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Of what value is feminism to black men?

Kopano Ratele*

Abstract

If the ultimate purpose of critical engagement with black men and masculinities is the development of progressive masculinities, the growing body of scholarly, pedagogical and media-related work on men and masculinities in South Africa has reached a dead end – or something close to it. This article employs three media pieces as springboards to highlight the currency of the topicality of masculinity, but, crucially too, the apparent gaps in how black South African masculinities are thought of, in order to respond to how work on men and masculinities can negotiate itself out of the current impasse. While the article is anchored in the phenomenon of masculinity as a media headline issue, it is not an exhaustive analysis of the prevalent discourses of black masculinity conveyed by the media. The article argues that, in the context of the enduring power of monist theories and politics of men's and blacks' lives, (re)engaging black and African feminisms for black men, alongside critical black thought, might be precisely what is needed to 'make the black man come to himself' as Biko put it, and towards liberating black masculinity.

Keywords: Biko, black men, feminism, masculinity, media

Blackness, I reasoned, meant that I could finally be myself
– Wallace 1982, 6.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of critical engagement with local (black) men and masculinities is not critique for its own sake. Critical enquiry might be a form of action, but arguably critical work with men and masculinities has to go beyond merely observing that men's genders are culturally constructed, multiple, changeable and historically contingent. Critical scholarly, pedagogical and media-freighted engagement with men and masculinities is meant to ultimately contribute to the development of progressive masculinities.¹ Arguably, critical studies of masculinities investigate the practices of men in order to change them. Indeed, there is a wide range of applications and cultural usefulness of research and theory on masculinities, as Connell (2007) has noted. If this is the case, the existing body of work on men and masculinities in South Africa has reached something close to a dead end, as far as the goal of transforming dominant black masculinities is concerned. Evidence that can be adduced is that after a decade-and-a-half of working on masculinity and admirable gender equality policies, men's violence against women, children and other men in this country remains high by global standards (South African Police Service 2012). The *Global study on homicide* reported that

South Africa, a country with a high homicide rate, displays a pattern of lethal male violence similar to the Americas, with (the) highest shares of homicide victims in the age groups between 20 and 39. This

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is a pattern of male violence that owes much to the types of risk-seeking behaviour in which certain disadvantaged groups in South African society routinely engage. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2011, 68).

Also, it has been argued that the dynamics of the ruling alliance in South Africa have succeeded in presenting gender equity as ‘anti-African, equating it with modernity, (white) middle-class aspirations, and widespread lack of (male) economic advancement. Thus, they have collectively launched what amounts to backlash against gender equality in the course of building a movement that enabled contestation of hegemony at the highest levels of national power’ (Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger 2012, 18).

How might we go about (re)presenting progressive masculinities, and by implication some of the ideas from (black) feminist thought, to black men, as ‘pro-African’ and not a ‘white woman’s thing’? This article contends that, against the enduring seductive power of monist theories of men’s and blacks’ lives, (re)engaging particularly black and African feminisms *for* black men, alongside critical black thought, might be precisely what is needed to ‘make the black man come to himself’ (Biko 1996, 29), to liberate black masculinities.

To negotiate our way out of the current impasse, several discursive cross-currents that check the possibilities of transforming black masculinities need to be addressed. Amongst these are, first ironically, a gender discourse that remains skeptical about men as subjects of feminist interventions, or, at best, is largely indifferent to men – except in connection with violence against women. Different strands of feminism and a number of feminist women do work on the subject of masculinity, of course. However, bell hooks (hooks 2004, xiii) observes that ‘while some women active in the feminist movement felt anguished about our collective inability to convert masses of men to feminist thinking, many women simply felt that feminism gave them permission to be indifferent to men, to turn away from male needs’. The contention of this article is that non-sexists, pro-feminists and feminists can ill afford to be dismissive, uninterested or immutably angry with patriarchal, sexist and undemocratic, violent, racist, consumerist and uncaring men. The author proposes that feminists and pro-feminists (women and men) face up to arguments made by or on behalf of black males, to enable the transformation of dominant forms of black masculinity.

