

## **Title: ‘Theorizing Black African Transnational Masculinities’**

### **Abstract**

Just as masculinity is crucial in the construction of nationhood, masculinity is also significant in the making and unmaking of transnational communities. This article focuses on how black African men negotiate and perform respectable masculinity in transnational settings such as the workplace, community and family. Moving away from conceptualizations of black transnational forms of masculinities as in perpetual crisis and drawing on qualitative data collected from members of the new African diaspora in London, the article explores the diverse ways notions of masculinity and gender identities are being challenged, re-affirmed and reconfigured. The article argues that men experience a loss of status as breadwinners and a rupture of their sense of masculine identity in the reconstruction of life in the diaspora. Conditions in the hostland, in particular, women's breadwinner status and the changing gender relations, threaten men's 'hegemonic masculinity' and consequently force men to negotiate respectable forms of masculinity.

**Keywords:** new African diasporas, respectable forms of masculinity, transnational engagements, UK, crisis of masculinities

### **Introduction: Re-Configuring Masculinities in Re-Conceptualizing Respectability**

This article seeks to make a contribution in giving prominence to diverse masculinities in the international literature, while acknowledging feminist, anti-racist and intersectional praxis. In that direction, we aim to formulate a modest call for an *epistemological* demand to make firstly, *visible* and *vocal* the particularities of social experience for certain black African migrant/transnational men which cannot be universalized as one in a container of hegemonic masculinity; secondly, to highlight the cultural politics of *critical research*, motivated by a third demand in contributing to *transformative feminist and anti-racist research* that can form the

basis of a pedagogic scholarship of teaching research-led/informed gendered subjectivities in the classroom in *decolonizing knowledge* construction and transmission. We view the pathway in re-configuring masculinities through our empirical data as the platform to re-conceptualize respectability in anti-racist discourse through collaborative research that is interdisciplinary, intersectional, feminist and praxis-oriented. At the same time, we seek to contribute to the still limited literature on migrant masculinities (Charsley 2005; Charsley and Wray 2015; Charsley and Liversage, 2015; Datta et al. 2009; Christou, 2016; Gallo and Scrinzi 2016; Pasura 2008, 2014) that entails a gendered diasporic lens into the making and unmaking of transnational communities in a diverse, global, urban and under the shade of a rhetoric and emergence of a contemporary crisis of multiculturalism, city, such as London. As Charsley and Wray (2015, 403) correctly observe, until recently, migration scholarship has predominantly focused on women migrants neglecting men's gendered experiences. Moreover, 'where they do appear', they further argue, 'men are frequently cast as the oppressor of family members or as abusing legal channels of migration.' In this context Charsley (2005) examines the link between masculinity and migration within transnational Pakistani marriages, showing the experiences of 'unhappy husbands' who found adjusting to life in Britain difficult. However, within the UK these debates have been elaborated primarily in relation to South Asian and Afro-Caribbean families, with relatively few studies devoted to contemporary African families. This article contributes to the literature by examining how black African migrant men's identities are being challenged, re-affirmed and reconfigured in a transnational context in the United Kingdom. In contrast to the discursive construction of African masculinities as violent, patriarchal and oppressive, we uncover the contexts in which African migrant men enact and adopt respectable forms of masculinity.

Alert to the particularities of the colonial/post-colonial historicity and oppression as that suffered by black men, in 'telling diaspora stories' (Christou 2009) we also endeavor to locate the discussions on the margins, resulting from exclusion/privilege, but also reflectively aware of

fractured transnational diasporas and the competing meanings of the African diaspora (Pasura 2010). The article is interested in how ‘gendering the diaspora’ (Campt and Thomas 2008; Christou and King 2011; Pasura 2008) can provide further insights into how masculinity is articulated, narrated, experienced and lived, which, in turn offers a clear reframing of masculine respectability in black African transnational men’s psychosocial subjectivities. Thus, the article contributes to the project of ‘dismantling diasporas’ (Christou and Mavroudi 2015) in rethinking identities, geographies and development in the affective and material complexities of attachments, groundings and deterritorializations of mobile groups.

Finally, we remain acutely aware of Tina Campt’s reminder that James Clifford in his 1994 article ‘Diasporas’ posed the probing question, *‘What is at stake, politically and intellectually, in contemporary invocations of diaspora?’* In her seminal research which theorises gendered, racial and diasporic formation in black communities in Germany, and Europe more broadly, Campt (2002, 94) reminds us that Clifford’s question is one that holds continued relevance to current scholarship on African diasporic communities. In that direction, our invocations here aim to respond to what is at stake both politically and intellectually in re-configuring masculinities to re-conceptualize respectability in our research on the black African transnational migrant context we discuss in this article.

In this article, *respectability* emerges as a ‘plastic’ concept moulded by the re/actions of our participants to their new social and cultural geographies of living transnational London-based lives. Respectability in this sense refers to migrant men’s desires and efforts to claim positive recognition in contexts structured by ‘otherness’ and a neoliberal economy. As a basis for analysis, we cautiously take respectability to refer to it as perceived by and for migrant men whereupon respectability entails providing for the family, sharing household chores and earning money for the patriarchal family unit. Respectability is framed through conformity to the standards and expectations of a neoliberal society by being, among other things, a provider for one’s family, working hard and acquiring material possessions such as a home, education and

some level of economic independence. In Africa, debates over respectability peaked during the colonial period as an ideology to impose European middle-class values and norms on the African population. For example in colonial Zimbabwe, West's (2002) work documents the rise of an African middle class which was distinguishable from white settlers as well as from African peasants and the urban poor because of its aspirations and ideas relating to respectability and domesticity. Within the Caribbean context, Wilson (1969) demonstrated how men related their position in society according to a two value system of respectability and reputation.

Thus, in the discussion of our empirical material, our analysis develops how 'respectability' is appropriated, negotiated and performed by our participants in their everyday social and family lives. This analytic optic in turn informs our discussion of diasporic/postcolonial masculinities. But first we contextualize our contribution to critical masculinity studies by situating our use of the core terms of men and African masculinities.

