

February 2021

## Taboos of Masculinity: Positive and Progressive Masculinities

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### Recommended Citation

Agozino, B., & Agu, A. (2021). Taboos of Masculinity: Positive and Progressive Masculinities. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 20 (1). Retrieved from <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol20/iss1/5>

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## Taboos of Masculinity Positive and Progressive Masculinities

*Biko Agozino & Augustine Agu*

### Abstract

This papyrus argues that masculinity is going through a hard time in discourse given the hegemonic consensus that masculinity is characterized by the virility of a virus. It appears that the predominant imagery of masculinity is increasingly negative and this is perhaps justified by the risks and dangers that confront especially African masculinities under post-modern conditions governed by truth-power regimes. Any discussion of the positive aspects of masculinity appears banished and forbidden from discourse and therefore qualifies as a taboo. That is the taboo that we will seek to break in this papyrus by focusing exclusively on the positive dimensions of masculinity. We will conclude that the reason why the media and scholars promote the negative aspects of masculinity is deliberately because of the huge risks associated with being male but indirectly such pathological discourse tends to mislead young African males into dead-ends to facilitate their domination by hegemonic masculinities. We recommend a perspective that sees some aspects of masculinity as good things which have historically contributed to the improvement of the world, despite the flaws that are well known.

### Pre Note on the Core Values of Taboo

This papyrus takes up the core values of the journal, *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, by adopting a transdisciplinary collaboration between an expert on education policy and a sociologist for a significant contribution to the

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Sociology of Education broadly defined. We address the core value of radical contextualization by extending to male students, the policy initiatives that may have been applied successfully for the advancement of the education of women around the world. A radical contextualization of the concerns around gender equality in education will show that male students are beginning to lag behind the female students in many regions of the world. Our papyrus serves as a wake-up call to educationists indicating that the male students need to be carried along in the search for gender equality. Also, the discussion of masculinity tends to treat it as a taboo subject due to the important concerns about toxic masculinity around the world. We suggest that radical contextualization should lead us to identify positive or progressive masculinity as well and model it in education for a more humane world shaped by successful male and female students.

We draw from the Africana Studies paradigm of centered, creative and critical scholar-activism which maintains that we must be committed to progressively changing the conditions of people of African descent whenever we study them scholarly (Agozino, 2016). We also apply insights from Africana womanist literature and from the Critical Race Theory of intersectionality or what Stuart Hall (1980) called the articulation of race-class-gender politics in societies structured in dominance. What emerges from our papyrus is the astonishing fact that the taboo of masculinity can indeed be broken in a progressive and radical discourse when the focus is on progressive masculinity.

We hope that after reading this papyrus, the general public, scholars and policy-makers will learn about the extent that they took for granted that improving gender equality in education involved doing something only for girls without realizing that boys also need help for a more humane world. We contribute to the core values of this journal by adopting an action research or scholar-activism approach that invites the students, parents, scholars and policy-makers to work together to address an emerging problem of how privileged male students in racist-imperialist-patriarchal societies struggle in education perhaps partly because of the dominant tendency to see masculinity only as a toxic problem. Our reading of popular culture revealed progressive masculinity role models that could be integrated into the curriculum to help motivate both boys and girls to make more progressive or positive academic achievements. The content of the papyrus is intentionally provocative by reminding us that progressive masculinity is a good thing to be promoted instead of being treated as entirely part of the taboo of toxic masculinity.

## Introduction

Masculinity can be defined as maleness or the socially defined qualities that are associated with being and becoming male in any culture or society. It is usually conceptualized as the norm with femininity defined as the other or polar opposite in the European tradition where women are said to be the second sex, according to Simone de Beauvoir (1949). The view that men are always superior to all women

in line with the Eurocentric principle of primogeniture has been rejected by African women who have pointed out that, apart from matrilineal descent systems in many parts of Africa, some African cultures have always allowed women to marry other women as 'female husbands' or to remain unmarried as 'male daughters' (Amadiume, 1987). Furthermore, Nzegwu dramatized a dialogue with de Beauvoir to prove to her ghost that African cultures allow women to acquire and to inherit property that they can pass on to their descendants contrary to the imperialist assumption of male supremacy (Nzegwu, 2006). Similarly, Africans accord respect to older generations of women and men instead of inventing the mythology of gender as the dominant principle of social organization dominated by men in every part of the world (Oyewumi, 1997).