Second, there is in evidence a strand of the black radicalism – specifically, a black consciousness philosophy-influenced view – which understands the black man’s troubles as emerging out of the historical white racist order, yet underemphasises black men’s complicity with hetero-patriarchy. Black consciousness scholars and activists concentrate their efforts on racial conscientisation in the ‘long journey towards realisation of the self’ (Biko 1996, 31). Racism is not the only thing that imprisons and impedes black men from actualising liberated masculinities. Intra-group gender power contestations are equally responsible for black men killing each other.

Third, there is a resurgent muscular African gender traditionalism which seeks to retribalise black men and women. Several criticisms can be leveled at retrogressions of gender traditionalism. The

main problem with this discourse is that it tends to be characterised by a refusal to reflect on the contents of tradition as masculine, or the fact that tradition can hurt the very members it claims as its own (K. Ratele 2013).

Finally, there is a hypervisible media-favoured black masculinity that champions capitalist consumption. Discourses of black men as regards what they drive or wear effectively stand opposed to not only the reduction of intra-racial economic inequality, but also the development of socially conscious egalitarian masculinities (Z. Mohamed 2012).

This enumeration of resistant discourses to the development of new models of progressive black masculinities is by no means exhaustive. The author will not enter into a direct engagement with this inventory. Being focused on black South African men and masculinities, the article responds to the principal question in broad strokes, by arguing that a critical and empathetic (re)engagement specifically with black feminist ideas could be what is needed to liberate black South African masculinities from apartheid racist patriarchal traumatising, in order to move towards new black masculinities. While anchoring itself in the phenomenon of masculinity as a media headline issue, the article is, however, not an exhaustive analysis of prevalent discourses of black masculinity (conveyed by the media) that work against the project of freeing black masculinities. It should be observed that the media are not homogenous. There are, after all, ongoing contestations within the media about masculinities. Even as it employs 'the masculinity issue' in a leading American publication, before turning to the South African edition of *Gentleman's Quarterly (GQ)* and a piece in the *City Press*, the article does not constitute a comparative analysis of masculinities in the United States (US) and South Africa. Directed at both critical work on masculinity as well as the subjects of that work, the three pieces are used as springboards to highlight the currency of the topicality of masculinity, and gaps in how black men are thought of, so as to respond to how we might negotiate a way out of the current impasse.

WHY MASCULINITIES ARE IN THE HEADLINES

Perhaps now, more than ever, masculinity *qua* masculinity is making headlines around the world. The view of masculinity as an object inside male genes, or located somewhere in their bodies, may still be pervasive. Yet, masculinity on the covers of magazines, named and measured, asserted, validated or disparaged, clearly indicates it to be a cultural project of individual males as well as men as a group. Masculinity in the media appears to confirm the notion that it is not essence but 'a set of actions, relations and discourses' used to distinguish an individual from others, one group of subjects from another (K. Ratele 2011, 414). According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 832), masculinity is taken as a 'pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)'. At the same time, similar to other categories of identification, masculinity ought to be conceived as an individual psychological reality, not only a social configuration of actions and omissions. Being about desires, cathexes, anxieties, repressed material, projections, denials and other cognitive and affective processes, masculinity is as much about the psyche and its contents

as it is about where we are located in our society by means of laws, tradition, institutions, rules and discourse. The same applies to being black, queer, South African, or any other social identity. The regulation of social identities is the domain of political, economic, religious and cultural orders, but it is equally about an individual's early life, attachments, traumas, insecurities and fantasies. Robert Morrell (Morrell 2001^b, 7) observes that while men's gender identities arise from their social contexts, masculinity 'is "owned" by an individual. It bears the marks and characteristics of the history which formed it – frequently with salient childhood experiences imparting a particular set of prejudices and preferences, joys and terrors'.

