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6 Rethinking Masculinities in the African Diaspora

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we examine the gender identity issues faced by African men settling in Melbourne, Australia. By examining the results of fifteen individual interviews and one focus group, we explore the gender-related settlement issues faced by the men as they negotiate the changing meanings of manhood and masculinity in Australia.

Pre-colonial African masculinity needs to be understood in the context of the collective nature of African communities. However, while some basic elements have survived, changes have occurred because of external influences. The most fundamental shifts have come from colonisation, religions (particularly Christianity and Islam), globalisation, urbanisation and migration. All of these experiences can be seen as a result of the forces of modernity and their impact has led to a reshaping of traditional ways of life. This has meant that some elements of Western individualism and some remnants of pre-colonial African cultures have become embodied in African men's lives. Migrating African men arrive with this hybrid gendered subjectivity and embark on yet another journey as they encounter diverse masculinities in Australia.

STUDYING AFRICAN MASCUINITIES

The study of masculinities in Africa is still relatively underdeveloped (Ouzgane 2002). However, in recent years a number of anthologies have been published on African masculinities (Morrell 2001; Lindsay and Miescher 2003; Ouzgane and Morrell 2005). Morrell’s collection looks at different expressions of masculinity in southern Africa. Lindsay and Miescher’s edited book focuses on how masculinities have been constructed and practiced in West Africa, in particular, sub-Saharan Africa. While Ouzgane and Morrell’s anthology refers to Africa as a whole, most of the chapters are focused on southern Africa, thus reinforcing the hegemonic influence of this region on the study of African masculinities. Miescher (2007) notes that the study of men and masculinity has focused primarily on West and southern Africa and that pre-colonial African societies have been neglected.

As Africa is not a singular or homogeneous continent, there is considerable cultural and social diversity in relation to language, religion, economy, culture, governance, climate and topography (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). Given the history of colonisation and the balance between modern and traditional lives, we can not generalise about all men in Africa. Thus, the diversity of Africans and African experiences makes it very hard to present a form of masculinity that is unique to Africa and Africans (Buja 2002). Like all masculinities, African masculinities are socially constructed, contextualised, plural and changing (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005; Barker and Ricardo 2005).

Notwithstanding the diversity of masculinities, modern African manhood bestows on the man specific responsibilities to himself and the wider community, age group, family, clan, tribe and nation. Womanhood also carries responsibilities like conducting oneself in ways that do not bring dishonour to the family. Murray and Emecheta (1981: 1) have noted that in “most African societies, the birth of a son enhances a woman's authority in the family: male children are very, very important”. While there is public pride in having a son, there is also great satisfaction for the woman who has a daughter as she expects that she will share the housework with her. The father too expects that she will get married and bring wealth to the family. The traditional practice in many African ethnic groups is that the girl leaves home on marriage. This means that investing in the boy, who will always remain part of the family, is a guarantee for being cared for in old age in a society with little or no modern pension or aged-care programs.

In modern Africa, the attempt to blend cultural practices and African tradition has tended to marginalise women, as many people in gender and development aid programs have been emphasising. In Kenya, for example, the tradition of inheriting land along the male line means women have problems acquiring land title deeds that they could use as collateral to get bank loans. Ellis et al. (2007: 1) have noted that “women in Kenya face more severe legal, regulatory, and administrative barriers to starting and running businesses than do their male counterparts”. Women, therefore, end up either operating very small businesses or in very poorly remunerated jobs in the agricultural and textile sectors. Ellis et al. (2007) argue that these inequalities hinder overall economic development. While this general pattern of gender domination by men can be identified in Africa, it is by no means evident universally across Africa. There are been reports of patriarchal cultures in parts of Africa. Watson-Franke (2000) has identified a number of African communities where patriarchal features are evident and these include: the Ibo of Nigeria, the Ashanti or Akan of Ghana, the Kwaya of Tanzania and the Chewa of Malawi.

In this context, Lindsay and Miescher (2003) question whether Connell's (2005) theory of masculinities is applicable to an understanding of African
men. Some African feminists have also called for caution in adopting European/American concepts of masculinities, by arguing that their Western counterparts have an individualist thrust that contrasts with an African's emphasis on the importance of ethnic groupings, kinship, and family groups (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). The argument is that within such an environment, gender does not play a dominant role compared to other relationships. Schiele (2002) suggests that in traditional Africa, gender was less significant in determining distribution of material resources than age because the very old are regarded as special as they are closer to the spirit world.