Masculinity is not biological but ideological given that it is something that you acquire as you become a man and as you change from being a boy or when you change your biological sex or cross-dress. The qualities that are normally associated with masculinity include rationality, strength, power, authority, wealth, protection, punishment, creativity, aggressiveness, dominance, competitiveness, public speaking, virility, reproduction, fatherhood, patriarchy, care, patriotism, morality and divinity. These qualities are not exclusively held by men because many women possess them too and some men lack many of them while the opposite qualities are not possessed by women alone either.

To elaborate on a reference made above, Ifi Amadiume (1987) has documented cases among the Igbo of Nigeria and the Kikuyu of Kenya in which a woman can assume the roles of a 'female husband' or a 'male daughter' for the purpose of reproducing a heir for the patriarch of the family line (though this still privileges male children as heirs). According to Amadiume, these attributes of masculinity can be shared by a woman in precolonial African societies and colonialism did not completely wipe out such roles. Therefore, it is misleading to characterize masculinity only in negative terms:

The fact that biological sex did not always correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles, usually monopolized by men, or be classified as 'males' in terms of power and authority over others. As such roles were not rigidly masculinized or feminized, no stigma was attached to breaking gender rules. (Amadiume, 1987, p. 185)

In a presentation made at UNICEF Headquarters, the authors invited the audience to think of positive qualities for each of the letters that spell masculinity and they came up with things like morality, assertiveness, success, community, unity, leadership, integrity, nurturing, intelligence, and youth (Agozino, and Agu; 2009). Such an exercise is important because we need to encourage the public to stop thinking of masculinity only in negative terms and teachers in Africa and the Caribbean could help with this exercise by challenging students in their classes to spell positive masculinity.

Despite the many flaws of masculinity, we argue that it remains a magnificent thing that Africa or the world cannot do without. All religious creeds adored masculinity, all scientific communities privileged masculinity and all artistic and cultural genres celebrated masculinity until very recently. The root of the downfall of masculinity is the zero-sum game of power which presumes that the only way to empower one group is to deprive another of power but we agree with bell hooks that it is possible to empower both femininity and masculinity democratically without demonizing either in a win-win strategy especially among people of African descent (hooks, 1984).

### **Review of the Literature on the Myth of the Black Macho**

The myth of the black macho represents all black men as violent and oversexed, concealing the fact that hegemonic masculinity is not based on physical strength but on moral and intellectual leadership. For instance, Michelle Wallace argued that the Black Panther Party treated women in the party in sexist ways that the women resisted as much as they sided with the men to resist racism in America but she left out the important detail that the Black Panther Party was, and perhaps remains, the only political party ever led by a woman in America and the black men supported that female leadership (Wallace, 1990; Brown, 1992)). Similarly, Munthua collected and edited conference proceedings on the theme of progressive black masculinity but the emphasis was heavily on sexuality as if it is the main thing that defines masculinity (Muntua, 2006). As indicated earlier, Nkiru Nzegwu (2006) interrogated Western feminist obsession with gender and reminds us that precolonial Igbo women had rights to property that the colonial patriarchal masculinity tried to strip away from them without complete success given that progressive Igbo men defend the rights of their sisters, wives and daughters to share in the family inheritance. In the case of *Ukeje v. Ukeje*, the Nigerian Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that a daughter had equal rights to inherit from her deceased father instead of giving all the inheritance to her brother and the widow according to the unconstitutional Customary Court rules imposed by colonialism that also deprived poor European women and men of any properties to inherit in Europe. In the concluding discussion of this papyrus, we will critique some current neo-colonial anthropological reports on negative masculinity and socio-economic development in Africa.

The most powerful men in the world are very rarely the physically strongest. Those who are physically strong excel as the bodyguards of the truly great or earn prestige as sportsmen. However, history demonstrates without doubt that dominant masculinity is based on reasoning rather than on might. This raises the question of why the dominant representation of the true black man is always based on the macho imagery of brutality, violence, lust, and dread when the

most successful black men owe their success to their intellects, like any group of successful men, rather than to their physical strength or virility. A review of the literature will reveal this dubious image of black masculinity that is eagerly marketed by the media and development researchers to the disadvantage of black men, concealing the fact that most black men are overwhelmingly law-abiding.

