



Review of Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (Eds.), *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (New York/Scottsville: Palgrave Macmillan/University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), xv + 308 pp.

Saheed Aderinto

Academic research on African men is still in its infancy. The limited scholarship on this aspect of African studies constitutes a serious concern, not only because it seems to suggest that discourse on men and masculinities is not worth studying but also because of the enormous body of ideas and data left unexplored. The problem is also geographically relative. In other words, the largest chunk of existing work conspicuously comes from southern Africa, especially South Africa, while other African countries, like Nigeria, the most populous black nation on earth, probably has less than five scholars seriously working on masculinities.

Lahoucine Ouzgane's and Robert Morrell's anthology *African Masculinities* is aimed at bridging this gap in Africanist scholarship. Aside complementing Lisa A. Lindsay's and Stephen F. Miescher's edited volume, *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*, the volume under review moves the state of knowledge forward by involving scholars from diverse disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, history, English, French, Spanish, education and health. By involving scholars from an assortment of intellectual disciplines, *African Masculinities* expands on the mainly historical themes of *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*. Historians, especially of the colonial period, will surely find *Men and Masculinities* indispensable while *African Masculinities* will appeal to the intellectual sentiments of the non-historian. While most anthologies on Africa (notably those on gender) often treat the northern most part of the continent as if it were not part of Africa (politically, geographically, culturally and otherwise), this volume has chapters on the North African country of Egypt. Readers are likely to appreciate the variations and commonalities inherent in African masculinities by comparing the North with other regions of the continent.

As diverse as the contributors' fields are, *African Masculinities* generally aims at correcting the treatment of men as a unified category by emphasizing that concepts of masculinities change across time and space in response to internal and external forces. The ever-changing character of masculinities is also a reflection of the racial and ethnic diversity of the African continent and its history of colonialism, apartheid and neocolonial capitalist expropriation. In spite of Africans' racial and cultural variations—Africa is home not only for blacks but also for Caucasians and Indians, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and adherents of traditional faiths—all African men, according to the editors, need to cope with the legacy of colonialism as they also have access to the dividends of patriarchy. In addition, all men, irrespective of class, age and other categories or paraphernalia of identities, have to contend with

the effects of the “new” globalization that produced new “global citizenship” and widened the gap between the haves and have-nots.

The volume consists of seventeen chapters divided in the following four sections: (1) interpreting masculinities; (2) representing masculinities; (3) constructing masculinities; and (4) contesting masculinities.

Arthur F. Saint-Aubin opens the first section with a critical essay on the evolution of scientific and, what he calls, “pre-scientific” thought about African male sexuality. He dwells entirely on how the idea of African racial inferiority influenced the ways European and American naturalists, scientists, anthropologists and other commentators depicted African male sexuality and anatomy in their writings and experiments.

How South Africa emerged as a major tourist center for gay males is the central theme of Glen S. Elder’s chapter. Elder locates the trajectories of post-apartheid urban desegregation and globalization within the framework of new racial ordering. The new racial ordering produced a “spatially differentiated gay space that is mostly white, male exclusionary, classist” (p. 45). In another chapter, Beti Ellerson interviews Mohamed Camara, the producer of *Dakan*, a famous film on African homosexuality. *Dakan* demystified the myth of the absence of homosexuals in Africa and created for the “first” time a serious sense of pride among African gay males (mostly those in the Diaspora). It disavowed the idea that their sexual orientation is “unnatural,” as mainstream African societies profess. Ellerson’s interview with Camara addresses the social, sexual and political forces associated with the film and traces the extent of its reception.

Frank A. Salamone explores how the *Yan daudu*, “men who talk like women,” fit into the social, religious and cultural construction of masculinity among the Hausa of northern Nigeria. The *Yan daudu*’s spiritual presence in *Bori*, an ancestral Hausa cult, places them beyond the confines of men who have sex with other men. They dress and talk like women and serve as pimps of female prostitutes, but they are also a bridge between the old Hausa who practice *Bori* and those who embrace Islam.

Lindsay Clowes opens the second section with a chapter on the changing representation of manhood in *Drum*, a famous South African magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, and how it contributed to the changing perception of family and gender roles related to post-Second World War urban unionism and industrialization. The representation of black manliness in Bloke Modisane’s *Blame Me on History* is the main focus of Meredith Goldsmith’s chapter. Modisane’s autobiography is set against the background of the agonies that followed the destruction of Sophiatown, one of the few townships where blacks were allowed to own homes in South African apartheid, and the exiling of black South African intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s. Kathryn Holland uses Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* to explore the dilemma men faced in the bid to satisfy white colonial hierarchies while, at the same time, leading resistant movements or serving as representative for their people concerning justice. Sally Haywood focuses on El Saadwawi’s depiction of Mayor of Kafr El Teen in the novel, *God Dies by the Nile*. The main point here is how the Mayor deployed his racial and cultural background for the purpose of imposing himself on the community as the “physical” and spiritual head.

In the section on “constructing masculinities,” Paul Dover, Margrethe Silberschmidt, Deevia Bhana and Rob Pattman examine how social and economic

spaces, like schools and villages, replicate and enhance the ever-changing masculinities of men in east and southern Africa. Silberschmidt challenges the idea that women are victims of men's oppression by examining how men of some rural areas in Kenya and Tanzania are, like women folk, disempowered.

In the last section, "contesting masculinities," Goolam Vahed, Victor Agadjanian, Robert Morrell and Marcia C. Inborn write on gender relations and interaction between males and females. Viewing gender as both a historical and social construction, it is argued that the division of people according to biological sex is rendered ineffective when trying to understand the pattern of gender relations in Africa. The idea of "genderless" Africa, which is the hallmark of influential works of Africanist scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi, Ifi Amadiume and Obioma Nnaemeka, is reinforced in this last section, suggesting that imposing a Western gaze on African gender relations is like putting a square peg in a round hole.

African Masculinities, in spite of its contributions to Africanist scholarship, is not without some limitations. First, the editors seem to reinforce southern Africa's "academic hegemony" in the study of men and masculinities in Africa (nine of the seventeen chapters are on southern Africa; Egypt has three chapters, while Guinea, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania receive one each). Despite this shortcoming, Ouzgane's and Morrell's excellent volume is a veritable source for materials on African men and masculinities. Its transdisciplinary content will make it a useful tool for scholars in the social sciences and the humanities.

Saheed Aderinto
University of Texas at Austin/USA
e: saheedaderinto@mail.utexas.edu