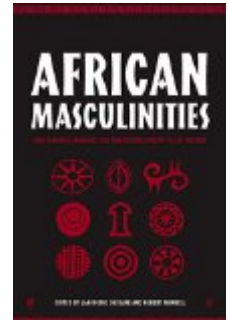


Lahoucine Ouzgane, Robert Morrell, eds.. *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xv + 308 pp. \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4039-6587-5.



Reviewed by Anene Ejikeme

Published on H-Africa (August, 2006)

"Interesting case studies of African women.... They combine to make a book which offers a variety of readable material, generally free from specialist vocabulary and polemical tone. It can be recommended to anyone curious about the lives of African women."

That was Shirley Ardener's assessment of Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay's *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, published in 1976.[1] Women's history was then so new, and the study of African women in particular rarer still. Similarly the study of masculinities in Africa today is new territory and so Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell must be congratulated for putting together this wide-ranging volume. Ouzgane is Associate Professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta in Canada, and Morrell is Professor of Education at the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Ouzgane and Morrell's *African Masculinities* joins the 2003 volume edited by Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher as pioneers in the field of African masculinities [2]. Ouzgane and Morrell note that their book differs from the Lind-

say and Miescher volume in two important ways. First, theirs offers wider coverage of the continent while that of Lindsay and Miescher is much more focused on West Africa; next, their contributors come from a variety of disciplines whereas the Lindsay and Miescher is dominated by historians. *African Masculinities* is a contribution to the field of masculinities studies that will be very welcome in diverse quarters. Given that masculinities studies remains in its infancy, it is unlikely that many will fault the fact that there is no thread holding all the essays together beyond the fact that all deal with men. While the range of disciplines represented here is almost dazzling, some readers might quibble with the claims to extensive geographical coverage: thirteen out of the seventeen contributions focus on Southern Africa and Egypt. While so many of the contributions (more than one-third) deal with South Africa--the one area of Africa for which literature on men and masculinities is relatively abundant--it is regrettable that the geographic scope of the contributions is not more broad.

While it has long been commonplace to insist that the division of Africa into North and sub-Saharan is not useful, few actually bridge this gap in their own work. Ouzgane and Morrell declare: "Not all residents of Africa are black. Nor do all speak Bantu languages" (p. 7). In their brief introductory essay, the editors quickly situate their work in the context of masculinities and African women's/gender studies, locating their volume within a postcolonialist tradition of "talking back" to theories developed in the West, insisting Western theories cannot be used uncritically to explain African societies. It would have been helpful for the authors to state precisely and explicitly how they see the contributions in the volume challenging or disrupting extant theories of masculinities. Much of the strength of masculinities studies is that it is not allied to a unified men's movement and scholars speak from many locations and address issues of race, class, sexual orientation, disability and age.[3] Women's studies emerged out of a drive to make women "visible." One unfortunate aspect of early women's studies was an unwillingness to acknowledge that factors such as race and class divided women. Men's studies takes off from an entirely different premise because men can hardly be said to have ever been invisible in scholarship. The study of masculinities begins with a call to attend to the different ways in which male identities are produced.

Seventeen essays are divided into four sections: "Interpreting Masculinities," "Representing Masculinities," "Constructing Masculinities," and "Contesting Masculinities." In part 1, "Interpreting Masculinities," Arthur F. Saint-Aubin argues in "A Grammar of Black Masculinity: Body of Science" that eighteenth-century anatomists were "obsessed" with two groups: "black men as the superior gender of an inferior race, and white women as the inferior gender of a superior race" (p. 23). Their *soi-disant* scientific fascination with black genitalia culminates in claims by U.S. scientists that white male and black female coupling was "natural" while coupling involving black males