The heroic as well as the dastardly deeds of men have always made news. What is new in terms of what is seen in the mass media, is what men do to others and themselves being conceived of as an *issue of masculinity*, rather than, for instance, politics, business or war. Textual and visual images of men in suits, army fatigues in Iraq or Mali, playing rugby or showing their biceps, are to be understood as representations of models of masculinity (even though it may be called business, war, sport or body-building). Reinscriptions of masculinity occur while subjects are engaged in other activities. In instances where masculinity is an issue, the prevalent model may be variously conceived as being in crisis, changing, under scrutiny or gone wrong. Regardless of the view being expressed, the upside of masculinity in the media headlines is that it is apparently increasingly understood as something to work on. We live in an age of masculinity as a self-conscious art, of sorts. A self-conscious masculinity does not apply uniformly to all men. Men who work in fashion, for example, are likely to be more self-conscious of working on themselves, than men working in mines. However, it would be incorrect to assume that poor men in South Africa are untouched by public debates on masculinity and demands for men to change. For instance, from her visual ethnography with black male undergraduate students, Kharnita Mohamed (2011, 106) reported that fashion magazines such as *GQ*, *Men's Health* and *Blink!* were used by her participants to 'identify trends but also provided the imaginative material to embody new performances of masculinity' (see also Viljoen 2012). In this respect, Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on history* (1963) tells of black men's historical partiality to 'fashion'.

To students of masculine orders in South Africa, and internationally, the 'unnaturalness' of masculinity and men as gendered may be old news. But brief observations on masculinity on the covers of two periodicals – one local and the other from the US, are made in the next two sections, followed by a gendered, against-the-grain reading of a piece of writing published in a local Sunday paper, on the 2011 nationwide municipal elections which, at first blush, appears to have little to do with the issue of masculinity.

RULES OF MASCULINITY ACCORDING TO GQ

Consider the express mention of masculinity on the cover of *GQ* South Africa of June 2012. The pertinent cover story of the men's magazine has the headline 'The rules: Man up! The art of masculinity – with Jason Statham, Ewan McGregor and Jenson Button'. The main article of

interest is that by Tony Parsons. Of special interest is how the piece surfaces the constructedness of masculinity, but also its 'silent but emphatic omission(s)' (Viljoen 2011, 311)² in its (re) presentations of masculinity.

On the opening page the article features a picture of a well-turned-out, unsmiling Jason Statham,³ presumably in a tyre factory. The actor is said to be 'displaying some manly poses in a masculine environment' (Parson 2012, 97). The subtitle reads: 'How is a man supposed to be a man these days? By indulging in the art of masculinity says Tony Parsons.' We are meant to understand that masculinity is, in other words, not something men are born with, but an art project to work on.

The article states: 'Not all rules are meant to be broken. This guide is geared towards making your life as fulfilling as possible.' The article gives 53 rules and five tips by Victoria Coren in a side bar in pink, background titled 'A woman's advice'. It is not clear whether the 53 rules are solely by Statham, drawn from an interview with him, or formulated by Parsons with Statham in mind. Does it matter, though, when masculinity is both fantasy and social representation? Indeed, the man being interpellated does not seem to have a history, race, culture, relationships or other social markers. All men can be like Statham if they can get the art right and abide by the rules.

Needless to say, *GQ* gives men false hope. These rules are made up for the sake of entertainment, although to the unwary reader they can become a new hegemonic masculine ideal. 'The rules' article omits to point out the constraints and privileges of history, race and income in making a man's life fulfilling.

Although a sign of the global apprehension or celebration (with local reverberations) of the changing orders and regimes of gender, taken as a whole cover stories about masculinity (such as the piece outlining the rules) have an unsettled, troubling meaning. They probably conceal their true intentions. Is the intention to create a new hegemony? What are black male readers to make of the rules *GQ* lists in respect of masculinity? Should they assess their manhood against them, memorise them, ignore them or laugh at them? The rules of masculinity are, in part at least, meant to be tongue-in-cheek. Like many articles in *GQ*, this piece seems to be intended as light, entertaining distraction. Who is to say, though, that no man will take this advice to heart? There is a possibility, in other words, that some readers might give the rules more than just a passing thought. In such cases, the form of masculinity held up in the article actually undermines the development of progressive masculinity, even while the piece appears to recognise the manufactured-ness of masculinity.