The calypso song, 'Caribbean Unity,' also known as 'Caribbean Man,' won the 1979 national prize in Trinidad and Tobago for its composer and performer, Black Stalin, and generated a huge controversy that lasted for months on the pages of newspapers. Ramesh Deosaran (1981) reflected on the controversy by stating that it was a symptom of racism that the popular song called for Caribbean unity by assuming that all Caribbean people were of African descent and thereby neglecting the different history of those that CLR James (1965) called West Indians of East Indian descent. Deosaran also rightly argued that the song was condescending to women when it saw the ambition of the Caribbean man as providing for Caribbean women and children without recognizing that the women could also be equal or even main breadwinners. Stalin was forced to admit on television that when he said Caribbean man, he meant the men of African descent who, according to him, built the modern Caribbean. However, since the author does not have the final say on the interpretation of a text, it could be argued that his chorus included all Caribbean men from the same race of the human race, all of whom came from the same place called Africa as scientific evidence of human evolution has since confirmed.

The relevant point for us here is that Black Stalin focused on the failure of Caribbean men, meaning the leading politicians, to unite seven million people into one federation when it was apparently an easy task that must be done (as is the case with the unification of Africa into one federation through the African Union, West Indian Cricket, and the University of the West Indies). The West Indian Federation of 10 island countries collapsed after Jamaica pulled out and Eric Williams rationalized that ten minus one leaves naught ( $10-1 = 0$ ). Williams responded to the Caribbean Man controversy by re-emphasizing his belief that the Caribbean was made up of different races and that in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, there was no longer mother Africa or mother India, only mother Trini (but then, Tobagonians would ask, how about mother Tobago?). We do not wish to go into this racial controversy in this papyrus except to say that the tone of Black Stalin was pessimistic about Caribbean men when in reality, very much has been achieved by Caribbean men in line with our notion of positive masculinity (as Eric Williams also emphasized in his contribution to the debate). Those interested in the construction of masculinity in Calypso music should check out the magisterial analysis offered by Gordon Rohlehr (2004) on the evolution of the genre from the glorification of the stick-fighter to the glorification of the cricketer and then to the fascination with the male organ and conquest over women as the essence of masculinity to which female calypso artists responded with the critique of

toxic masculinity. We are convinced, however, that positive masculinity remains abundant in the Caribbean and in Africa as in other parts of the world and so teachers of children of African descent should not focus exclusively on texts that celebrate, or agonize over, negative masculinity.

In Africa and the Caribbean, the research interest on masculinity has been traced to the feminist movement which started by seeking equality with men but soon realized that many men were messed up and so seeking equality with such men would mean seeking equality in messiness. The feminist writers went quickly from chronicling what women lacked to dwelling on what was wrong with men given that almost every bad thing that happened around the world and in the communities, in schools or in the family, a man had something to do with it. With reference to male underachievement in schools, it was initially suggested that men were being marginalized in school systems where women predominate as teachers and in families where there were not many fathers present, denying the male children many positive role models (Reddock, 2004). In Africa, male students still predominate but the female students are fast catching up and or taking the lead in places like Eastern Nigeria (NBS, 2012). Female students appear to be achieving more success in education among African Americans.

Soon, it became obvious to scholars that it is not marginalization that is to blame for the fewer male students in schools in the Caribbean because it is still a man's world where men are privileged but it would be nothing without women, as James Brown wailed. What was happening in the Caribbean was that while equality of opportunities was being created for female students, men continued to enjoy the privileges that they had in a patriarchal society. For instance, boys believed that housework was for girls to do while the boys played sports or hung around street corners. The girls appeared to learn early in life to enjoy reading after doing their chores and they seemed to be transferring the skills into their studies in the form of better time management and so, they performed better in school because they performed better at home tasks too. Rather than seeking how to teach boys effective time management and other study skills, the suggestion is increasingly that there must be something wrong with masculinity and that boys should be brought up to be more like girls in order to cure whatever is wrong with masculinity. But not many boys would like to be brought up like girls and so, they seek models in toughness and virile hetero-sexuality with homophobia and chauvinism (Chevannes, 2001; 2006).