Some African women scholars have argued that Western feminism is premised on a binary and oppositional model of relations between women and men that emphasises disharmony and struggle. The adversarial nature of gender relations is challenged by this view. Certainly, a community focus is emphasised in African societies, as compared with polarised individuality in Western societies. The shared burden of poverty in Africa necessarily requires collaboration and negotiations between women and men (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). Some writers believe that this creates joint interests of both women and men that will enable them to move beyond patriarchal violence (Morrell and Swart 2005; Theo 2007).

Black nationalists have promoted an Afrocentric perspective on gender relations. Afrocentricity is a form of indigenous knowledge that is based upon the history and experiences of black people, both in Africa and in immigrant and refugee contexts. It provides a standpoint through which to research and theorise black masculinities. Theo (2007) maintains that from an indigenous perspective, the responsibilities and roles of women balance out the power of men in patriarchal contexts. Thus gender inequality is not regarded as necessarily patriarchal. Amadiume (cited in Morrell and Ouzgane 2005) proposes gender harmony and fluidity as opposed to gender conflict and fixed gender roles. The focus is on consensual rather than antagonistic gender relations.

While Afrocentricity promotes self-respect among black men, Mutua (2006) notes that it has been charged with being homophobic and sexist. Morrell and Swart (2005) maintain that indigenous knowledge has often not acknowledged the exploitation of African women and that it can be used to reproduce patriarchal gender relations. Furthermore, while the African context of poverty and economic hardship may create more of a level playing field than would otherwise be the case, once they arrive in Australia African men and women face different challenges.

THE GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT
OF AFRICAN MEN'S LIVES

African masculinities must also be understood within the context of poverty, AIDS, colonialism, independence struggles, wars and violence. Morrell and Swart (2005) have noted that Africa was the site of sixteen armed conflicts in 1999. Thirty-four per cent of countries in Africa staged wars or major conflicts. Recent statistics show that Africa has accounted for more than half of war-related deaths throughout the world and in 1996 wars resulted in eight million displaced persons and refugees (Morrell and Swart 2005).

Colonialism has challenged the dominant social position of African men. Economic decline, poverty and structural adjustment programs of the World Bank have further disempowered African men (Miescher 2007). Morrell (1998) also cites the Christian church as having challenged hegemonic forms of African masculinity. Silberschmidt (2007) believes that Western gender theories should be revised in the context of these economic and political developments in Africa because they do not take account of the impact of colonialism on masculinities. Silberschmidt (1992) argues that women have been better able to hold on to their traditional roles in both society and the household in the face of colonialism. The position of men, on the other hand, has been more significantly transformed, and as a result, men have lost their identities and self-respect.

This disempowerment of men has been a continuing theme of all of Silberschmidt's work over the years (1992a, 1992b, 2000, 2001, 2005). Her research has focused on the impact of socio-economic change and unemployment on men's lives in rural and urban East Africa. Her argument is that patriarchal authority has been undermined and as a result, men have been unable to fulfil the expectations of their traditional roles as breadwinner and head of the household. Despite this, they have had their self-esteem plummet and their male identity destabilised. Silberschmidt's (2005) research on men's experience of disempowerment raises the question of the consequence of their responses for women. The decline of the breadwinner role is likely to have significant effects on gender relations. In this context, women have challenged their subordinate position. While patriarchal power remains, Silberschmidt believes that the normative basis of men's authority has been undermined. This has led her to pose the question of whether men have become the weaker sex (Silberschmidt 1992b). It is hard to answer this in the affirmative, however, in a context where men are increasingly using violence to defend their household authority.

As class and race oppression may have 'emasculated' African men, in their struggles against class and race domination, they also sought to defend their masculinity (Morrell 2005). This meant that they have also endeavored to re-establish their power over women. By providing black men with greater access to patriarchal privilege as a response to their oppressed condition, there is no questioning of gendered social arrangements (Mutua 2006). Morrell and Swart (2005) have even noted how a program of 'responsible patriarchy' has been promoted by the church in Zambia.

In this context, how does one empower men without re-establishing patriarchy? We cannot just focus on emancipation of black men without acknowledging that they are also implicated in oppressive relations with women.
(Morrell and Swart 2005). Mutua (2006) argues that black men need to
develop progressive black masculinities, which Collins (2006) emphasises
will require black men to reject patriarchal masculinity and male dominance.
Morrell (2005) has suggested that feminism is more likely to engage black
men if it recognises race and class oppression and the impact that globalisation
has had upon black men’s lives. Although the African continent is on
the periphery of globalisation, Africans do not live in isolation and are influ-
enced by global trends and cultural practices. For Africans, globalisation
has been experienced since the times of the great classical African civilisa-
tions which had external contacts and trade. The transatlantic and the trans-
-Saharan slave trade dispersed African people across the globe and to North
and South America in particular. Finally, with colonialism and the latest
globalisation phase coupled with international development aid, Africa has
been exposed to the world market economy and global migration. Globalisation
has intended and unintended consequences on the gender identity issues
facing African men that we are concerned with in this chapter.