### **Towards Grounding Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities**

At the core of the concept of masculinity, Morrell and Ouzgane (2005, 4) argue, is the 'evident fact that not all men have the same amount or type of power, the same opportunities, and consequently, the same life trajectories'. For Connell (1995, 81), gender and masculinity are social and historical processes which are constituted not by individual human action but also by larger 'configurations of practice.' Although hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of male power, Connell (1995) allows for the existence of 'lesser' forms of masculinities – those that are complicit, subordinate and marginalized. Hegemonic masculinity sustains its position through the active subordination of other masculinities in order to create a hierarchical relationship within the traditional gender binary as well as across it (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In South Africa, Morrell et al., (2012) identify multiple hegemonic masculinities and how the term was appropriated and utilized in various forms of gender activism and interventions which included men as participants and not just as perpetrators of

violence. One of the core repeated arguments is the need to advance theorizations of masculinities beyond ‘hegemonic status’ (Christou 2016), yet drawing from mainstream gender studies approaches that continue to be relevant and timely. Theoretically, we consider gender and masculinities as accruing from individual practices and interpersonal interactions. West and Zimmerman’s (1987) notion of ‘doing gender’ illustrates how men and women routinely and methodically enact, perform and contest gendered roles and identities (see also Butler 1990).

Encapsulating the societal grounding of the concept of masculinity is predicated on the premise that ‘social definitions of masculinity as being embedded in the dynamics of institutions—the working of the state, of corporations, of unions, of families—quite as much as in the personality of individuals’ (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 2004, 153) ground masculinity in discourses about men and masculinity (Hearn and Collinson 1994, 97–98). Not only are individuals to be thought of as subjects of various discourses, but also being male, being masculine, being masculine in a particular way are also subjects of different discourses. It then becomes apparent that ‘as members of any particular culture, community, or group, individuals are given a vast array of scripts that together constitute them as social subjects. Some scripts are branded onto individuals more emphatically than others’ (Guterman 1994, 223). Apart from the social constructedness of the concept of masculinity, we do agree with Adu-Poku (2001, 167) that ‘masculinity is never a fixed core, although it can acquire specific meaning in a given social context.’

Hence, our research highlights the social constructedness of masculinities but also draws caution in paying attention to the various social scripts that migrant men tap into in order to negotiate their identities. Here we also underscore the complexity of migrancy in how masculinities unfold in the diaspora. It is attentive to this particular context and the social/cultural geographies of diasporic lives that further add new grammars of articulating masculinity.

Before exploring how African migrant men negotiate and perform respectable masculinity in the diaspora, it is instructive to problematize what we mean by African masculinities as well as provide an overview of the pre-migration cultural context.

### *African Masculinities*

The expression ‘African masculinities’ raises a prior question about what is ‘Africa’; what is ‘African’? Naming is not innocent. What defines Africa, as Zeleza (2005) tells us, are the particular attributes of its history, its geography, its material and imagined places, and its people. Beyond its geographical boundaries, Africa is also a product of colonial and postcolonial inventions and constructions (Mudimbe 1988). For instance, we must be wary of racialized and restrictive construction of ‘Africa’ as ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ or treating Africa as a ‘country.’ We argue that an in-depth and holistic understanding of African masculinities must be historically informed. We have to be attentive to the historical role of slavery and colonialism as well as Western concepts such as modernity and globalization, and the ways in which they shape conceptions of Africa as the ‘other’—not just its peoples, its religions but also its cultural practices. Following Zeleza (2010, 2), the challenge ‘is to resist both the tyranny of hegemonic models and the romance of the local, and to develop analytical models that are historically grounded and theoretically suggestive—that are sensitive to local experiences without losing sight of the global forces that structure them.’

Examining masculine articulations in Africa during pre-colonial and colonial periods, Uchendu (2008, 13) explains:

Men in patriarchal settings were irrefutably the favoured class: an esteemed group that grew from childhood to manhood culturally imbued with notions that made them believe they were superior and had multiple privileges, including inherent rights to dominate. Where matrilinealism diffused such masculine confidence, colonialism, which was

uniformly patriarchal in its verbal and non-verbal expressions and social exportations in the continent, undermined non-patriarchal hegemonic masculinities.

Thus, the impact and legacy of colonialism and the general influence of globalization have been accompanied by a reconfiguration of social relations (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005) and by extension those of social reproduction. Briefly, we now turn to how African masculinities are produced through the intersection with colonialism, neoliberal capitalism and Pentecostal Christianity.

The notion of a male breadwinner was a colonial creation achieved through a migrant labor system and cash crop production which targeted men. The male-migrant labor system in Southern Africa, which involved some form of cooperation between traditional authorities and the colonial administrators, forced men to enter settler employment in urban centers, South African goldmines and farms while women remained at home as *de facto* heads of households (Barnes 1992). Male mobility was normalized and women's mobility was considered 'unrespectable'. The creation of these gendered spaces meant that production and formal employment came to be gendered as male, while reproduction conversely became gendered as female. However, Schmidt (1990) documents incidents in which Zimbabwean women resisted customary law and efforts to control their movements. As African feminists (Bhana et al. 2007; Gaidzanwa 1992) argue, domesticity is a received ideology furthered by both the colonial and post-colonial states. It is important to note that gender relations of exclusion and the oppression of women on the continent were formed and transformed more by historical processes in racialized societies that fostered the supremacy of race as an organizing ideology of social life than by the pre-colonial patriarchy that some scholars rely on. The notion of a male breadwinner was reinforced as considerable numbers of Africans converted to Christianity which stressed monogamous marriage in which the man was the household head and breadwinner.