and white females was infertile and thus "unnatural." Both the black female and black male bodies were seen as possessing anatomies that were essentially different from those of their white counterparts, a difference marking their "inferiority" and affinity with animals. Making extensive use of primary sources, Saint-Aubin offers an argument that will be well-known to those familiar with nineteenth-century science from the works of scholars such as Sander Gilman and Nancy Stepan. Geographer Glen S. Elder, explores the issues of race and class in the emergence of Cape Town as a tourist destination for middle-class, white foreign male travelers. A key emphasis in tourist literature produced for this clientele is the unrivaled position of homosexuals in the South African constitution. Elder argues that these "hyper-mobile" tourists are part of an effort to "replicate the urban geography of North American gay life" in a South African context, with total disregard for the specificities of the local context and its recent history. The central question, Elder emphasizes, is "how did a homosexual struggle and movement, the logical outcome of an anti-racist/sexist struggle, come to produce a spatially differentiated gay space that is mostly white, male, exclusionary, classist, and neo-colonial" (p. 45). I found this question puzzling given the highly segregated nature of the early gay movement in South Africa. Simon Nkoli, who died in 1998, was so pivotal in South Africa precisely because he was one of the earliest activists to campaign both against homophobia and apartheid. Although it raises at least as many questions as it answers, the most interesting contribution in this section is an interview of filmmaker Camara Mohamed by critic Beti Ellerson which highlights the tensions produced by the enthusiastic reception of the path-breaking film *Dakan* (1997) by black homosexuals, especially those in the diaspora, and Camara's inability/unwillingness to become a spokesman for African homosexuality. The last essay in this section, "Hausa Concepts of Masculinity and the 'Yan Daudu,'" can best be described as curious.

For reasons left unclear, Frank A. Salamone, a scholar of renown and author of numerous books and articles, has transformed Northern Nigerian scholar and activist Ayesha Imam into a man! Moreover, it is unclear whether the author believes Islam was predominant in Northern Nigeria by the twentieth century. We are told, "The British perpetrated the fiction that Northern Nigeria was mainly Islamic. The truth was different in 1900" (p. 78). Later we read: "Northern Nigeria has been dominantly Muslim at least since the eighteenth century, some argue the fourteenth century" (pp. 83-84).

The essays that make up the section on "Representing Masculinities" concern media or literary representations of masculinities. This section opens with an intriguing essay by Lindsay Clowes on images of men in *Drum* magazine between 1951 and 1965. Clowes's paper, based on her doctoral thesis, argues that there was a radical shift in the ways in which men were represented in this period. In the early fifties the images of men on the pages of the magazine often showed them with wives, children, parents, in the home; however, beginning in the mid-1950s, men "were constructed as autonomous and isolated individual[s]" (p. 106). Drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon and of Homi Bhaba on mimicry, Meredith Goldsmith examines the life of the South African, Bloke Modisane. In his autobiography *Blame Me on History* (1963), Modisane, the most well known of the Sophiatown writers, appropriates artifacts and artifices of maleness from white screen and literary images, constructing for himself identities that challenged the racial ordering of apartheid. Yet, pointing to the ways in which Modisane's treatment of women and "tradition" was complicit in their oppression, Goldsmith concludes "Modisane's performance of masculinity brought him to the threshold of resistance, but it prevented him from taking the next step" (p. 119). In a salutary move, Kathryn Holland, turns away from the women characters to focus on "The Troubled Masculinities in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condi-*

tions." Two essays focus on Egyptian texts whose main protagonists' identities are marked by hybridity. The mayor in a Nawal el Saadawi novel, the subject of Sally Hayward's essay, is a child of European and Egyptian parentage. In this compelling essay, Hayward examines how "words, images and material practices [are used] to create and sustain a position of power" by elite males in the village of Kafr El Teen in Nawal el Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* (1985) (p. 136). In Kafr El Teen, it is not only women, but boys and non-elite men who are oppressed and physically assaulted. This unrelenting patriarchy is dangerous because it ultimately dehumanizes oppressors as well as oppressed. William Chacko Joseph discusses the work of the colonized subject of Britain and colonizer of the Sudan. Joseph, through a close reading of the memoir of an Egyptian army officer who served in the Sudan under both George Gordon and Lord Kitchener (Ibrahim Fawzi), argues that "Egypt's encounter with black Africa produced ruling anxieties and new models of masculinity" (p. 155).