Globalised patterns of masculinity from the West are spreading across
the world (Kimmel 2003). This influence is facilitated by the cinema and the
Internet. Centuries of colonialism and the reach of the Western media, develop-
ment aid, tourism and migration have had a major impact on the perception
of masculinities. Diaspora African masculinities in Western countries
may also differ from the experience of masculinities in the African continent
in that they are shaped in the shadow of Western masculinities.

AFRICAN DIASPORA MASCULINITIES

In the last fifteen years there has been an emerging literature on black mas-
culinity and black men’s lives in the United Kingdom (Mac an Ghaill 1994)
and the United States (Stecopoulos and Vebal 1997). In masculinity stud-
ies, black men are seen to inhabit marginalised masculinities because they
are marginalised and subordinated to hegemonic masculinity (Morrell and
Swart 2005). Such an analysis comes out of an understanding of race as a
marker of inferiority in the context of colonialism and imperialism (Morrell
2002). Morrell and Swart (2005) point out, however, that we must be care-
ful not to essentialise black men and fix them in a subordinate position.

Our focus in this chapter is on the responses of the diaspora Africans in
Australia in the face of the challenges of women gaining greater economic
opportunities. In Western countries, as women have made advances, men
have felt their power and control slipping and have experienced a sense of
crisis. This response has been widespread, and African American men and
other diaspora Africans have expressed dissatisfaction with their position
as males by participating in activities like Million Man March, in Wash-
ington, DC, in 1995, to highlight this. However, they often fail to recognise
that their marginalisation from the patriarchal advantage is more to do
with their experience of being dominated by white hegemonic men than it is
with being subordinated by women.

Staples (1989) has argued that institutionalised racism prevents black
men from accessing any benefits from the patriarchal dividend. Also, given
black men’s poverty and lack of education, Morrell and Swart (2005) raise
the question of how much Connell’s patriarchal dividend is likely to flow
on to them. Others have maintained, however, that while black men are
oppressed by race, they are nevertheless still privileged by gender (Collins
2006). Mutua (2006), however, offers a more nuanced perspective and ques-
tions whether black men are privileged by gender in all circumstances.

These historical reactions may be important in helping us to understand
how diaspora Africans construct their masculinity under systems that, at
least in theory, grant equality to men and women. For example, in rela-
tion to young men in Britain, “for a Black male to enter or survive new
Britain is one of denial of race/sexual identity” (Sewell 1997: xiv). If the
experiences from the United States and Britain are any guide, black women
have been performing better in education, while black men are overrepre-
sented in prisons. Black women in the United States earn 67 per cent of all
bachelor’s degrees awarded to blacks as well as 71 per cent of all master’s
degrees and 63 per cent of all doctoral degrees (Nelson 2008). For diaspora
African families then, the challenges of racism are only one of the problems
that they encounter and may not always be the most important one. Sewell
(1997: xiii) notes that “race remains a vitally important part of contempo-
rary life and politics, but it is neither separate from other factors (class, gen-
der, sexuality, disability) nor is it always the most important characteristic
in human experience and action”. Race indeed does not operate separately
but rather intersects with class, gender, sexuality and disability.

A SHORT HISTORY OF AFRICAN
SETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

African migration to Australia is generally regarded as a recent phenom-
enon, as the White Australia policy ensured that Africans were excluded on
the basis of their skin colour. There are, however, indications that Africans’
presence in Australia dates back to the First Fleet, which included some
African convicts.1 Because convicts were a multicultural group, Africans
were part of the colonisation of Australia (Num 2007).

The 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, better known as the ‘White Aus-
tralia policy’, was meant to keep non-Europeans out of Australia. It was
not always strictly enforced and was eased in 1966 by the Holt government
to allow a small number of non-European skilled immigrants to enter Aus-


1 Udo-Ekpo, 1999). Migration was a key component for Australia’s post-war development and there was international pressure from countries
like the United States, India and Japan to end the discriminatory policy.
Even though there has been a Humanitarian program of settlement in operation at least since the end of the Second World War, the inclusion of black Africans in this program did not happen until the end of the White Australia policy in the 1970s. Since the 1980s there has been political acceptance of black Africans affected by political turmoil in the continent.