### **The Methodology on Progressive Masculinity?**

Our collaboration started in the Caribbean after we noticed that the University of the West Indies was graduating up to 80% women on some campuses and we decided to find out what was happening to keep the male students from graduating as much. In our response to the core values of this journal, we indicated that our methodology derives from the scholar-activism paradigm privileged in

Africana Studies with additional insights from Africana Womanism and Cultural Studies. We suggest that Positive Masculinity could be included in the curriculum if teachers look at the biographies of successful men of African descent to see what progressive lessons young people could learn from those successful men. The focus is deliberately on men of African descent because black masculinity comes in for more knocks than other forms of masculinity and so those black men who rose to make significant contributions towards changing Africa progressively must have done so against immense odds. We sketch the biographies of some such great men along with the biographies of a few great men from other cultural backgrounds.

This method should serve as a source of hope for youth worldwide, no matter the obstacles they might be facing and no matter what privileges they might be enjoying; if black men could make progressive contributions to world civilization despite the peculiar odds against them, so too could the youth of today. If we can identify what made the men successful as progressive individuals in the community, if we could identify their mistakes and achievements, then we could identify teachable moments that the youth of today could learn from.

We need to focus on masculinity because it is a hot topic of discussion given the large number of men ending up in prison, dropping out of school or dying early often from violence by other men in Africa, the Caribbean and inner cities in the US. Teachers could also use the scholar-activist methodology of this papyrus to teach students the role that women played in producing progressive successful men and women. A follow up volume essay is planned for Progressive Africana Womanism that we are sure both female and male readers would equally enjoy studying as part of their education in Africa.

Although the examples here and the focus are on Africana masculinities with some non-African men thrown in, it is not being argued that their Africanness or even their masculinity is responsible for their success as progressive individuals. Their success would be understood in terms that are common with all successful masculinities and all progressive people with their inevitable contradictions, mistakes and other lessons that African youth of today could study and learn from. What is unique about them will also be made obvious. Our methodology is the case study approach outlined below with a deliberate attempt not to go into too much details about the biographies of the men so that students can do their own detailed research on each man profiled here or choose others to profile on their own.

It is hypothesized that what the successful progressive men have in common is the love of learning, connection to the community, critical thinking skills, love for the people and creative courage to say and do the right things often as members of movements, teams, or groups. By examining a series of biographies, the teachers, parents, and students will be able to identify what the successful men have in common and what they also do not share with less successful men. The class is encouraged to study other biographies with this approach or research the



very biographies highlighted here in more detail on their own to see what more lessons they could throw up.

### **Case Studies of Black and other Masculinities**

Review and Construction of some men that have exhibited aspects of Positive or Progressive Masculinity (PM) follows. We classify them into the periods of attempts to destroy black masculinity or what we call 'male-caust' during the holocaust of slavery when motherhood was recognized as the line of descent into slavery while fatherhood was suppressed. This is followed by the colonized period when progressive masculinity was manifested in the ability to lead the struggle for the restoration of independence. Then comes post-colonial masculinity when successful black men continued the pro-democracy struggles to end racism-sexism-imperialism. Finally, we outline the roles of successful black men in post-modern masculinity where the struggle is waged non-violently through intellectual and moral leadership for hegemony as always.

#### **A. Male-caust During Slavery**

**1. Sundiata Keita and Imohtep:** Both of these men lived in empires or kingdoms in Africa and distinguished themselves although Sundiata became a bloody dictator. Imohtep was the first multi-genius that the world ever recorded and his scientific, priestly, healing, diplomatic and administrative skills could be researched and used to motivate young men today to aim beyond trivialities. Sundiata was a physically disabled prince who was denied the opportunity to rule by a usurper but he later regained the mandate and went on to proclaim the first ever declaration of the rights of all human beings, not just the rights of free men, though he erred by massacring his opponents (Diop, 1981; 1974)

**2. Frederick Douglas and Olauda Equiano:** These were two enslaved African men who grew up to become free men by buying back freedom in the case of Equiano and by escaping from bondage in the case of Douglas. Neither of them made his name by oppressing women. Their positive intellectual qualities and courageous masculinity could be models for young Africans today especially given that they overcame the great odds of surviving the black male holocaust during slavery or what we have termed male-caust.

**3. Toussaint l'Ouverture and King Ja Ja:** Toussaint and Ja Ja were leaders with distinction. The one was born into slavery in Haiti and grew up to lead a revolution that overthrew slavery and established a state based on equality. The other was sold into slavery in the kingdom of Opobo and he rose to become the King of the kingdom who opposed slavery. The British kidnapped him for defending his independence and took him to the Caribbean where he died.