It is possible to engage in further analysis of the kinds of representations of and omissions about masculinity conveyed in the article under discussion. Indeed, the entire June 2012 masculinity issue of *GQ* can be productively subjected to a critical gender analysis discourse for its omissions and representations of masculinities. All *GQ* issues and other men's glossies can, of course, be analysed for their productive claims and for what they remain quiet about as regards masculinity. Of immediate relevance here is the gloss on intra-male differences such as status, sexual orientation

and race, for example, in the article. However, nothing further needs to be said on the issue here, as some of this has been ably undertaken by others already (Viljoen 2008). Suffice to say that, despite the admission that masculinity is, in effect, an art, a cultural construction and a global/local concern, care must be taken in reading media pieces such as this, since they can produce a new masculine hegemony – and even a new essence.

RETHINKING (BLACK) MASCULINITIES IN LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

The currency of masculinity as a topic for wider public consumption is further attested to by the fact that masculinity made the cover of a leading global mainstream publication,⁴ *Newsweek*. The import of making the cover of a periodical such as this, as opposed to a men's glossy such as *GQ*, is arguably that the most revelatory sites for understanding masculinity ideologies, discourse and cultural repertoires are not located in arenas where masculinity is explicitly mentioned (even though these cannot be ignored). Arguably, dominant ideologies usually operate best when they are implicit, since dominant groups and individuals are socially dominant much of the time, not only when they speak or act in a dominant way.

The *Newsweek* masculinity edition, published in September 2010, features several articles on men and masculinities. The articles are explicitly concerned with the demands changing gender orders and regimes make on men. Admittedly, the cover is beautiful. It shows the well-defined back of an adult white male carrying a cute white child over his shoulder, the latter staring directly at the viewer.⁵ The full text on the cover of the issue reads: 'Man up! The traditional male is an endangered species. It's time to rethink masculinity.'

One of the articles, because of two conjoined questions it poses, is of particular interest. Titled 'Men's lib', the article starts by stating that to 'survive in a hostile world, guys need to embrace girly jobs and dirty diapers. Why it's time to reimagine masculinity at work and at home' (Romano and Dokoupil 2010, unpaginated). The piece begins by repeating some of the answers offered (in the media) to the question: 'What's the matter with men?' Answers include that men are 'in decline', getting 'stiffed', that there is a 'war on boys'. There is also a look at some of the hard, new realities of changing economies for men and women which are useful in considering the future of men and masculinities in South Africa. There are, in fact, interesting changes facing men in the US, some of which also apply here and elsewhere in the world. While these pertinent facts reinforce the need to focus on the pressures on contemporary masculinities, it is clear that context is a significant factor in thinking about men's lives. Even in a world of globalised media images, men's desires and forms of masculinity can only be fully grasped in a local context, without losing sight of the global influences that shape localised relations. A neglect of the historical, political, economic and cultural contexts of men's genders is tantamount to willful blindness. Social power and powerlessness are possibly the most important shapers of masculinity, as much as the thrownness of birth. Hence, the question 'What's the matter with men?', as posed in the article, actually asks what is the matter with the once unblushing and mighty *white US* men. As Joshua Alston (2011, unpaginated) states,

although it is an uncomfortable truth best left unspoken in sensitive mixed circles, ‘being a black man and being a white man are different roads’. He points out that on

just about any measure of social or economic success you want to single out, ... chances are, black men are foundering in it at rates so alarming, you have to assume the alarm has a snooze button. The unemployment rate for black men – 17.8 percent, according to the most recent job report – is double that of our white counterparts. A report issued last month found that the on-time high-school graduation rate for black males was a dismal 47 percent Black men, it seems, are still pretty miserable.