Researchers on black African migration and settlement in Australia have noted that it is impossible to get reliable data on the number of Africans living in Australia. Available statistics are based on country of birth, but many people born in Africa who have come to Australia have been white Africans from Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa (Udo-Ekpo 1999; Cox et al. 1999; Nsubuga-Kyobe and Dimock 2002). Until the 1970s, migration from Africa to Australia was mainly white migration from decolonising countries and from South Africa. While there have been small numbers of skilled migrants and students obtaining a change of status, the majority of black Africans settling since the 1970s have come under the various humanitarian programs (Udo-Ekpo 1999).

Relative to other ethnic communities, the number of black Africans is quite small. In 1986 there were 108,547 Africans in Australia, and the number had grown to 132, 265 by the 1991 census (Udo-Ekpo 1999). These figures make no distinction in ancestry so white as well black immigrants from Africa appear to be included. Cox et al. (1999) have attempted to make a rough estimate of the black African population migrating in the period 1982 to 1998 and suggest that out of the 59,000 people migrating from Africa, 24,250 were black Africans. The African population has had a steady growth since the 1980s, with Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somali being the pioneers of this trend. From the late 1990s, the Sudanese became a significant African community and more recently they have been joined by Burundians, Sierra Leoneans, Congolese and Liberians. Other countries that have maintained smaller but significant numbers include Mauritius, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania. South Africa and Zimbabwe have large numbers of white immigrants but much smaller numbers of black Africans. As most of our participants were from Sudan and Kenya, we highlight the specific migrations flows from these two countries.

THE SUDANESE IN AUSTRALIA

The Sudan has been ravaged by drought, famine, war and poor governance since independence in 1956. The twenty-two years of the second phase of the conflict and famine from 1983 to the peace agreement in 2005 are estimated to have cost two million lives and displaced four million people. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC 2007) has reported that since 1996 to 1997 about 20,000 people born in Sudan have settled in Australia, and the Sudan was the leading source of humanitarian entrants since 2003 to 2004. Government information also indicates that 98 per cent of the Sudanese immigrate through the Humanitarian program and the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP), which requires sponsorship by an Australian resident or organisation.

The capital cities take most of the Sudanese immigrants, with Melbourne and Sydney taking up to 54 per cent between them. Some of the Sudanese people have settled in regional centres. Nsubuga-Kyobe (2004) has identified settlement problems for refugees in regional areas that include: education and English language issues; intergenerational conflict and cultural gaps; unemployment, access to employment services and benefit payments; accommodation problems; understanding the system; and isolation and alienation. There have also been mixed reactions by host communities in regional areas, with some welcoming new refugees to save dying towns and relieve labour shortages, while others fear that they present a threat to community cohesion (Taylor and Stanovic 2005).

Kenyas in Australia

There is very little published information on the Kenyan settlement in Australia. Cox et al. (1999) note, however, that between 1982 to 1983 and 1994 to 1995, there were 2,455 people arriving from Kenya. Kenya has been home to people of diverse backgrounds, including a British settler community, people from the Indian subcontinent and refugees from the neighboring African countries. These non-indigenous Kenyans sought opportunities to migrate before the 1980s when political repression and economic decline influenced the indigenous Kenyans to start migrating as well.

It is very difficult to know how many of these reported immigrants from Kenya to Australia were Kenyans by ancestry. Cox et al. (1999) estimated that 60 per cent of these immigrants would have been white. Most, if not all, of those appearing under the humanitarian category would be Sudanese born in Kenya. Most of the Kenyans by ancestry in Australia have migrated as skilled immigrants, through family reunions after marrying Australians, or as students who have sought a change of status after completing their studies. A very small number were resettled under the Humanitarian programs in the 1980s and an even smaller number were granted on-shore protection.

The census data from the DIAC (n.d.) show that there were 6,870 persons born in Kenya living in Australia during the 2001 census; there were 5,330 during the 1996 census. The 2006 census shows that there were 9,930 Kenyan-born people in Australia, an increase of 43.5 per cent (DIAC n.d.). The major groups were English (22.6 per cent), followed by Indian (21.7 per cent), Sudanese (6.1 per cent) and the others were of assorted ancestries (36.8 per cent). A notable feature is that the Kenyans are a relatively small, diverse and dispersed community.
RESEARCHING AFRICAN MEN IN AUSTRALIA

Being Responsible

The African men we interviewed emphasised the importance of being responsible not just to themselves but also to their families and the wider community. A man who demonstrates responsibility is regarded as portraying the best aspects of African manhood. A responsible man provides for his family, participates in ensuring the security of his community and takes part in the communal rituals. All the manhood rituals are geared to preparing the man for responsibilities to the community's past, present and future. Thus, as James, from Southern Sudan explained, the rituals are meant to transform the boy to a responsible man:

You stay in a secret place for a minimum of three weeks to a month, being taught by elders of a clan and also the spiritual people, your role in the society and what it means to become an adult. After you come back, you come back to the family as changed, a grown man, and there are certain things that are expected from you. (James, 23, Southern Sudan)

An initiated man is therefore regarded as a role model, carrying himself with dignity, providing for his family, taking part in community activities and being able to support and advise younger members of the community. There is an expectation that the respect is mutual between the various members of the community such that initiated men would have the right to give orders to women and children. However, the men in return would be expected to risk their lives for the community by fighting enemy tribes or wild animals. In modern times, employment is part of that responsibility, as Mghanga from Kenya explained:

In the place where I come from, to be a man is to be someone who works hard as it were . . . and hopefully earning a living and respect in the society by following the rituals within the society. That is, you get married; you get children. The children respect you; you raise a family . . . and you work for the family. (Mghanga, 37, Kenya)

It is the same on the West Coast of Africa, where Ousmane observed that to be a man you needed to have a family and be able to support that family with what a modern lifestyle considers to be necessities:

If you are a man it does mean you have to be responsible. You have a wife, kids, house and car . . . To . . . be complete you have to have a job. (Ousmane, 34, Senegal)

To be a man in Africa entails a high level of responsibility and it comes with privileges. These are the earned privileges that accrue to men for simply being men. This was clearly demonstrated by Ahmed who stated that the fusion of Islamic and African culture in Northern Sudan puts the man on a pedestal, irrespective of age or abilities:

If you are not controlling the female persons in your family people will think you are a weak man and you don't want to be called that. So you will try to control all the females in your family. And if you didn't work hard and earn money looking after your family, the family will keep watching and evaluate you and also the surrounding family in your small town . . . So even when you are 10 years old you will try to behave like those men. You will hit your sister who is 15 years while you are 10 because you are the man. (Ahmed, 34, Northern Sudan)

A combination of religious, family, and community obligations thus situate the men in positions of power and control. If the women do not accept this arrangement, there is potential for conflict. While they have a better chance to succeed in an urban setting, in a village it would be difficult if she were not supported by other women. Some of the participants in the research did not believe that there were power differentials but rather differences in obligations and expectations placed on men and women by the various African cultures.

The Significance of Religion and Tradition

There are conflicting perceptions of gender equality from the perspective of the African participants in this research. Some participants believed that men are clearly in more powerful positions while others argued that men and women occupy different positions in which neither gender is more powerful than the other. However, there seems to be an agreement that there is a gender order in African societies.

Where there was fusion of new religions and traditional African cultures, there appears to be a more explicit tendency for the African men to assume a powerful position as the provider and protector of the women in the community. Reflecting on where he comes from in Northern Sudan, in the African focus group, Ahmed considered this fusion of Islam and tribal cultures to have created the “most extremist place in the world”. He gave the example of his brother who would not allow his wife to practice law even though they graduated at the same time with the same grades. She could only help him with the paperwork from home. John explained that as a Christian from Southern Sudan he felt the bible confers on him authority over the woman:

The bible is saying that the man is the head of the family and he is given the authority . . . to be the head of the family. And it asks the
woman to submit to the man because this is the biblical way. But it’s not that if your wife is submitting to you, you are a dictator. No, it’s that you are in charge. You are in authority given to you by God. But you take your wife as a partner. You are caring for her. (John, 44, Southern Sudan)

Islam appears to be quite clear on the positions of women in relation to men. Women are to obey the men and men are to protect and provide for the women. Ahmed explained that religion is critical in understanding masculinities in his culture in Northern Sudan:

> We grow up with religion. It affects us in everything ... Since you are 7 or 8 you start to go to Mosque ... One saying of the prophet Mohammad says: "If I were to ask someone to worship someone, I would ask the wife to worship her husband" ... He also says that you have to respect your wife. She has to obey you but you have to respect her. You have to give her all her [needs] ... You have to support her and to protect her ... as long as she follows the religious [teachings] ... as long as she obeys [Allah]. (Ahmed, 34, Northern Sudan)

Without the influence of exotic religions, the African culture is less strident in decreeing the superiority of the man. From Southern Sudan, Moses believed that the culture prescribes different duties and obligations that are complementary but neither superior nor inferior:

> I can't say this one has low or higher status because the roles were given to everybody [by societal norms] and everyone is expected to carry out what is given to him [or her]. A man is told to do certain things and not to do certain things ... Also a woman is told to do certain things and to avoid doing certain things ... Everybody is expected to perform accordingly ... So ... I don't want to characterize some as being higher or lower status. (Moses, 38, Southern Sudan)

Many factors and not just gender determine power and status in African traditions. Age, marital status, rituals, order at birth and kin relationships are among the other issues that count in determining power and status.