Within the postcolonial context characterized by weakened state governance and aggressive neoliberal capitalism on the continent (Davies 2007), the majority of men are finding it hard to achieve what historically might have been seen as successful masculinity (Ratele 2014). Since the 1980s, many African countries introduced the International Monetary Fund/World Bank prescribed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) designed to restore the economies to high growth (Davies 2007). SAPs recommended the liberalization of the economy, the privatizations of state companies and the cutting of state subsidies. The program brought severe hardships to the people and resulted in the retrenchment of workers. For instance, examining the impact of the neo-liberal policy agenda on men's identities, Gibbs (2014, 431) observes that 'the last two decades of economic decline in Africa have drawn attention to the crisis of masculinities, to "failed men" unable to build kinship networks and to "violent men" who damage social networks whilst competing for scarce resources.' It is within this context that 'in the Pentecostal trajectory born-again masculinity is defined as a break with "tradition" and "African culture" since these are considered responsible for the moral and social crises in African societies' (Van Klinken 2012, 235). For Pentecostals, breaking with the past also entails cutting with hegemonic forms of masculinity which is associated with drinking alcohol, sexual violence and absence from the family (Van Klinken 2012). Born-again masculinity can be seen as transformative in that it challenges boys and men to change the harmful perception of being a man, that is, the erasure of a destructive image associated with drunkenness, violence and family neglect.

Our article extends these debates by exploring how masculinity and transnational migration intersect to disrupt any fixed notion of gendered identities but also of monolithic African migrant experiences. From this brief overview, it can be noted that African masculinities are diverse and have undergone changes not least due to the process of colonization, the spread of the neoliberal agenda on the continent and the rise of Pentecostal Christianity. A common aspect among the various versions of masculinities in Africa is that



they are constructed under the influence of a patriarchal ideology that places men above women. Masculinities in Africa entail attainment of a level of financial independence, employment, or income and subsequently being able to start a family.

In the UK, African migrants, particularly men, have been positioned as significant ‘problems’ within the media, political and health discourses. Anxiety has been expressed from the growing suspicions that because of the high HIV prevalence rate in some parts of Africa, African migrants might spread the virus to the indigenous population (Doyal, Anderson, and Papparini 2009; Doyal, Papparini, and Anderson 2008; Kesby et al. 2003).<sup>2</sup> These studies construct a hypersexualized African masculinity, which is linked to the AIDS pandemic in Africa and resonates with a colonial image of aggressive African male sexuality where women are often seen as passive recipients (Simpson 2005). This visibility in the academic and popular discourses reflects a longer trend in the portrayal of African men as patriarchal but also points towards the stereotypical image of them as dangerous and unwelcome strangers in western cities, mirroring colonial discourses, alarms and moral panics about Africans spreading incurable diseases to colonial cities (Goldberg 1993). African masculinities are somehow captured through an orientalizing gaze as immutable, violent, patriarchal and oppressive. It is this image of immutability that is then retrieved, invoked and reproduced to infuse the crisis discourses. If identities are constantly being reworked and always in the process of ‘becoming’, as Hall (1992) suggests, then it is imperative to respond to these discourses which categorize Africans in homogeneous and static terms and acknowledge the diversity, difference, competing meanings and articulations of masculinities. Although African masculinities have undergone changes not least due to the process of colonization, globalization and the spread of the neoliberal agenda on the continent, *transnational migration* is another interesting process which this article considers. Using in-depth interviews within a qualitative research methodology, the study findings demonstrate a shift from previous discourses of African masculinities being in

crisis to how they are being re-negotiated in transnational settings resulting in an enactment of respectable masculinity.

### **Methodology**

The article is based on in-depth interviews, follow-up interviews and participant observation with African migrant men and women (Gambians, Kenyans and Zimbabweans) in London.<sup>3</sup> We interviewed Zimbabweans in 2009 and 2014, and Gambians and Kenyans in 2014. In total, 21 interviews were conducted: ten with Zimbabweans, six with members of the Sando Hometown Association (Gambians) and five with Kenyans. Five of the respondents were women. In both sets of fieldwork, we explored the relationship between migration and radical changes to gender relations and roles between men and women in the diaspora. The communities involved in the study were selected to capture the diversity of contemporary African diasporas in the UK, particularly those formed out of the migrations engendered by economic, political, and social crises and the destabilizations of structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The census statistics show that the African community in the UK is growing considerably. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of people who identify themselves as black African doubled from 0.8 percent to 1.8 percent outnumbering the Caribbean population, which stands at around 1 percent. Despite these significant figures, black Africans are the least-studied major ethnic group in the UK and until their experiences are investigated in more depth, the wider implications of their social exclusion and transnational connections remain unclear. The majority of respondents were middle-aged and married with children. All the participants were resident in the UK for six years or more. From our sample, the earliest migration date to Britain was 1997 and the latest date was 2007. The participants migrated to the country via a range of migration routes: workers, students, refugees and family reunion. The interviews were held in respondents' homes, workplaces, restaurants and cafes, and they lasted between one and two hours. Purposive non-random sampling techniques were used to recruit participants to the study.

Interviews and participant observation were conducted by one of the two authors, a black African scholar. Inevitably, his location in this research, as a member of the African diaspora, influences the questions that he asked as well as those he did not ask. At the same time, his position as a black African allowed respondents to share experiences of vulnerability which they may not have shared with a white researcher – a sentiment that was clearly echoed by some of the participants. Oakley (2000) argues for interaction between the researcher and the researched, contrary to the model of a distanced, controlling researcher who is dependent upon a hierarchical division that separates the researcher and the researched. The first author's biographical details were used reflexively in order to understand and interpret the narratives of migrants.

We also draw on several informal conversations we have had with African migrants across the country in different social spaces such as churches and hometown associations. To explore the extent to which migration shapes notions of masculinity and gendered identities within the African diaspora in the UK as well as pick out female voices, diaspora churches and hometown association were used as points of access. Participating in these sites provided the authors with rich ethnographic data, and the sites were also crucial points of access to the in-depth interviews that were conducted. As Levitt and Schiller (2004, 1013) explain, 'participant observation and ethnographic interviewing allow researchers to document how persons simultaneously maintain and shed cultural repertoires and identities, interact within a location and across its boundaries, and act in ways that are in concert with or contradict their values over time.' Narratives and stories are valuable ways of studying lives and lived experiences (Punch 2005). Identifying narratives and following them across sites was a means of exploring the similarities and differences in experiences, behavior and attitude towards the diverse notions of masculinity and gender identities. Researchers' biographical details were used reflexively to understand the narratives of migrants. From the in-depth interviews and participant observation in different research sites, the aim was to identify stable features and patterns. The authors

consistently looked for emerging patterns from the data and used them as a starting point to probe into the complex and the internally diverse African diaspora. The fieldwork followed the same study participants over time and space, allowing for continuity, trust and a rounded analysis.