Is unhappiness central to a definition of black masculinities – a global phenomenon with local inflexions? It is not hard to imagine that there are many individual black men – but, possibly, white individuals too – in the US and South Africa who are content with their lives. Yet, if it is desirable to have a non-patriarchal, non-sexist, egalitarian, peaceful, non-racist, non-consumerist and caring ethic as core elements of a new, prevalent masculinity among blacks, it is critical not to be unsympathetic to men’s past trauma (more on this later). It is commonplace that the lot of black men has, historically, been characterised by racialised socio-economic oppression. In South Africa, black men and women, when compared to white men both in the US and locally, are on average at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder (Statistics South Africa 2008, 2013).

Partly in an attempt to nuance the homogenising question in *Newsweek*, partly in response to the presumably American writers of the two pieces under scrutiny, and partly in support of some of their observations, it is vital to insert a crucial point about the historical and political-economic contexts that texture masculinity and men’s relationships with others. In South Africa, black men’s labour force participation rates have historically been lower than white men’s, due to the vagaries of colonialism and apartheid. Historically, black men have, on average, earned several times less than white men, due to racially discriminatory employment policies. In contemporary South Africa employment rates are much higher for white men than black men (Bhorat, Van der Westhuizen and Jacobs 2009; Statistics South Africa 2011).

It is true that the phenomenon of females staying in school longer than males and overtaking them in numbers in universities is observable not only in the US, but also elsewhere. In many African countries where girls’ and young women’s education is taken seriously, changes are afoot. It is true, too, that males – especially blacks – in South Africa and the US tend to have higher rates of premature death from non-natural causes, and are more likely to be incarcerated than other races. Nevertheless, it is absurd to pretend that the ‘hostile world’ that confronts well-employed men in the US is the same world unemployed men in Syria, Sudan or South Africa face in their daily lives. Consequently, while there may be overlaps in racial facts relating to black American men and South African black men, that does not tell the full story about local conditions, pressures, frustrations and changes in the political, economic and cultural circumstances men in the different countries are confronted with. Turning a blind eye to differences amongst men (including economic, north–south, inter-racial and intra-racial differences) thwarts the advancement of critical work on men and masculinity. However, perhaps the blindness to the geopolitics of masculinities, besides masculine

body-politics, is due to the colonialist zero-point enunciations that underpin the disembodied, unlocalisable '(white) male authority voice' from the rich West who speaks for all males. Perhaps, even amongst students of masculinity, there is a crypto-imperial attitude.

In contrast, Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985, 598) note that different histories around the world (for instance, the women's movement, homosexuality, national liberation struggles) 'oblige us to think of masculinity not as a single object with its own history, but as being constantly constructed within the history of an evolving social structure, a structure of sexual power relations'. In this light, the author aims to offer a reading of a curious piece of writing that, unwittingly perhaps, points the way on how to rethink black masculinity studies and black men in the context of history and politics. In spite of itself, the article contains intimations as to how to possibly reignite critical studies on black masculinities, by developing liberated masculinities through re-engaging with feminism.

BEYOND CRIMES OF 'STAAN EN KYK': VOTING FOR THE LIBERATION OF BLACK MASCULINITY

The piece of special interest was written in the *City Press* newspaper by the deputy-editor, Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya. The article is curious precisely because it does not explicitly problematise men's gender, for instance, even while it talks of fathers, sons, men, the army and 'baas' (Afrikaans for [male] boss) (Moya 2011, unpaginated). Moya is concerned with the importance of historical, political and economic context in defining a black man's voting choices in a piece on local elections.

The piece is on the 2011 nationwide municipal elections. The main challenge to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) was posed by the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA). The DA, which was (and still is) the governing party in the Cape Town metropolitan municipality, was gunning to wrest Johannesburg from the ANC. Moya notes that in the contest between the two parties,

voters are presented with a 'tale of two cities' (Johannesburg and Cape Town), of which they must choose one. If we choose Johannesburg (read ANC), we choose the billing chaos, potholes and infrastructure decay. If we choose Cape Town, we choose a clean, well-run city that is the envy of local and foreign visitors. From this perspective alone, it is a no-brainer. The DA presents a better prospect for Johannesburg than the ANC. (Moya 2011, unpaginated)

As Moya asserts, people never vote only for efficiently managed municipalities. Identities are implicated in voting. Moya is, then, knowingly or otherwise, addressing black people on how to think of themselves as subjects in the post-apartheid landscape, not just how to weigh up the choices presented to them by political parties.