**The Influence of Modernity**

Africa has not been immune from the forces of modernity and African masculinity is influenced by both traditions and modernity. It is a balancing act, therefore, for many men who have to work with women in some contexts as equals, in the modern office, for example, while in other contexts, like the rural village, they are expected to assume the prescribed cultural roles. Kamau, in the focus group, recalled his experience before migrating from Kenya:

> In the office where I was working there were women bosses ... But ... socially men had a different place than women. Men were considered to be higher than women and they were supposed to tell women what to do. (Kamau, 39, Kenya)

Migration to Australia adds another dimension to the experience of masculinity. There are more opportunities for women to engage in paid employment and to live independently. These opportunities represent a recent phenomenon in the industrialised world, where the restructuring of the labour market has tended to favour women and there has been an increase in female participation in the labour force over the last forty years (Green et al. 1999). Green et al. (1999) have also noted that these changes have had an impact on the structure of households, including increases in single-person households, rising divorce rates and lone parent families. This is the situation Africans are migrating to. However, they may be unaware of the overarching structures and the historical background.

Immigrant African men said they found this challenging and claimed that the expectation of gender roles in Australia favoured women and challenged their models of masculinity. A normative understanding of masculinity is followed in the more traditional cultures. In the focus group, Kamau observed that the breakdown of these gender norms is responsible for family breakdown:

> When people come there's a lot of tension between the wife and the man. Part of the reason is ... back home, a man is more likely to be earning more than a woman. So ... because of that ... women sometimes adopt a subservient attitude ... When you come here you find ... both of you can earn as much ... Secondly, it is the law here. I mean, everyone is equal before the eyes of the law ... At home, if there is a domestic issue it is solved within the community, either within the elders or within the parents ... Some women come here and realise "I no longer need my husband's income to survive". So they take advantage of that situation. The Centrelink money and the fact that they can actually lead their own [and lives with] independence has created a lot of conflict. It has also made a lot of men feel kind of, castrated, because your wife will talk back to you ... So, there has been a lot of conflict and some couples have separated and others, even though they are together, are always in a situation of continuous tension. (Kamau, 39, Kenya)

Where harmony has depended on unequal power relations, rather than mutual respect, then migration has caused significant disruptions. For men who have been slow to adjust, there is no doubt that the situation is experienced by them as disempowering. Ahmed told the African focus group that men are finding that all the major roles that define manhood: provider, defender, counsellor, become redundant after migration:
Here we should all prepare for our girls and our daughters to bring their boyfriends home... If she brought the boyfriend back home, they will kill her!... So here you are not a man anymore. The wife is not listening to you. You don’t provide protection. You don’t provide money. You have no reason to be man. So you lose yourself totally and you end up with marijuana, and sitting down in the pub just drinking.
(Ahmed, 34, Northern Sudan)

The challenge then for settlement programs for African men is to assist them to negotiate these changed power relations without alienating them as fathers and husbands.

Adjusting to New Challenges

Men participating in this research noted that they have had to make adjustment to accommodate changed circumstances. This is not to suggest that immigrant African men have to forget everything they have learnt within their cultures. However, they can take what is constructive and abandon what is a hindrance to the settlement process. Notions like being a responsible parent and husband, hard worker or community-oriented are examples of what could be encouraged and supported. Notions of the man being a tyrannical overlord would be out of place both in Africa and in Australia.

Some participants observed that the notion of gender equality was already there in Africa and that it is not unique to the Western cultures. They felt that boys and girls growing up were treated the same, at least in some cultures, and urbanisation and education played a positive role in this. Hassan from Kenya said that he supported gender equality even in Kenya and he felt his parents, to a large extent, treated boys and girls in the same way:

I always felt, even when I was at home, men and women should have the same worth. If the woman wants to work, she should have the right to work. If a woman wants to study she should have the right to study... My two sisters and three other brothers, we all have... equal opportunities. We have the same level of support from the parents... But... if I compare the whole country of Kenya compared to Australia, I can see... —it’s better here when you compare the equality of the woman with the man here. (Hassan, 36, Kenya)