### **Changing Gender Relations in Transnational Contexts: Family Dynamics/Divorce, Working Lives/Feminization of Labor**

Gender relations are not static but fluid and contingent upon specific cultural contexts and historical processes. For African migrants in the UK, the diaspora has become a contested space into which gender relations and roles internal to the group are being compared and contrasted with those of the destination country. This provides an intriguing insight comparatively into the public and private sphere, social relations and how sociality unfolds in a post/modern and post/colonial reality of the global urbanity that London provides. The conflicts are manifest at many levels, but they are most visible within diaspora households and at religious and social gatherings. Silvia, who is married with two children, describes the high divorce rate among the Zimbabwean community and other African communities in the UK. She explains:

I don't know what is happening. One of the thing that is causing marriages to break down is that women who were not breadwinners suddenly they are the main providers for families. And it's not within the Zimbabwean community alone but it is within the whole African community, they have got that upheaval. Again the sharing of duties has caused some problems and has caused marriages to break here in the UK. Good marriages, people came with they were married, they were good but they are breaking here. I have heard young wives who started having lots of money and the moment she

starts having lots of money she starts saying he is having the same amount as me, they became wild and you try to control them and you wonder this woman tend to be so good what is the problem now.

The quotation highlights the transformation of gender relations and roles within African families in the diaspora and yet these changes are not without resistance, negotiation and conflicts (explored in detail in the following section). More importantly, Silvia underlines how in the reconstruction of life in the diaspora African men experience a loss of status as breadwinners and a rupture of their sense of masculine identity. At first instance, this is where respectability is questioned. The majority of respondents in the study acknowledge that most women 'are now the main breadwinners for their families.' Although some women in Africa are in paid work and make a financial contribution to their households, this is done without challenging prevailing gender norms. Silvia above talks about 'wild' and 'out of control' behaviors where the contrasting social norms of the private and public sphere intersect and collide.

We argue that the restructuring of the world economy, in particular, the growing global demand for female workers in 'high touch' occupations and the related feminization of migration, is accelerating the reconfiguration of the family. Often, the first migrant assumes the role of being a breadwinner of the family and in the majority of cases, these are women in the nursing, health, social work, and teaching professions. Four of the five women we interviewed were primary migrants which belie the assumption that women follow their husbands as trailing spouses. In most parts of Africa, the culturally normalized ideal of 'being a man' entail being a breadwinner for one's family and making final decisions on family matters. This is a correlated pathway to respectability where the 'man of the house' brings sustenance, material support and decision-making capacity to realize this role as a 'man'. Tamara is a Gambian social worker who migrated to Britain in 2001. Like most of the respondents, he explains the normative roles of African men and women.

As far as I am concerned, the Gambian way has always been that the father will provide and then the mother will decide. That's the Gambian way as far as I am concerned. I think from my point of view being a father means having children. Secondly, you should be able to look after them. You must know that you have responsibility to look after them and to provide for them and make sure they have everything they need in their life.

Migration disrupts these cultural ideals as the transnational context has benefited women at the expense of men and displacing them from their traditional productive functions and diminishing the power, status and breadwinning income they previously enjoyed. The changes in economic options of men come with the redistribution of power in diaspora households (Pasura 2008; Tinarwo and Pasura 2014).

While it seemed 'natural' that men occupied a higher status in relation to women and children, these pre-migration gendered and social positions are being challenged and contested in the hostland. Sakho is a male respondent from the Gambia. He is married and has four children. In 2006, he came to the UK as a refugee and his family followed him later. Sakho explains:

In terms of power and priorities in this country (UK), children are at the top, then you have women, then you have cats, then dogs and finally you have men. Whereas in Africa men are at the top.

The above excerpt vividly captures the crisis of masculinity brought about by transnational migration which reconfigures roles, status and hierarchies within the family context. The pre-migration gendered and social hierarchies are being challenged and contested in the hostland as diasporic conditions force the majority of African men to re-think their masculine identities within diaspora households and society. For men, the UK government's neo-liberal policy

agenda and its egalitarian context contribute to the relegation of men to a dependency status. We argue that the diaspora is increasingly becoming a space for reordering social categories and social status as well as negotiating respectable forms of masculinities. Thus, this new human geography of the receiving country with all its implicit postcolonial and neoliberal dynamics becomes a social laboratory where men must reconfigure masculinities and the sense of respectability that is interrelated with such gendered identities.

Although highly educated and having had higher status occupations in their countries of origin (Modood 2005), the majority of African migrant men and women experience deskilling by working at the lower end of the labor market in the UK (McGregor 2007; Datta et al. 2009). Farisai is a Zimbabwean-born solicitor, entrepreneur and pastor to a Pentecostal Church. He describes his experience of working as a cleaner, thus:

First I got a cleaning job, but cleaning as a public job was hard. I asked myself why I was being supervised by someone who wasn't as educated as myself. One day the supervisor came to me and said I wasn't cleaning thoroughly. I said to her, "Excuse me, I am not a cleaner. I am a lawyer." One day I was just fed up and I decided to look for an office job.

Similarly, Chiku, a Kenyan married man in his 40s, describes how 'most Kenyan men work for security, warehouse jobs, cleaning, shelf-stacking in supermarkets that kind of jobs yet back home most of them were having better jobs in offices.' For most African men, migration has meant accepting work that is not seen as 'suitable' for a man; work that is incompatible with hegemonic masculinity. By working in the health and social care sectors of the economy, most of these men talked of doing women's work in order to fulfill their transnational obligations. By extension, we decipher their argument that women's work is not men's work and hence not respectable in fulfilling their roles as men. Tendai is a Zimbabwean married man in his 40s. He

migrated to Britain in 2007 to further his studies in engineering; now, he works as a care giver in London.