The part that contains seeds about how black masculinity can be liberated – about what being free black men (and women) might entail were gender and class and sexuality, for instance, given space

next to black men's traumatised historical race identities – comes next. Here, Moya writes of the lived experience of what it means to vote as a person with his kind of history. More generally, he can be read as surfacing what it means to be a black man in the context of the history of our society; how history casts its shadow on the present practices of black men; and of how historical apartheid disenfranchisement moulds acts which one might imagine have little to do with the overt theme of municipal electoral politics, such as men's gender practices. In a heartfelt personal register, Moya writes:

I vote taking into account the humiliation of my father's generation and my son's aspirations. I vote for the memory of a generation of men who had to stomp on their own hats to show respect to the *baas*, and for the hopes that my children will never again be bulldozed into accepting the falsehood that their god is lesser. I vote for the memory of all the men I knew who never returned home from work at night because they had forgotten to transfer their '*dompas*' from one jacket to another and were thus saddled with Hobson's choice of 30 days or R30 – to spend 30 days in jail or pay a fine of R30 – a significant portion of a *working-class family's budget*. Alone in that voting booth, I shut out the noise and intellectual bullying of the chattering class that would rather I forgot the *evils of white racism* which caused people to end up in jail for ridiculous 'crimes' such as 'staan en kyk' (standing and looking); meaning that in the opinion of the arresting officer, the native was *looking at white property or women in a manner that suggested he was plotting something deviant*. So while I cannot argue that Cape Town is run much more efficiently than Johannesburg, I cannot help notice that the man who represents the party most likely to replicate Cape Town's success story in my ward, looks strikingly like an older version of that man who, in a South African Defence Force uniform, occupied my school and thought nothing of pushing the barrel of an R1 rifle onto my 14-year-old chest. Until the day when my memory of the past is treated with the same respect as I know they treat those that suffered the Holocaust, I am afraid that the DA's undoubted and impressive track record will still not be enough. I am not fooled by the platitudes of convenient revolutionaries, who speak the language of the poor between gluttonous scoops of caviar and sips of expensive whisky while their designer belt buckles struggle to push back their ever swelling bellies. But still, that will not assuage my feelings of guilt for voting for a party that reduces the collective memory of the people to an irritation. If I vote, it will not be only about the 'issues'. It will be for my tissue too – the scar tissue. It may mean nothing to the chattering classes but that does not make it any less valid. (Moya 2011, emphasis added)

Put differently, Moya argues, individuals do not vote just for good policy and technical efficiency, but also to reaffirm their identities. In the case of black men, they make political choices against the background of trying to recover from the injuries of apartheid. 'The system' might be dead, but the **psychosocial scars** influence how they choose. It would lighten the work of becoming free new men if those men who have experienced similar injuries and run the local and national governments did a good job delivering what these recovering men need. And yet, what black men and women need is not only 'clean, well-run cities' (and decent jobs, adequate housing, electricity and water), but everything that informs social justice; not just redistribution but recognition too (see Fraser 1996). More than men of other races, many a black South African man is still working out what it entails to be a free man.