Other participants observed that they needed to make adjustment in order to make settlement a success. The key areas of tension were domestic work and financial matters. The men felt that, in Africa, those from the middle classes could employ domestic help or female relatives would assist with housework and child care. Adjustment was necessary if the transition to a new life in Australia was to be a success. The challenge was that while there are cultural norms to follow in Africa, it was not clear in Australia what the gender roles were. Godar from Ethiopia felt that this lack of defined roles meant he had to invent a new life and identity for himself:

The concept of a man... [has] been mapped out in a sense in my culture. You know there are certain things through those age brackets... You will know exactly what you will be doing when you are a particular age. But when I came here that was not the case. So I had to establish a brand new identity... So yes, whatever I came with, or I was expected to have, has changed. (Gadar, 36, Ethiopia)

Some African migrant men indicated that they are taking small steps towards equality and sharing domestic chores. Peter from Southern Sudan indicated that he has found it very helpful to the family if he actively supports his partner in domestic duties:

I favour more sharing in housework [and] child care. In my home country the child care is not the responsibility of a man. Because you have relatives with you and that those relatives would take responsibility of looking after your kids... But in Australia... the situation is supposed to be changing from that old view of household responsibility into something reasonable because you can’t say I can’t do this... In my situation, changing my views from what I had in Africa to something very new. I thought this would help my community to stay together... If I change a nappy, my wife would feel very happy that I am taking part of responsibility which I would not have taken if we were in Sudan. So she would feel okay I am cooperative and therefore she would feel yes, this is what sort of life we want in this particular situation in Australia. So this would... [leave] the family more relax[ed] and [with] more happiness. (Peter, 36, Southern Sudan)

African men are reviewing their position and roles in the family under the changed material and social circumstances. Daniel, 42, from Southern Sudan indicated that he has found a 'formula' that works for him and "the formula is that you share the responsibility". In this way, if they have to support relatives from either side left behind in Africa, they consult and make a joint decision as a couple. Those who are unable to consult reported that they have broken up.

Blending Cultures

While the tendency when comparing different masculinities is to emphasise difference, there are also commonalities. African men therefore identify with some aspects of Australian masculinities, especially the ones that would be regarded as essentialist or ‘conservative’. African men said they found no problems with the concept of men doing the hard and dirty jobs,
being the ‘breadwinners’ or being in charge of the barbeque. Godar noted these commonalities as well as differences:

I think that there are certain gender-universal issues that still exist between African men and Australian men... But there are also things like being the head of a family, and being a father, being a brother, or for somebody being a son. There are certain things that are universal for all men. (Gadar, 30, Ethiopia)

African men would also have no problem with the concept of ‘mateship’. Mateship has a long history in Australia dating back to the frontier settlement, ‘gold rush’ and during the various wars that Australia has been involved in. During these harsh and demanding times the idea of sticking together and supporting each other became very important. African life is harsh too and if men are involved in hunting or inter-tribal wars they need to have a strong sense of solidarity. Ahmed described the equivalent of mateship in Northern Sudan as “standing together with your friends in tough times”:

There is something you must be careful about when dealing with men. Even as a child you must be very honest with them. You shouldn’t betray them. You should stand beside them in the hard time when they are fighting others. You have to be very good with them; otherwise they will say you are not a man. (Ahmed, 34, Northern Sudan)

Male solidarity in sports across racial and class boundaries is often portrayed as evidence of the continuation of mateship. Whether mateship also implies exclusion is not normally discussed. Even when it is widely defined in Australia, mateship usually only refers to compatriots and men. It excludes international solidarity as well as women. There are obstacles or hurdles that African men have to overcome before they can feel like they are truly mates and these relate to different cultural orientations.

Confronting Hurdles

Coming from a culture that is more communal and family-oriented to one that is individualistic, materialistic and consumer-oriented is a major hurdle for African men. However, since most African societies are undergoing similar transition processes, it is unlikely to be insurmountable. Many participants laments the loss of community that provided nurturing, guidance and identity. Evan, from Kenya, explained how initiation is the time the secrets of the community are revealed and one is formally acknowledged by the community as a significant member:

It’s really not the cutting, it is the lessons inculcated in you when you undergo the cut... You are told the history of the community, how

you have evolved to where you are... You are told the values that society holds dear to them. And... you are also told which way forward, the secrets that society tends to... hold. (Evan, 40, Kenya)

That link to the community is what is severed by migration, forced or otherwise. The sense of community is replaced by a consumerist ethos which some may embrace wholeheartedly but others might find hard to adjust to. Godar expressed his reservations about becoming a consumer:

The main thing here [in Australia] is that the sense of collectiveness, the sense of group, of community does not exist here, and I feel like I’m like a consumer. You know I have to have all these things around me and all these cars and clothes. There’s no sense of meaning for me, unless I sort of crave something, something that resembles back home. Losing the sense of collectiveness, the sense of belonging, I can’t get it here. And for that alone I would have preferred to be back home. (Godar, 36, Ethiopia)