Tendai explains:

Go to any care home, especially in London, you see black people and you are most likely to find two or three Zimbabweans. This is what I have realized. It is within our community. The Ghanaians and the Nigerians when they arrive here they are into cleaning jobs. They work around 3 am, 4 am cleaning the trains (laughter).

The revealing correction here is that care/caring and cleaning are jobs/duties associated with women and their traditional roles. When men are now compelled to undertake such jobs the very process shatters the foundations of their identities.

Many migrant workers from the Global South, particularly Africans, carry out the 'dirty work' of neoliberalism such as care and cleaning in London (Datta et al. 2009). Similarly, Keto, one of the male Gambian respondents, considers this as twentieth-century slavery. He explains:

It's is the new twentieth-century slavery, you don't chain up people. Like people being abused in the care homes and stuff like that. You don't put people in chains and take them to sugar plantations, no you don't do that. What do you do? You create chaos in their own countries, and when you do that you know they will run and when they run you know where they will go, they will come here. All those jobs the locals don't like to do you know they will do it, and they are being underpaid, being abused, that is the new 21st-century slavery.

Keto's account above is a clear insight into what he renders the postcolonial mechanism of what in his opinion is slave labor. Keto articulates this as a neo-colonial practice disguised in the



realms of liberal, capitalist labor market relations. The above extract illustrates how the combination of race, gender and the neoliberal economy produces sites of particular disadvantage and inequalities. Most of the African male migrants strategically put up with restricted employment opportunities and ethnic and racial discrimination in the hostland as well as the loss of their hegemonic masculinity with the hope that their situation will be reversed when they return to their homelands. The above quotations highlight how the presence of African migrant men in feminized occupations not only challenged and disrupted their hegemonic masculinities but also produced them – their social relations, sexualities, masculinities and consciousness (explored further below).

### **Negotiating African Masculinities within Transnational Contexts: Re/Acting to the Crisis of Masculinity and External Cultural Forces**

Men respond to the loss of their hegemonic status in different ways; with some studies showing that some men resort to domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse (Kabeer 2007). In this section, we explore the gendered intersection of African migrant men's personal losses and gains in the diaspora and how these 'gains and losses' influence the negotiation of respectable forms of masculinity. Although the content of what is counted as respectability shifts over time and space, respectability demarcates social status and shapes interpersonal relations, and thus it goes beyond what the individual wants and desires and subscribes to the expectations of the collective, the family and the wider community. For African men, respectability is not simply a measure of one's economic and/or social capital but also of morality and proper norms of gendered behavior as well as maintaining transnational obligations. We suggest four possible outcomes of how African migrant men strategically respond to the loss of their hegemonic masculinity and these are *withdrawal*, *accommodation*, *resistance*, and *endorsement and subversion*. As we will demonstrate in the following sections, not all four strategies employed by the migrant men in renegotiating their masculinities can be regarded as articulations of

respectable masculinity. We will illustrate how black African men's identities are being challenged, re-affirmed and reconfigured in a transnational context.

### ***Withdrawal***

The first strategy is withdrawal. African men withdraw from the traditional marriage and/or return to their homelands to regain their privileged position again. In cases where men's identities as family providers have been undermined or displaced, some men have returned to the homeland [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]. Francis, who is a Zimbabwean journalist and diaspora activist, explains:

If you used to say to your wife cook the food and bring it here and then you find yourself in a very embarrassing job, some have found their way back home. When they (men) come here and they try to apply for a job and say they were managers in Zimbabwe they don't get it because of the social composition and the politics of Britain in relation to different races. Some have decided to return home though the work there does not give them so much. He would rather remain as a manager there than having the woman managing the house as a breadwinner.

Similarly, Fanaka, a Kenyan man in his 30s, acknowledges that migration has restructured the African family because 'all of a sudden women realize they can do better than men, they can earn more money and this affects their relationships and I know a number of people split up because of that.' The same point is echoed by Farisai, a Kenyan married woman in her 40s, who notes that 'this migration has weakened relationships within and across our borders.' Moreover, this comes against the backdrop of state investment in border controls and other attempts to 'fix' transnational communities in a manner that creates obstacles to family reunification but also to maintaining satisfactory familial ties across borders (McGregor 2008).

Coming from African societies where individual rights and entitlements are often submerged to those of the kin group, the family or even the community as a collective, women

are asserting their rights in diaspora households. Taji, a Kenyan male migrant who runs a barber shop in London, explains how the changing of gender relations and roles has resulted in marriage breakdowns:

What I have realized so far in England is really a frustrating thing to say. You come to England and your wife is back home. You work for some time and raise money for the wife to come here. It can be either way. You fight for the wife to come here and in this instance we are talking of a person who has papers. You are a nurse, doctor or whatever. When a wife comes over, I have a true example to tell you. When a certain man brought his wife over here and after three months the wife said 'I just want to thank you for bringing me over here but I have realized something, you aren't my type.'

As the diaspora has become a site of cultural conflict because of the changing gender relations and gender roles, some African migrant men, unwilling to give up to their hegemonic cultural ideal of being a man, coercively or voluntarily withdraw from the hostland to their homelands or alternatively remain in the UK leading to the collapse of their marriages. While the context of diaspora is one where volatility and friction emerges when traditionally gendered roles are questioned and resisted by women migrants, it also becomes a space when men migrants realize their need to remain anchored in their hegemonic masculinity. As a result of this realization, return migration with the inevitable outcome of relationship and family breakdown becomes the pathway to regaining eventually future respectable masculinity. So, whereas respectable masculinity is a quest lost in the diaspora, it re-emerges as an alternative pursuit in return migration. Hence, mobility becomes a new pathway to future realizations of respectable masculinity.

### ***Accommodation***

Accommodation is the second strategy and is widely embraced by the majority of the respondents in the study. It encapsulates how most African migrant men consciously negotiate

and embrace transformative masculine identities. Moses is a Zimbabwean nurse who lived in London since coming to Britain in 1997. Like most of the respondents, he explains why migration has been a vehicle for changing gender relations among African migrant families. As Moses puts it:

Men here have to adapt to certain way of life in which they have to learn to do some things they wouldn't have done in Zimbabwe like learning how to cook, wash their own clothes, clean up the house. Whereas in Zimbabwe it's very rare to find a man doing these household chores. Here it's part of our lives; it's something that you have to do.

