their home countries. Women were
seen to have more power in Australia. One Latin American man commented
that the opportunities available to Latin American women in Australia
were "enormous compared to the opportunities they get back in our coun-
tries". There is even a perception among many immigrant men themselves
that they are "stuck in sexist traditional male roles while white educated
middle-class men are forging a more egalitarian role" (Hondagneu-Sotelo
and Messner 1994: 200). We must be careful, however, not to portray
immigrant men as patriarchal and backward in gender terms, in contrast to
more egalitarian white Australian men (Bradley 1996).

In contrast to many of the countries these men migrated from, in Aus-
tralia there is an ideology of gender equality enacted through government
discourses and popular culture. However, numerous empirical studies of
both domestic labour and paid labour continue to show deeply embedded
unequal gendered practices. Migrants who encounter the espoused egal-
itarian views, however, must not know of the reality of gender inequality
and thus conclude that gender relations are more equal than they are in
practice.

COMING TO TERMS WITH CHANGE

A number of men commented that immigrant women find their rights vali-
dated in Australia. Many men found this very difficult to accept, as the
comments from the following two African men illustrate:

I think that equal rights are very, very hard for men to survive.

I think that women should be respected. But equal rights is something
that will never work.

One Middle Eastern man believed that equal rights for women equated with
women becoming like men and that this was going "against our nature"
which would lead to being "punished by the nature too".

Many men felt that they are worse off than women are in Australia.
Some of the men thought that Australian men were dominated by women.
One African man said that "Australian women are bossy" and another
commented:

I have visited many houses and families, particularly those who are
married to Australian born women. I saw the woman talking to her
husband in a masculinized way as if she is the boss of the house. This
is wrong. I do not accept that.

A Cambodian man said that he felt like he didn't have any control over his
relationship. Growing up as a man in Cambodia, he internalised a belief
that men must be in control of their families. In his culture, men domi-
nated women, but here it felt it was different. Wives didn't listen to their
husbands and they argued a lot. He believed that women had more rights
than men in Australia and he was finding that very difficult to deal with. A
Vietnamese man commented similarly:
They [Vietnamese men] complain that they can't live here because they are not valued by their wives. They complain about the rights of women here. They say women are dominant and that they dominate men.

An African man also remarked that he thought Australian men were "under the thumb of women". Another African man commented on his perception of Australian women as "intimidating and confrontational", while a third African man believed that "Australian women expect too much from their men". A Middle Eastern man referred to Australia as a "woman's country" because women didn't listen to men. He believed that there was a hierarchy of importance with women at the top followed by children and then animals and men last.

It is clear that these men regard women's rights as having supplanted men's authority and power. Many regarded themselves as being oppressed by women. It appears that any challenge to men's privilege and any changes in patriarchal power relations are experienced by many men as a reversal that positions them as oppressed. Thus, if men no longer exercise control over women they experience this shift in power as a form of oppression (Conway-Long 2006).

Men would appear to be very conscious of how much women are improving their situation but they do not appear to be conscious of how much institutional power they still retain (Conway-Long 2006). Many men have difficulty recognising that they perpetuate a system of inequality that benefits them. Some look back to a 'golden age' when they had more absolute power and they experience their loss of power as losing a fundamental aspect of their identity as men. Most men were ambivalent about this; some were openly angry and only a few were supportive (Conway-Long 2006).

Many men find it hard and painful to adapt to changes in roles and expectations. Vietnamese participants said that, while in Vietnam, men are the head of the family and there is a strong belief "that the man is more important than the woman"; they believed that in Australia power is shared equally in families. One man talked about how he continued to want it to be the way it was but that he was forced to adapt to Western culture. In this context, "conflict happens".

When I came here I found it difficult for me to change, to do things around the house. Because when I grew up, I didn't do many of these things, like washing the dishes. It is really hard for me to adopt all of these things.

A man in the African focus group commented similarly:

When you come here, you just find things are not like that. Man and woman, they are both the same. They have to share responsibilities. If

you've got a job, she might have a job too or she might be busy with the housework and you have to help with the housework. Yes, that does hurt you as a man.

One Kenyan man talked about how highly respected he was and when he came to Australia it "was a very big shock". One man believed that Australian couples treated each other equally because they understood the basis for equality, whereas African men did not.

Many of these men were angry at what they saw as Western values and priorities. A Middle Eastern man believes that women's challenges to male authority have their origins in other countries. He regards these changes as tearing families apart, as women take decisions without consulting their husbands. The impact of these changes was captured by a Latin American man:

There is a breaking down of relationships. It's not just that you are losing your independence. You are losing everything. You are losing your family, you are losing your leadership, and you are losing your role. Because you are no longer the leader, the breadwinner.

One Argentine man reflected on how sad he would be if he had a son here "because of what I am going through, what I see men going through here". These responses from our interviews with Latin American men are consistent with the literature on Latin American men migrating to the United States. Torres (1998), for example, found that Latino men experienced internal conflict as a result of their attempts to adhere to a traditional form of masculinity that was no longer attainable in the United States. Abalos (2002) also found that Latino men in the United States felt powerless because they were unable to live up to the ideals of the macho identity.

There are some instances where men have embraced new roles and expectations. A Mexican man said that he had changed "because I had to adapt into the society and the way people here see women as a participating member of society, because it's important to them". Similarly, a Salvadoran man commented that he had changed and was he was now equal with his wife:

We changed completely our role with the kids, like most of the things we do in the house. Now we share most of the things we do. So my role has changed very dramatically.