A few Africans return to Africa when they feel that they cannot fit into the Australian culture or because the advantages they thought Australia would offer them are not there. The African men interviewed expressed a common view that they felt more valued as men in their African societies and claimed that the Australian society discriminated against men. They rejected the idea that men and women are equal in Australia and claimed that the laws and welfare services are geared towards supporting women. Mghanga from Kenya believed that he would have felt more comfortable in a familiar culture in his country of origin compared to the uncertainties of Australia:

I would not really look at living in Kenya... to make me more powerful. I would just say living in Kenya, I prefer that, because I was born here. And the language is, the Swahili that I speak, people speak, is much easier to express myself. Not that I cannot express myself in English, but it’s much easier to express myself to people who can understand me there. We share the same values across the board and therefore, since we share the same values, it’s much easier to live. (Mghanga, 37, Kenya)

A common experience for immigrants from ethnic backgrounds that are different from the mainstream is racial discrimination. African men experienced discrimination in public places and in work environments but often in a subtle rather than a violent manner. Juma from Tanzania reported having to confront prejudices held against African men as being violent towards their partners:

I remember a long time ago when I just started this nursing and this woman said, “Where are you from?” I said, “From Africa”. “Oh yeah, this is African men bashing their wives”, she said like that. I said, “Not all of them”. She said, “Oh yeah, a friend of mine was married to this
It is clear from the African men in this research that they have felt more valued and validated as men in their countries of origin. Not all the men that were interviewed were refugees. So they had not all been forced to leave their countries. While they appreciated the material benefits Australia offered, they also missed the valued position occupied by the men in African societies and the familiarity and certainties offered by their cultures.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed the diversity of views and experiences of African men settling in Australia. Although the African men interviewed faced racism and unemployment, the men felt that many of their problems stemmed from the differences in cultural understanding about masculinity and manhood. We have explored the challenges they faced in translating the experience of manhood learnt in Africa to the Australia context. A new identity for African men in Australia is being forged as men adjust to the new life. This includes being able to take part in domestic chores and child care. While many men have met these challenges successfully, others found it difficult and for some it has led to family breakdown. The men acknowledged that adjustments were needed by themselves. However, they also believed that their families and the wider community needed to change to make settlement a success. As noted earlier, Mutua (2006) suggests that men of African descent could help themselves and their families by adopting progressive black masculinities. Progressive black masculinities actively stand against structures of domination. They also validate and empower black humanity in all its variety as part of a multicultural global humanity. We believe that if more African men adopted this approach, they would be better placed to address the threats to their masculinity that arise from their greater involvement in housework and child care.

NOTES

1. The First Fleet is the name given to the ships that sailed from England in 1787 to establish the first European colony in Australia.

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7 Machismo and the Construction of Immigrant Latin American Masculinities

Paul Crossley and Bob Pease

INTRODUCTION

While a growing number of North American authors have researched Latin American men and masculinities within Latin America as well as the experiences of Latin American men migrating to the United States, there has been little research on the specific issues facing Latin American men in Australia. In this chapter we explore the experiences in Australia of a variety of male migrants from Latin America through three key elements which emerged through our research: the importance of men as ‘providers’ for the family and the place in men’s sense of self; the changing nature of men’s and women’s roles and statuses in Australian society and their difference from Latin America; and the shifting nature of what constitutes ‘home’ and a sense of belonging for Latin American men. In addressing the issues that the men face, we also examine the nature of the discourses on machismo and the almost fetishised nature of its oversimplified usage in relation to Latin American men generally and in defining their identities in Australia.

MACHISMO AND LATIN AMERICAN MEN

Most discussions of Latin American men and masculinities begin with an analysis of machismo. Ramirez (1999) notes how Latin American men are described as ‘machistas’. All men in Latin America and Mexico have been characterised as uniformly macho (Gutman and Vigoya 2005), which typifies them as narcissistic, oppressive, loud-mouthed, aggressive womanisers. Islas (1999) believes that machismo is based on supremacist attitudes in relation to women and machismo has become an expression synonymous with sexism (Gutman and Vigoya 2007). Many feminist writers in Latin America regard machismo as the fundamental basis of gender inequality, whereby such societies are characterised by excessive male privilege and power (Brusco 1995).

Some Latin American writers, however, believe that machismo can also entail more desirable attributes such as responsibility, perseverance and courage (Brusco 1995; Ramirez 1999). Brusco (1995) challenges the view