**4. Crazy Horse and Little Wolf:** These were heroic American Indian natives who led struggles to protect their people from genocidal settlers. The fact that their people were almost completely wiped out should be a lesson to young men today that non-violence is often a more successful strategy than warfare especially when the forces are uneven against the side of the oppressed. Perhaps if they had adopted the nonviolent philosophy of Africans, many more of their people could have survived the genocidal invasion of their land.

**5. WEB Du Bois and Marcus Garvey:** These were Africans in the Diaspora who descended from enslaved ancestors and who chose to adopt the African philosophy of non-violence to organize an intellectual resistance to white-supremacy. Neither of them ever killed someone to prove his masculinity. Rather, they used their intellectual skills to organize resistance and self-efficacy for global Africans with relative success.

**6. William Shakespeare and Karl Marx:** These are the two most famous European men of all time according to a recent survey by the BBC. Neither of them made their marks as men through violence. Rather, they relied on their intellect to achieve ever-lasting renown. Thousands of years to come, young people would still be reading their collected works while no one would know who was the richest, the strongest, or the sexiest men when they were alive. They are lessons in positive masculinity for young men today!

### **B. Colonized Masculinity**

**7. Malcolm X and Steve Biko:** These were two Africans from the Diaspora and from the continent. Although Malcolm was pushed into a life of petty criminality due to poverty after the death of his Garveyist father and the illness of his Grenadian mother, his introduction to the teaching of Elijah Mohammed led to his emergence from Prison as a leader of the black community. Steve Biko was studying to be a medical doctor when the inhumanity of apartheid forced him to choose to become a full-time activist against racism. Although they were both killed violently, their examples for young people lie in their adoption of the African methods of non-violent resistance. Neither of them ever killed anyone, raped or exploited anyone. We remember them for their intellectual and moral leadership. African youth could be brought up to be more like them.

**8. Martin Luther King Jr and Patrice Lumumba:** Again, these were peace-loving Africans, one from the Diaspora and one from the homeland. Neither of them was a killer, rapist, extortionist or oppressor. They made their names everlasting by using the African philosophy of non-violence and intellectual and moral leadership. Africa would be transformed with one million more like them.

**9. Eric Williams and Nnamdi Azikiwe:** These two African leaders with high

academic accomplishments chose to fight peacefully for an end to colonial rule in their countries of birth – Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria - and in their respective regions of the Caribbean and Africa. We will always remember them with pride especially because they never killed, raped, beat up, or oppressed anyone. More African youths should follow their examples.

**10. William Tubman and Haile Selasie:** These were African presidents of two of the African countries that were never fully colonized—Liberia and Ethiopia. In their cases, they were authoritarian rulers who did not write many books to offer intellectual and moral leadership. Not surprisingly, their countries experienced bloody civil wars in which lots of lives were needlessly lost many years after their deaths. African youths should be trained to avoid authoritarianism. Rastafarians revere Selasie but emphasize the philosophy of equal rights and one love for all instead of domination and exploitation by any one man.

**11. Mahatma Gandhi and Mao Zedong:** These were Asian leaders of note who made their contributions mainly through intellectual and moral leadership. Gandhi learned from the Zulu, the important strategy of non-violence and took it to India and used it to free India from British rule. Mao had no choice but to lead an army to fight to free his people from a military dictatorship that was oppressive. Yet, Mao is remembered for his intellectual contributions today despite the errors of his Cultural Revolution in which many people needlessly died.

### **C. Neo-Colonial Masculinity**

**12. Walter Rodney and Samora Machel:** These were two African brothers who made significant intellectual and moral contributions to the liberation of Africa. Circumstances beyond their choosing forced them to adopt militant strategies for the liberation of their societies from oppressive rule. Rodney was assassinated before he could take power peacefully in a democratic election and Machel was assassinated when his plane was blown up after he had taken power through guerrilla warfare.

**13. CLR James and Amilcar Cabral:** These were two Africans from the Diaspora and from the continent who independently chose the ideology of Marxism as the framework for their intellectual contributions and left indelible marks for young people to study. James was a democratic Marxist who did not participate in armed struggle and lived into his 80s while Cabral was the leader of a guerrilla army and he was killed on the eve of victory over the fascist forces of colonial Portugal.