Likewise, Selmar describes how African 'culture has been taken over by economics'. He is in his 40s, and runs a delivery business. He came to the UK in 2001 with his wife as students and then moved on to a work permit visa. Selmar explains:

Women in Kenya leave everything for the husband, but here (UK) they are more astute, responsible. It is the market economy that dictates everything. Whatever creates more money we structure ourselves in so much that we can get it....So culture has been taken over by economics. You cannot maintain cultural intransigency just because it is your culture, you starve.

These African migrant men who accommodate to their wives' demands are considered effeminate, passive and weak, likened to 'sheep' (Sakho, Gambian respondent). As traditional forms of patriarchy fail to legitimize men's power and authority in diaspora households, some attempt to reclaim this power in spaces such as diaspora congregations and hometown associations. Khiama, a Zimbabwean male refugee, thinks diaspora congregations should help men negotiate respectable forms of masculinities; he explains: 'What I see is that men were engaged in better jobs in Zimbabwe. First time they come in here, maybe their wives could do

any job or there were nurses, for you now you have to climb down. Men need help from the church during the transitional period.’ Here, the pragmatism of the transnational context means African men need to ‘climb down’ (that is, to deskill) to live in the hostland. What is also highlighted here from participants is the new psychosocial need for emotional support from the church in what is experienced as a challenging transitional time of incorporation into new social modalities.

Such new social modalities in the diaspora have married women perceived as the equivalent of the Home Office, whose power and authority is to issue visas (permission) to their husbands to go out and socialize with friends in pubs or social spaces (Pasura 2014). One of the respondents describes the different types of drinking alcohol visas that married men have to bargain for the time they spend away from family homes.

If your wife issues you with a student visa, then you should socialize with your friends between three to five hours and return home. And if your madam stamps a work permit visa for you, then you can laugh and enjoy with your mates and return home just before your madam is about to sleep. But the visa is still time limited. Then, other men like me are given indefinite visa, and with this visa, you can go to the pub on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On each of these days, you go out and drink with your friends until late and come back home to mark the register. And there is a citizenship visa, which I don't like but I know other men who have it, with this visa you go to the pub every day, the barman knows your family and children and you have a reserved seat in the pub. You are part of the furniture in the pub. But still every day, you go back home to mark the register. Now there is an asylum visa, in this case although you don't have money you can drink beer until you are drunk, you are also part of the furniture in the pub. Most men shun this asylum visa; it is for the underclass. And then there is an illegal immigrant visa, here a man just disappears from his family home without permission from his wife,

and the wife has to call his friends for his whereabouts. But the fact is, we must respect and protect our visas even if it is a student visa, one day it will be upgraded to work permit, then indefinite and citizenship visas (cf. Pasura 2014, 77-78).

The above excerpt shows how the enactment and achievement of respectable masculinity is legitimized by other men in social and cultural spaces. These discussions about men obtaining 'visas' from their wives explain the shift in the balance of power from men to women as well as drawing attention to the performative intricacies of gender. Respectable men do not come to pubs or social spaces without permission from their wives. In these interactional fields, flexible masculinities are created, performed and given legitimacy (see West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990).

Assuming African migrants return to their homelands will the gains which women have realized remain? It can be speculated that most African migrant men may quickly revert to hegemonic masculine identities even when returning to their countries of origin for a holiday or extended visits. Mariama, a married mother of two children, narrates her experience of visiting Gambia with her husband. She explains: 'Here (UK) my husband helps me with cooking and carrying out other household chores but when we go on holiday to Gambia, he stops everything. He won't touch our child; in fact, I have to be on good behavior because he can even slap me something which he doesn't dare to do in the UK.' This anecdote illustrates the importance of socio-cultural contexts which permits and legitimizes certain behaviors while sanctioning others. Yet, the speculation remains intact if it is the socio-cultural context of the homeland that reinforces hegemonic masculinity, the migrant men, or both. Future research in this domain can unveil the interplay of the above and provide a more empirically informed account on this while building on our existing research findings.

## ***Resistance***

Resistance is an approach which embodies men who choose to engage with the reality and discourses about the crisis of masculinities but resist its competing premises and values so as to preserve ‘ideal’ African cultural practices. The African men resist the changed gender relations and roles within migrant households. The failure by some African men to perform their roles as providers and breadwinners of their families leads to the loss of respect, power and authority. Rather than withdrawing from marriage or returning to their homelands, some resort to *hyper-masculinity*. Taji is a married Zimbabwean teacher who came to the UK in 1998 as a refugee. He explains:

Don't forget that our African culture might oppress women but it makes our marriages survive. Whereas the English culture is destroying our marriage, then which one should we go for, our culture or foreign culture? We aren't supposed to maintain foreign culture but we are supposed to maintain foreign laws.

The quotation shows how some African migrant men respond to the loss of power and authority by re-emphasizing patriarchy and aggression. African culture is used as an excuse to conceal existing oppressive gender relations and legitimize the perpetuation of those oppressive relations. Women are conceived as custodians of African cultural and traditional values and thus the boundary markers between migrants and the indigenous population.

Some men perform a hyper-masculinity which often relies on domestic violence and excessive drinking of alcohol. One of the executive members of the Gambian hometown association (HTA) hinted about the conflicts and tensions within diaspora households and likens the HTA to an ‘insurance’ as it helps members in times of need. As he puts it:

Upon conflict with the law as a result of domestic violence, immigration, driving related offenses, alcohol, drugs, etc., some form of support is needed for them (members) to meet their legal costs, advice, and in a worst case scenario when such persons are deceased and their bodies have to be repatriated to the home country.