Interestingly, though, nowhere in this piece does the journalist mention gender *qua* gender. However, it is plain that he is troubled by how apartheid sculpted and coloured the reality of being a black man. Although Moya notes the role of socio-economic status ('working-class family's budget) and sexuality ('looking at white ... women in a manner that suggested he was plotting something deviant'), alongside the 'evils of white racism', in shaping black men's lives, a monist view of black men's humiliation dominates his memory. One suspects that the historical trauma that Moya correctly sees as influencing his own political sympathies also fundamentally shaped how black men as a group define themselves. Inasmuch as it has not been dealt with at a collective level, that historical trauma continues to inform the dominant meanings given to black men's practices. Black masculinity continues to carry the mark of apartheid traumatising. In turn, the unprocessed trauma of black masculinity figures in men's social and intimate relations with others, as well as how they look at themselves. This implies that what black men need is to come to grips with their history, if they are to move beyond the shame and ludicrousness of apartheid and colonised manhoods. In other words, no critical work with black men can go far without 'empathetic work'. Only in such a space will black men feel secure enough to rethink themselves as men, and therefore move towards the realisation of all they can be as liberated subjects.

It is not, however, only racism that traumatised and criminalised black masculinities. Patriarchy and capitalism, too, in concert with racism, are not without reproach. Highlighting the imperative to (re)engage black men from the location of black and African feminism, Moya gestures to the necessity of engaging black men's apartheid humiliations with respect, yet stops short of thinking of the disgraces that welded themselves to black masculinities as arising also from *patriarchal* capitalist domination. His representation of black men is thus incomplete. Similar to, for example, Frantz Fanon (1986) and Steve Biko (1996), he is weighed down by the conditions of men as subjects of an almost fetishistic race sign. He fails to adequately consider his subjects as simultaneously fundamentally gendered and sexual, among other social forces. His absorption by the constitutive powers of racism closes him off to other social-psychological forces.

Moya's partial engagement with elements of his history is therefore a powerful yet strange narrative of denied black manhood. Similar to the other two well-known authors, what Moya does not explicitly state betrays the value of critical gender analyses to black men's racialisation, and, conversely, the significance of race to black men's gender-making projects. In *not* talking about men as subject of gender and sexual regimes, Moya, like Fanon and Biko, suggests precisely that black men might not want to look *only* like apartheid's thing-ifications (Cesaire 1972, 21) if they are to step towards liberated forms of masculinity.

POSSIBLE VALUE OF BLACK FEMINISM IN LIBERATING BLACK MASCULINITIES

Against the persistent power and intuitive appeal of such monist analytical frames and politics of black men's lives, (re)engaging black and African feminisms and women's liberation thought for black men, alongside radical or critical black thought, appears to be precisely what is needed to liberate black masculinities. While recognising the contestations within that body of practice and

thinking, a significant lesson for liberating black masculinities is that, at a minimum, black men are both a racial and a sex/gender category. Black and African feminisms and women liberationists suggest that reductive characterisations of blackness as well as masculinity can imprison black men.

Black feminists and women liberationists have long pointed out the trouble with monist analyses and politics of blacks' or women's lives. For example, Michelle Wallace's (1982) classic paper (referred to at the beginning of this article) aimed to show that, separately, radical black politics and feminism are not enough to free black women to be themselves. From the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement we have come to appreciate that in trying to liberate black masculinities it is necessary to actively and simultaneously struggle 'against racial, sexual, heterosexual, class oppression', and to aim to develop an 'integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking' (1982, 13). Mohanty (1988) argues that like women, men are not an ahistorical, universal and fixed category of analysis. Patricia Hill Collins' (1989, 756) work suggests that like black women's studies, it is important to try and access, for a start, both Afrocentric/African and feminist thought, so as to analyse and practically engage black men and masculinities. Kimberle Crenshaw notes the complex ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's experiences. She illustrates how 'many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately' (Crenshaw 1991, 1244). Kimberly Springer (2002, 1059) points out that black feminist work 'continue[s] to refute the idea that working against gender oppression is somehow counter to antiracist efforts' – and the converse is also true. Springer underlines the need 'to strike a balance between adequately theorizing race and gender oppression as they intersect', and perhaps as important, that black feminists and anti-sexists can 'advocate a love for Black men while passionately hating Black sexism' (ibid, 1059). In an interview with Elaine Salo (Salo 2001, 62), Amina Mama contended that 'it is clear since the days of Freud that all identities are gendered, whether one is talking about identity at the level of individuality, sociality, or politics. Feminist theory also has much to contribute to our understanding of statecraft and politics. At the very least it alerts us to the partial and limited manifestations of individuality, sociality and political life in patriarchal societies.' In answering the question of whether one can be African and feminist, Sisonke Msimang (2002, 5) contends that 'it is certainly possible to be an African and feminist. The question is, how one as an African feminist, navigates the politics of decolonization while working on the feminist enterprise of a world free from patriarchy.' Again, the converse seems to be true as well. And, finally, Adomako Ampofo, Beoku-Betts and Osirim (2008, 328) point out 'the significance of race as a fundamental organizing principle *interacting* with other forms of structured inequality to shape the social construction of gender and situated location of social groups'. They also assert the need to take 'account of how race *interacts* across national and transnational boundaries to structure relations between women and men and among women, and to produce oppression and opportunity or privilege' (ibid, 238).