**14. James Baldwin and Wole Soyinka:** These are two African writers, one from the Diaspora and one from the motherland. They wrote enough to give them immortality in the literary world. Yet they also sacrificed their comfort as famous

writers to campaign for social justice in their home countries and worldwide. Neither of them killed, raped, looted or oppressed in order to achieve their positive masculinity.

**15. Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah:** These were distinguished Africans who led the struggle against colonialism successfully in Algeria and in Ghana while offering hope to young Africans through their intellectual brilliance. Fanon must have killed fascist troops to earn his medal of honor during World War II when he volunteered from his native Martinique to go and defend France from German aggression but that is not why he is famous today. We know about him so much for the intellectual and moral work he produced to guide the struggle against colonialism. Nkrumah is similarly known for his intellectual contributions to the struggle for human dignity. His preferred style of action was called 'Positive Action' with emphasis on non-violence although he later wrote a manual on guerrilla warfare.

**16. Chinua Achebe and Cheikh Anta Diop:** These two Africans from the continent are intellectual giants who achieved eminence through moral and intellectual leadership rather than by force or fraud. Achebe is the father of African literature with his trilogy (on the struggle to regain African independence from European colonialism) accepted as canons. Diop struggled through three drafts of his doctoral dissertation in order to prove to his credulous examiners that pre-colonial black Africa was civilized, that Africa was the origin of civilization and that African civilization made huge contributions to science and technology contrary to the image of barbarism associated with Africa in the minds of many.

#### **D. Postmodern Masculinity**

**17. Mohamed Ali and Michael Jackson:** These two African brothers from the Diaspora achieved worldwide acclaim due to their intellectual and moral leadership in sports and in music. Ali refused the glory of going to fight and win medals in Vietnam and so he was stripped of his boxing title. Jackson rose as a child star to redefine pop music without demeaning women and when he was accused of molesting children, his ex-wife (against whom he was struggling for custody of his children at that time) was called by the prosecution as a witness and she shocked everyone by swearing that Jackson would never hurt a child. He was found not guilty.

**18. Richard Wright and Leopold Senghor:** These two writers of African descent, one from the Diaspora and one from the motherland exemplify our thesis that intellectual and moral leadership would achieve more success for young men today than thuggery and sexism. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* emphasize that the way to rise above poverty is not through violence but through education, according to Wright. Senghor used the poetry of Negritude to make the same point that black

people would achieve a lot more through non-violence than otherwise. He rose to be President of Senegal and later died in France as a member of the French Assembly.

**19. Bob Marley and Fela Kuti:** These were two Africans who reinvented a musical genre and became global superstars. They both had children from many different women but they did not really oppress their women. Instead they sang ballads to them to declare their love. Again, they never killed anyone but rather used their music to protest against social injustice.

**20. Molefi Asante and Stuart Hall:** These two African Diaspora brothers have helped in founding new intellectual fields that are thriving today. Molefi Asante founded the first Ph.D. program in Black Studies while Stuart Hall was instrumental in developing the field that is known as Cultural Studies. Asante came from a sharecropping family in the US and rose to author more than 70 books defending the authenticity of the paradigm that scholars who focus on Africa should adopt an Afrocentric perspective. Hall rose from a working class family in Jamaica to go to Oxford on a scholarship and with only a first degree in English, achieved excellence as a full professor of Sociology in the UK with his theory of race-class-gender articulation, disarticulation and re-articulation.

**21. Barack Obama and Nelson Mandela:** These are probably the two greatest men of African descent born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They both rose from difficult backgrounds to become first black Presidents of white-dominated countries where such could not have been imagined at the time of their births. Obama went on to boast that he killed Osama bin Laden but he would be remembered more for his courage to end the war in Iraq and for the Affordable Health Care Act. Mandela was the leader of the military wing of the ANC and went to jail for it for 27 years but he would be best remembered for using non-violent dialogue to end apartheid and institute a Truth and Reconciliation process instead of seeking revenge and warfare.

## Discussion

In the discussion, we will like to do two things: (a) Deal with the misconceptions of African Masculinity and (b) Propose possibilities for ensuring harmony which is critical for human development.