Similarly, Khiama, a married Zimbabwean nurse, provides another example. He explains an interesting story: ‘When one person was stopped by a police officer, he was asked where he comes from and he said Zimbabwe, the police officer then said: “Zimbabweans we don’t search for drugs we breathalyze”, it’s about drink and driving.’ Some men resort to excessive use of alcohol in keeping with habits acquired in their countries of origin and as a way of coping with the loss of the breadwinner status, and, by extension the loss of respectability. Among migrant men, violence against women and the excessive drinking of alcohol are practices considered as threats to one’s respectability. Yet the trope of resistance to the loss of hegemonic masculinity reflects longstanding academic theorizations and media representations of African men as patriarchal, violent and hypersexualized (Doyal, Anderson, and Paparini 2009; Dodds 2006). The strategy of resistance which results in excessive use of alcohol and violence by some of the men re-emphasizes patriarchal domination and aggression and thus should be seen as a re-enactment of hegemonic masculinity, illustrating how hegemonic masculinities become hybridized in the transnational context.

### ***Endorsement and Subversion***

The last strategy of endorsement and subversion refers to how men consciously embrace and enact respectable forms of masculine behavior (for example, sharing household duties) while simultaneously and strategically using religious and social spaces to resist changes to gender relations and roles. This strategy we see as transformative in that it enables men to transact respectability through inclusive forms of masculinity that are not anchored on



traditional/hegemonic gendered practices. Analyzing the notions of resistance and power, Foucault (1980, 142) argues that ‘there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where power relations are exercised’. Hence social and power relations both constrain and enable, leading people to both endorse and subvert the world in which they live. In the first Mubatanidzwa (Inter-denominational Christian fellowship) for African men in 2010, in Milton Keynes, a Zimbabwean pastor cautions the male audience about how to respond to the *crisis of masculinity*. He explains:

Some of you might think you are British citizens. No! You are refugees! This is not our country. The bad thing about coming to a country in which the breadbin is never empty is that there are welfare benefits; your children get free education. In exile, you don't talk about your totem, it's about who you are, it's about our identity as Zimbabweans, not Jamaicans. *You can change nappies, make the bed, prepare food, but don't let your wife command you to do these tasks* (emphasis added).

The last line of the excerpt captures the endorsement and subversion strategy adopted by some men, changing nappies and preparing food ‘but don’t let your wife command you to do these tasks’ which simultaneously erodes and reinforces dominant ideas of being an African man. While power relations between husbands and wives remain a contested area within households, religious and social spaces provide for the affirmation of more traditional roles and relations; roles and relations that are being transformed in the private sphere (Pasura 2008; Pasura 2012). For some men, welfare entitlements have undermined and in some cases displaced their traditional roles as breadwinners for their families. Taji describes how the government has usurped his power and authority in his family. As he puts it:

Though the government is trying to help in the sense of Child Benefit to bring up kids, though we are benefiting from that we don't have the full powers. To maintain my family I need the full powers but the government is taking away those powers to maintain my family because the government is giving me money. That's bull shit. So the government is the hero of my family.

Paschal is an undocumented Kenyan migrant who got married in the UK and has no children. He explains how, like some of the male respondents, he delegates the responsibility of dealing with money to his wife. He explains:

If you meet an (African) man who says when he got paid he gives his wife a certain amount of money he wishes, that's a lie. It doesn't make sense; women are better with money than we are. Not that we aren't budget efficient; I can work within my petrol money and whatever. To me it's not that women are in charge but its delegation of duty.

Paschal's extract epitomizes the endorsement and subversion strategy embraced by some men. Thus, masculinities should be seen as constantly being protected and defended as well as continuously breaking down and being recreated (Morrell 2001). Within the endorsement and subversion strategy, African migrant men negotiate with masculine ideals so as to produce a 'hybrid' form of hegemonic masculinity that appropriates non-hegemonic practices. We argue that the UK's egalitarian context and the changing gender relations provide unique conditions that foster the creation of these fluid and hybrid forms of masculinities. Such fluid and hybrid forms of masculinity seem to be agentic in that the men combine the best of both socio-cultural worlds in their transnational communities. This very much resonates with Sheba George's (2005) research on female nurses who moved from India to the United States before their

husbands where she explains how those men who lost their social status in the immigration process attempt to reclaim ground by creating new roles for themselves in their church.

Parallel to the above masculinity survival strategy, Batnitzky et al. (2009) in their in-depth case of a London hotel and hospital exploring male migrant labor identities, define ‘flexible and strategic masculinities’ as those gender identities emerging from and intricately related to the ways in which participants discussed their performances at work in relation to ‘women’s work’ and ‘lower-class’ work. Their findings suggest that those migrant men originating from upper and middle class economic positions exhibited a desire or at least willingness to perform work which would be considered ‘lower-class’ in their countries of origin as a form of contestation of their gender identities in the UK. On the contrary those migrant men who had family obligations back home and were actively sending remittances would flexibly perform ‘women’s work’ and thus enacted extensive flexibility as regards their gender identities/masculinities.

Resonating with such flexibility we advance here further clarification why our findings point to a ‘plasticity’ in the concept of ‘respectability’ rather than the narrower definition that our participants seem to articulate. Given that not all four strategies employed by our participants in renegotiating their masculinities can be regarded as articulations of respectable masculinity, we have demonstrated that their portrayal is more complex and that shows how masculinities indeed vary and even reinvent what a notion of respectability might be. Thus a more plastic conceptualization emerges of ‘respectable masculinity’, one that encompasses notions of hybrid processes of negotiation of hegemony and subalternity.

### **Transnational Engagements and Masculinity**

It is highly misleading to consider African transnational migrants in the North as individual

actors, Geschiere (2013) argues, they carry a heavy load of obligations and expectations from the extended family back home and this stretch of intimacy increases witchcraft fears. Within the diaspora, some men and women participate in transnational cross-border politics and development networks to maintain their pre-migration gendered status and recognition. However, participation in transnational practices is gendered. Most of the Zimbabwean men invest in properties in the homeland and engage in the shipping of *magonyeti* (trucks) and cars which were seen as the diasporic equivalent of cattle [name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process]. For these men, participating in transnational activities and HTAs can be seen as alternative social spaces of recognition. Moses, one of the respondents, describes the desire to start and manage transnational businesses as infectious among Zimbabweans but also explains why such projects do not lead to social transformation. He explains:

These guys here who are buying buses are wasting their money. Unless they buy new vehicles and send them home. We have many examples of people who wasted their money. Zimbabweans aren't business-minded but they embark on such projects to create a name for themselves yet they don't have the knowhow of operating it. Now other Zimbabweans are buying grinding mills, again they have a colonial mentality when white people used to give them a grinding mill or a bicycle as their pension at the end of their contracts.