The contributions in the third section of the book, "Constructing Masculinities," examine the ways in which masculinity is constructed relationally, in particular in the interactions between men and women. In "Gender and Embodiment: Expectations of Manliness in a Zambian Village," Paul Dover agrees that gender is not determined by biological differences, but he insists "the fact of sexed bodies does have ramifications in their historical and social manifestations" (p. 185). Dover's analysis is based on a study of the Goba, a riverine people in Zambia. Some might see an ethnography which privileges what people say rather than what they actually do as retrogressive; it is certainly problematic in the context of a scholar such as Dover, who is employed in development work (with the HIV/AIDS Team for Africa of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). Next follows a radically different contribution by Margrethe Silberschmidt. Like Dover, Silberschmidt's work was based on interviews,

but it is clear that the questions were aimed at eliciting not information about what people thought, but about what actually happened in families and households. Usefully, and unlike Dover, Silberschmidt provides some information on the number and background of her informants. Silberschmidt concludes that "even if the patriarchal ideology may be embodied (and expressed) in the lives of socially dominant men (and women), this certainly does not mean that all men are successful patriarchs or that all women are passive victims. Stereotypes are dangerous: they are static, they do not allow for change, and they hide the fact that there are cultural variations" (p. 200). Silberschmidt's nuanced study indicates that "increasing poverty has perhaps been as harsh for men as for women, but in a different and more obscure way" (p. 200). Deevia Bhana examines "Violence and Gendered Negotiation of Masculinity among Young Black School Boys in South Africa." Bhana's study, which focuses on Zulu-speaking boys, is based on a year of participant-observation in a township primary school in Durban. The next contribution, by Rob Pattman, also takes the school as its setting. But in Pattman's essay, the students are young adults in one of the richest institutions of higher learning in Africa: the University of Botswana. Based on informal interviewee-centered (individual and group) interviews with students, Pattman presents a very interesting analysis of the ways in which male students construct self-identities in relation to other men, foreign and Tswana, and to female students. At the university, male students deemed "traditional" were "Ugandans." "High-class" Ugandan students and those from other African countries who embraced American popular culture and who socialized with women students were classed as "cats." In his essay "'Ugandans,' 'Cats' and Others," Pattman insists on the need to go beyond Fanon's discussion of how the male "native intellectual" constructs his identity by attending to how gender relations impact the ways in which "modern" and "traditional" are

constructed. The essays by Bhana and Pattman underscore the need to speak of "masculinities" rather than "masculinity." As R. W. Connell writes in *The Men and the Boys*, "different masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes on a smorgasbord. There are definite social relations between them. Especially, there are relations of hierarchy, for some masculinities are dominant while others are subordinated or marginalized." [4]

The last section of the book, "Contesting Masculinities," has contributions by Goolam Vahed (history), Victor Agadjanian (sociology), Robert Morrell (anthropology/public health) and Marcia Inhorn (anthropology/public health). Those who pursue a critical study of gender often profess a desire for a change in gender relations. The essays in this section all address the question, "what conditions are or seem to be more conducive to greater gender equality." The conclusions reached by Agadjanian, Morrell, Inhorn, and Vahed will surely be tested and contested by others. Vahed's "Indentured Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910" examines how indentured Indian men constructed masculinity in a violent colonial context in which the ratio of men to women was seven to three. On the plantations, Indian men were regarded as "unmanly" and often humiliated. Leisure-time activities were thus a critical moment for Indian men's constructions of self and the "desire to establish a family ... was central to the experience of most indentured men" (p. 248). In Natal, contrary to the practice in India, it was the man who paid dowry to the family of the prospective bride and the system was "frequently abused" (p. 249). Violence was pervasive in the workplace and at home; court documents record wife-beating, fighting between men, and uxoricide (the killing of a woman by her husband). In a situation where male competition for women was intense, it is disappointing to read that "married men often shared quarters with unmarried men, creating sexual tension in a situation where only one person's sex needs were taken care of" (p. 252). I imagine that the "one person" here refers

to the married man. Does this mean that women, presumably, had no sexual needs to be taken care of?