Developing on these and other insights originated within (black) feminism, critical studies of men and masculinity have underlined, among other things, men as fundamentally gendered, i.e., not just raced. There are different, competing masculinities – including subordinate, complicit and hegemonic masculinities – in any one context (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). Men do oppress other men, not only women. Black men do oppress black women and other black men. In critically engaging black men in the project of working towards progressive black masculinities we thus need to be conscious of the entwinement of several forms of privilege and oppression.

Against such a background of black feminists and women's engagement with race and gender (as well as class and sexuality, among other intersecting and co-constitutive categories), black and African feminisms clearly have some of the necessary theoretical resources and political knowledge to help black men overcome the historical denial of their manhood, as brought on by colonialism and apartheid – from the state of being 'a shell, a shadow, a sheep, an ox, an animal, a slave' (Biko 1996, 29) towards inhabiting new models of masculinity. In underlining the intersection of racial oppression with gender, sexual, economic and other forms of oppression, black and African feminist women have pointed out the imperative for racially progressive black men such as Moya to always endeavour to explicitly incorporate anti-sexist, anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist ideas in antiracist projects. Perhaps, then, above all, what South African black men can learn from black and African feminism, is how to create new self-definitions that liberate them from their oppressive, racist, patriarchal, homophobic and capitalist pasts (Collins 1989).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems that what is needed in engaging black men and masculinity towards developing progressive masculinity is a critical-sympathetic approach. Clearly, from Moya's piece some men hold on deeply to the memory of the past, and as such what black men might need is not to make light of that memory, but to reconnect with the past and liberate men from its oppressive aspects. A (re)engagement with feminism that centralises black men as raced subjects of feminism (or at least gender, and gendered subjects of racial ideologies) seems to be needed in order precisely to free them from their oppressive patriarchal pasts.

The article has sought to show that for black men to understand the power relationships between (black) men and women, to understand themselves in relation to women and gender, it is imperative to know what black and African feminisms have said about the interaction between race, gender and sexuality, among other categories of identification. For black men to better understand power relationships within society they may need to see more clearly that the race struggle does not do away with the need for other struggles, as shown by black women's intersectional struggles against gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, culture and race. And the history of black and African feminisms suggests that black men can and must create new self-definitions of masculinity,

especially in light of the fact that political freedom from racial oppression has not eliminated the need for struggle from gender, class and sexual troubles.

ENDNOTES

- 1 'Progressive masculinities' is short-hand for non-patriarchal, non-sexist, egalitarian and caring masculinities.
- 2 Stella Viljoen's (2011) main concern is not the omission of race, but references to men's relational commitments and attachments in men's lifestyle magazines.
- 3 Jason Statham is a famous actor known for his action movies.
- 4 *GQ* is a leading global publication, but different *GQ*s are published and tailored for local conditions.
- 5 Incidentally, the image may have influenced that used in South African media of the rugby star Victor Matfield, with his daughter, advertising *Dove*. Or, perhaps more interestingly – as it suggests the interaction between representational and real life – it may have been Matfield himself who attracted *Dove*, as the sportsman revealed his fatherly side when horsing around with his daughter after the Bulls won the Super 14 trophy in 2010.

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