It is interesting to note here how the excerpt above diminishes any capability as self-directed and translates action as the outcome of an ingrained colonial mentality. In contrast, most of the respondents like Huyai, a Zimbabwean refugee living in London, think transnational projects provide fall-back options. He explains:

By sending those trucks people are saying I can't work in industry for the rest of my life because the pound won't be enough. You can't say I have worked enough, no-no, you

have to go to work but in Africa you can sit down and say now I can retire and enjoy my money. I have got cattle, I have got my house and that's it.

Similarly, many Gambians use the Sando Hometown Association, which has a predominantly male leadership, to participate in transnational development projects in their homeland. As one of the executive members explains:

We have sent football jerseys to schools, 500 watches which we had to distribute to different areas, we have also sent hospital beds, crutches. It was so huge that we had to raise funds for that because we had to take a container. We send containers with books, pens, pencils, school uniforms, that is distributed through schools in the entire district.

Pursuing these transnational activities shifts the focus, though temporarily, from African migrant men's failure to perform their role as providers and breadwinners in households to assuming an even bigger responsibility of rebuilding their homelands from a distance. Hence, in the analysis in this paper reconstruction of community is symbolic of their value and worth, thus vicariously enjoying another hybrid form of respectability. We have pointed out the gap between the idealized and hegemonic construction of African men as patriarchal and the lived masculinities performed within the transnational context which are multiple, overlapping and to some extent respectable. Within essentialized discourses, the subjectivity of African men is silenced and replaced by an abstracted universal male subject – who oppresses women, is violent and hypersexualized. In this paper, we have not exhausted all the possible strategies employed by African migrant men in response to the crisis of masculinity. However, by narrowing down to the four strategies discussed in the preceding section, the objective was to disrupt fixed and bounded notions of African masculinity and identity which obscure the fact that African masculinities are fluid, contested and plural.

## Conclusion

The article has deepened our understanding of how African masculinities within transnational contexts are constituted and reconfigured. We demonstrated how African migrant men are experiencing a crisis of masculinity in the diaspora but nevertheless go about constructing new ideas of being a man relevant to the diasporic context. Without access to traditional forms of patriarchal power, the article explored how men respond and negotiate respectable forms of masculinities, in some cases a re-enactment of an alternative hegemonic masculinity. The article suggested four outcomes of how African migrant men strategically respond to the loss of their hegemonic masculinity as withdrawal, accommodation, resistance, and endorsement and subversion. The balancing act between these four responses is a key characteristic to African migrant men's crisis of masculinity characterized by a constant tension between accommodation and resistance. These hybrid forms of masculinities generated by transnational migration show that masculine identities, just like other forms of identities, are not fixed but socially constructed, unstable and always changing. While there is fracturing of patriarchal authority in the family, migrant men use the wider African cultural and religious spaces to regain some of the lost status and recognition. At the same time, caution should be raised in not proceeding with typical stereotyping of hegemonic masculinity in those instances where migrant men's social and cultural worlds are disrupted by adjustments to the new geographies of institutions, norms and values in the host setting. In recent research on migrant masculinities there is an emphasis on a central argument that there is 'a layering of logics within marriages, kin groups, ethnic communities, and wider cultural and institutional frameworks, which together impede the expression and understanding of these problems. .... these representations function to limit such men's ability to give voice to their vulnerabilities and the challenges they face and thus to reinforce an assumption of male hegemony' (Charsley and Liversage, 2015: 492). And, here, it is salient to note that the understanding of migrants' emotional lives through the recognition of

what Gallo (2015) terms ‘grey spaces’ that build up kinship relations, and through ‘also placing the latter within a wider historical context of generational dialectics’ (114), can be revealing of the ‘layering logics’ that intersect in mobile and transnational lives.

Our empirical findings contribute to ‘hybrid masculinities’ research in further extending the analysis to migrant transnational black African masculinities as we theorize their cultural politics of migrancy to make sense of the strategies and contradictions in their transnational settings of working lives, community and family relations. While our analysis reflects Foucauldian salient points of power and resistance, it also pushes the analytical boundaries further in its gendered focus thus extending *intersectional* theorizations to additional modalities of social life. Moreover, we reflect on both social and familial relations, thus bringing into dialogue both the public and private spheres by examining domesticity and everyday life. Through an intersectional thrust on the struggles, contradictions and actions of our migrant participants we have explored how social subjects transact and transform hybrid, even hegemonic, but more importantly, agentic masculinities.

### Notes

1. While we employ the term ‘African’ to denote the regional origin of our participants, we remain reflexively aware of their precise country of origin (e.g. Gambia, Kenya and Zimbabwe) and the limitations of homogenizing containers that incorporate elements of methodological nationalism. Hence, we situate our positionality in highlighting the ethics of our research but see no conceptual usefulness in abandoning the term altogether or painstakingly putting it in scare quotes (i.e. ‘African’) all throughout the discussion in this article. More useful, in our view, is to allow the voices of our participants to situate their perspectives, e.g. Tamara talks of the ‘Gambian way’.

2. Unless carried out sensitively, these HIV studies on Africans unwittingly result in the re/production of popular discourses which see migrants as the source of public health and social problems in the country of destination and settlement. In one of the 2015 UK general election debates, Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), suggested that (African) migrants are using the National Health Service (NHS) for HIV treatment (BBC 2015). Many of these stereotypes of African migrant men and women are reinforced by images of migrants aboard overloaded rickety ships crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Libya in search of a better life in Europe.
3. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect interviewees' identities. Moreover, the study does not provide a detailed overview of respondents to avoid giving away details that might be identifiable and thus put informants at risk.

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