Inverting the usual practice of tallying how women are catching up with men in the workforce or in traditionally male occupations, Victor Agadjanian turns the focus on "Men Doing 'Women's Work': Masculinity and Gender Relations among Street Vendors in Maputo, Mozambique." Agadjanian sees this as a source of measured optimism for its possibilities to "undermine inequality at home and assert greater role for women in family and household matters" (p. 268). I doubt many will share Agadjanian's optimism, however measured. In "Men, Movements, and Gender Transformation in South Africa," Robert Morrell gives an account of how different sub-categories of men have responded to the government's policy of gender equity. Drawing on the work of Michael Messner, Morrell groups men's organizations into four categories: those that defend male privilege (the best-known being the South African Association of Men, or SAAM, which was formed by white, middle-class men to "restore the tattered remains of the male image"); those that strive for gender justice (most work on domestic violence); those that deal with the "crisis of masculinity" (such as the recently launched multiracial Promise Keepers South Africa who focus on introspection and spirituality); and gay organizations. With the exception of Promise Keepers, men's organizations do not attract large numbers and most, especially "backlash organizations," are short-lived. In sharp contrast, AIDS-related issues succeed in mobilizing large numbers of men and women, black and white. Given the severity of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa, and the fact that it kills predominantly heterosexual African men and women, Morrell sees the possibility of coalitions between gay and other organizations in the future. But for now, because of widespread homophobia (and its own history as almost exclusively white), the gay organizations in South Africa have limited ability to forge coalitions with other

groups. Morrell sees the new focus on masculinity, which rejects the old notion that men qua men share privileges and an outlook, as having the potential to encourage broad-based alliances that promote gender justice.

Marcia Inhorn's essay, "Sexuality, Masculinity, and Infertility in Egypt: Potent Troubles in Marital and Medical Encounters," concludes the book. A medical anthropologist who has done extensive research on infertility in Egypt and Lebanon, Inhorn has written widely on the topic. Inhorn found that "most sexually dysfunctional Egyptian men refuse to seek psychological help (deeming it profoundly stigmatizing)" (p. 294), and are instead more likely to consult "traditional healers." She argues that what might be termed "medical patriarchy" and cultural norms, which discourage talking about sex in mixed-sex settings (even if it is a medical one), inhibit women's attempts to receive appropriate treatment in instances of male infertility. Ironically, while doctors treating infertile women and couples generally do not take their sexual histories, they do not hesitate to prescribe precise directives such as timed intercourse and the production of semen through masturbation. One wants to know more about men who do go to infertility clinics to try and produce semen on demand. We learn that men are more willing to visit infertility specialists than psychologists. Clearly, money is a factor: one exasperated woman told the infertility doctor, "You are not a doctor. You are not honest. You're wasting the time and money of people. We are not people from a village to be told 'Come here. Do this. Do that'" (p. 299). At the end of the essay Inhorn discusses new treatments that are likely to impact notions of masculinity and sexuality as well as infertility. Viagra is widely available in Egypt. Are these drugs seen in Egypt, as in many places, as a way for "real men" to further enhance their masculinity? Are these drugs popular because they can be taken privately, without the knowledge of others?

This is a book with thoughtful essays that marry nicely the theoretical and the empirical. The book is somewhat marred by what appears to have been great haste in production. The last two paragraphs of the preface are produced almost verbatim on the facing page under the acknowledgments. On page 248 we read that "it was important for Indian men to have a wives." And in Saint-Aubin's contribution on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classifications of the black male body, we read about "pencil length" (p. 34) while works appearing in the footnotes are not listed in "Works Cited." It is not clear why some contributions have a bibliography and some do not; consistency would have been preferable. These shortcomings are unlikely to prevent this volume from enjoying a central place on bookshelves and syllabi--provided interested scholars and students can afford to purchase the book. I hope the publishers will think of putting out a paperback edition, which includes a map or two, since the current \$75.00 price-tag is prohibitively expensive.

In the end, the book achieves fully its twin aims: "to address the subject of masculinities in Africa" and "to apply the concepts of critical men's studies to the analysis of masculinities on the continent" (p. 1). Thirty years from now, we will undoubtedly see collections on African masculinities organized more narrowly around specific themes and issues, but we have here an invaluable, general beginning.

Notes

[1]. Quotation on back cover of Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay, *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[2]. See A. Lindsay and Stephan F. Meischer, eds., *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann, 2003). I should also point out that several of the essays in the volume under review first appeared in a special 2002

edition of the *Journal of Men's Studies* edited by Ouzgane.

[3]. Arguably, masculinities studies emerged in response to the men's movement, led by Robert Bly, calling men (largely middle-class and white) to get in touch with their "inner man."

[4]. R. W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 10.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-africa>

Citation: Anene Ejikeme. Review of Ouzgane, Lahoucine; Morrell, Robert, eds. *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. August, 2006.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12107>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.