### ***Dealing with the Misconceptions of African Masculinities***

There is a passionate discussion about the correlations between African masculinities and socio-economic development (Silberschmidt, 2001; Groes-Green, 2009; Cornwall, 2000; UNDP, 2000). There is no question about it if we look at masculinity as a human capital variant. A similar argument could be made of femininity. We will hypothesize in this article that a harmonious balance

between masculinity and femininity will usher in positive human development, other things being equal. Development is a much more complex phenomenon that cannot be fully explained by masculinity or femininity alone, contrary to attempts by some of the above researchers. We question the assumption that African men were more macho or more patriarchal than European or Asian men and we believe that Africa is rich with models of progressive masculinity that Eurocentric approaches tend to gloss over while obsessing with negative aspects of masculinity in Africa.

Silberschmidt (2001) conducted empirical research in rural Kenya and in Dar es Salaam and came to the conclusion that unemployment and changing socio-economic conditions were disempowering men while the responsibilities of women as the providers for their families were increasing. According to her, the disempowered men tried to recover some self-respect by performing hyper-sexualized masculinities and by asserting patriarchal authority over the women. To her, sexuality was at the core of the family institution and the men insisted on their right to control the sexuality of their many wives while retaining the male privilege of having extra-marital affairs. This exposed the women to higher risks of contracting HIV/AIDS through the 'irresponsible' men that the women said were better off dead because a woman did not need a husband to survive unless the man was rich and powerful enough to pay their bride price in full and provide sugar and tea for the household. This is a stereotypical representation of masculinity as negative and problematic whereas our hypothesis is that if men were socialized from childhood to aspire to progressive masculinity, then their social value would not be judged exclusively on their sexual prowess, violence against women, and ability to provide school fees, tea and sugar (and a case could be made for the boycott of sugar in Africa on health grounds).

The picture of more women being HIV positive painted by Silberschmidt is contradicted by her epigraph quoted from Wangari Maathai who said that we must not forget that the miserable women that we are concerned about are married to miserable men. In other words, there is evidence that HIV affects men and women in about equal proportions in Africa while European men and women who are not less promiscuous than African men and women have not been exposed to as much HIV infections due to their better medical systems and stronger economies, not simply because Africans are more patriarchal or more promiscuous than Europeans. In other words, the conditions of underdevelopment in neo-colonial countries may be misrepresented if it is assumed that only men are disempowered and only women have social value in Africa. If both men and women were socialized to value people for their good behavior and not for their wealth, then poor men would not necessarily be ridiculed especially if they remained faithful to their wives while rich men were admired even while being promiscuous. We insist that progressive masculinities in Kenya and Tanzania could be better represented by the likes of Ngugi wa Thiongo and Julius Nyerere who remain role models

even though they are not the richest men nor the most sexually promiscuous, nor the most violent men in their communities but because of their moral and intellectual leadership.

The mythology of the over-sexed and violent poor subordinate masculinity compared to the hegemonic masculinity of the middle class exercised through financial and economic authority over women was reinforced by Christian Groes-Green (2009) who cited Silberschmidt and others with approval repeatedly in a post-colonial anthropology of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. This is mythological because there is no evidence that middle class men are necessarily less violent or sexually exploitative towards women than poor men, be it in Denmark or in Mozambique. It is astonishing that the modern day colonial anthropologists never found any progressive masculinity in Africa even when role models like Samora Machel and Agostino Neto stare them in the face while they neglect psychopaths like Anders Behring Breivik who emerged from well-healed Norway with a macho lust to kill men and women who look different in accordance with the ideology of white supremacy while his country was participating in the NATO bombing of Libya, the only country in Africa to achieve a middle income status, according to the Human Development Index.

We believe that the basic flaw in ethnographic reports such as that of Groes-Green is that the bias is in favor of finding negative masculinities in Africa as a self-fulfilling prophecy and if researchers and educators were encouraged to seek models of the taboo of progressive masculinity, they are bound to find them even in Maputo with a recent history of a brutal civil war waged with the support of apartheid masculinities and western war-mongers on one side and the socialist block on the other following the defeat of Portuguese racist patriarchal imperialism hardly mentioned in the ethnography. Groes-Green suggested that poor men in Maputo may be performing sexual capital by relying on sexual prowess to keep a woman satisfied in the absence of money and while this may be true of some men and some women in Maputo, we suspect that it is equally true of some men and some women in Denmark too but that the poor sex-machine cannot represent the ideal man in Africa where the youth can be brought up to fulfill their socio-economic responsibilities by being modeled after heroes like Samora Machel and Agostino Neto who were not violent against women, were not oversexed and were not patriarchal in their opposition to imperialism.