He was very positive about learning that women have the same rights as men. Another man from El Salvador also was pleased that there was a sense of equality here and more choices for women, and a Thai man commented that it was better here because the culture was better for women. He didn't like the way women were treated in his country.
ESCALATING FAMILY CONFLICT

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994) have commented that men who are marginalised and subordinated in the public sphere are likely to display exaggerated forms of masculinity and to attempt to exercise greater power over their female partners to offset their experiences of powerlessness. Some men believe that they have the right to use violence to punish women who have disrupted their sense of control (Conway-Long 2006).

It is clear that some men's responses to this situation are likely to lead to conflict. As a man in the African focus group commented:

It has made a lot of men feel kind of castrated because your wife will talk back to you and she will say anything she wants. And you cannot respond the way you used to respond back home because you might respond in a way that is considered abusive and that would be used against you. So there has always been a lot of conflict and couples have separated and others even though they are together are always in a situation of continuous tension.

While a man from Cambodia had changed his own behaviour, he observed that many of his friends had not:

In Cambodia men don't do things around the house, like washing dishes. We don't do that and we leave this stuff to women.

Interviewer: So you still don't do it now?

No, I adopted the western culture because we work together, because we have shared responsibilities for things around the house ... But some men here still practice the same way and conflict normally happens.

CHANGING MEN?

Some men believed that what they shared as men was stronger than their national and ethnic differences. Most of the men interviewed did not believe that migration had changed their sense of themselves as men. A Latin American man said that "the roles of men are similar in a way really". He believed that they were simply "performed differently". Another Latin American man commented: "We are all the same. The only difference is skin". While yet another Latin American man said: "They are men everywhere, here, there on the moon". A Middle Eastern man said that, for him, "the meaning of masculinity is universal", including, according to an African man, "things like being the head of a family and being a father". An Iraqi man said that "masculinity is masculinity anywhere you go". While another Iraqi man commented: "A man is a man and a woman is a woman". An Egyptian man also said: "The man everywhere is a man. In every country it's the same. A man is a man, anywhere he goes".

Being a man often reflected a sense of an unchanging masculine identity, for the core elements that the men felt their masculinity rested on were felt to be the same here, there and everywhere. That is, all of the men said that very little had changed in their own sense of masculinity and being a man as a result of migration, even when some of their practices had changed. An Argentinian man said that now, due to changes in technology and globalisation, similar cultural and social trends in both Australia and Argentina influence men here and there. As such, there were now similar forms of masculinity in both places. As the Argentinian man said:

You're a man no matter where you are. Man is a man, here, there, anywhere.

CONCLUSION

This comparative research with men from different cultures reveals a similarity in views and practices that is striking. In a study in eleven countries, Keith Pringle and I (Pringle and Pease 2002) found a high degree of transnational commonality among men's practices. In all the countries, some form of 'patriarchal dividend' was taken by men. In spite of various religious affiliations and specific cultural traditions, all of the cultures were patriarchal.

Patriarchy operates within various cultural and historical contexts rather than universally (Coleman 1998). Notwithstanding the common manifestations across various cultures, patriarchal authority is not immutable. Male authority and power are legitimated by specific cultural and religious traditions (Seidler 2006). In spite of the commonalities in views on male authority and male roles in the men who were interviewed, these are given specific meaning by reference to local cultural and situated structural contexts. Men in this study often made reference to culturally specific aspects of their society to authorise their particular views on gender roles. Thus it is important to understand the historical and cultural specificity of different expressions of masculinity but also to recognise that patriarchy has common elements across cultures, which, as I have shown here, include a strong adherence to the ethos of the breadwinner, the notion of paterlineal families, the idea of 'natural' sexual differences and a belief in a gendered division of labour.

From these men's accounts, many of them had access to undisputed patriarchal power in situated contexts in their home countries. However, in Australia, they were unable to retain their monopoly of power and authority. As women's economic contributions to the family increased and as men's earning capacity decreased, as a result of unemployment or low-paid jobs,
more egalitarian patterns of authority and decision-making were negotiated. This also impacted on how domestic labour was divided. While the women still had less power than the men, they had more power in Australia than in their home countries.

While the men in this study emphasised how different the social context of gender relations was in their home countries from Australia, these perceptions of difference are connected in part to the shift in men’s and women’s economic resources. Many of these men, in their home countries, were able to fulfill the provider role they were socialised to aspire to. In Australia they were generally unable to support their families financially because of unemployment and low-paid work. These changes enabled women to increase their power and to renegotiate the patriarchal bargain (see also Kibria 1990). However, it would not appear that this renegotiation has disrupted patriarchal gender relations overall. While some of the men have changed their practices, most of them have done so reluctantly and many of them would seem to be resisting these changes. This may explain increasing levels of separation, divorce and domestic violence in many immigrant families (Rees and Pease 2007).

This research confirms that culture and ethnicity play an important part in the way in which masculinity is constructed and expressed and the resilience of patriarchy in spite of shifts in gendered power. The factors that influence masculinities are broad and constituted by both larger macro factors such as class, race, culture and social hierarchies, and micro factors that include the personal impacts of divorce, political change, personal life histories, and the local impact of global forces.

In this chapter I have explored the diversity and commonalities in men’s lives in relation to patriarchal views and practices. These men’s narratives convey some of the experiences that migration has upon men’s masculine subjectivities. Through inviting and collecting men’s narratives of their experiences, the research provided opportunities for the men to reflect on the symbolic meaning of masculinity and manhood and on their role in the maintenance or transformation of gendered power.

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