Kopane Rapele (2008) differed slightly from the above by recognizing that men die more in South Africa than women (as is the case globally) not because of HIV/AIDS or communicable diseases like tuberculosis but because of the violence by men against fellow men sometimes fuelled by their lust for women, money and political power. The hegemonic men, were those who could exercise intellectual leadership in addition to the traditional male values of virility, money, power and physical force. We doubt if Nelson Mandela as the most successful male from South Africa could be said to have made his name with money, sexual prowess, or

physical strength rather than through intellectual and moral leadership that may be neglected at the expense of the youth who could have been molded after the image of the great Madiba.

The approach most in line with ours comes from the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) *Briefing Note* (2009) from Australian National University which insisted that Gender And Development approaches and Women In Development approaches had not gone far enough in including men along with women as worthy of consideration in efforts to produce equity in development outcomes because ‘human development if ungendered is development endangered’, according to the UNDP (1995). Unfortunately, men were only mentioned as obstacles to the empowerment of women without realizing that men and women were always tied together as members of the same communities and so empowering women to catch up with men or bypass them would only mean the entrenchment of existing gender injustices rather than the elimination of injustice towards democratic gender relations. As the Briefing Note put it:

So, it remains that men are not often mentioned in gender policy documents and are largely absent from gender-oriented development practice. When they are considered, it is often as obstacles to women’s development through what Andrea Cornwall has termed the ‘problematic male’ discourse (2000: 21). It is true that men too often exploit and mistreat women, but to deal with this simply by empowering women to better match men is to remain within the same oppositional logic criticised above.

### ***Possibilities for Ensuring Gender Harmony***

We believe that it is not enough to involve men in development activities the way UNDP proposed as a strategy for going beyond Women And Development by focusing on Gender In Development. We insist that as human beings with agency, we should actively intervene to reproduce the models of positive masculinity that are found in our communities. That way, we may reverse the relationships between masculinity and socio-economic development and arrive at a process through which masculinity is not just affected by development but progressive masculinity will positively affect socio-economic development for the benefit of men and women in Africa.

African students should be made to realize that massa day done, as Eric Williams once told his fellow Trinibagonians (and he refused to apologize for saying this when a newspaper accused him of racism, he replied that master is a class and not a racial term). Whereas learning and reading were prohibited to black people during the centuries of slavery, it is no longer against the law for black people to read and write. Black women already understand this in the diaspora but African women need to advance the struggle against illiteracy too. Chevannes presented the finding that, as part of the division of labour in the Caribbean, whereas reading and some of the other activities like sleeping and sex or television feature recurrently in both the



columns for men and women, young and old, (which are not really labour activities but leisure ones) only women reported reading books as work in his Caribbean research (Chevannes, 2001, 2006). Reading is fun and learning is fun or at least African teachers and students could try to make it fun by reading at least one book every month and by writing daily.

Education is prioritized in the above pieces of biography for a good reason: people who are successful academically tend not to take as much unnecessary risks as people who are less successful, according to the Healthy People 2000 research conducted by the US Government. The surprising thing is that although many of the writers recognize the importance of education and role models, few have attempted to develop an educational program specifically designed to teach young men how to become more successful in life generally and in education specifically. The rare exceptions would be the experiment in Calabar, Nigeria: 'My Father Did not think this way' in which Dr. Edwin Madunagu (2006) and activists designed a male education program (Girard, 2003). The program trained young men to be non-sexist in their relationships with women and exposed them to progressive literature on what it means to be a successful man. His spouse, Professor Bene Madunagu (2001) also ran a program, Girl Power Initiative, to teach young women how to be assertive in defending their rights in relationships with men.

## Conclusions

Addressing masculinity in Africa and the Caribbean is of paramount importance as many of the ills that exist within society are far too often linked to the African male even though most African males, like most males generally, are positively masculinist. The pathological issues range from male underrepresentation in schools to the myriad of crimes perpetuated by young black males and non-black males. The positive issues are the rarely mentioned examples of nurturing fathers in the Caribbean and Africa who work hard to provide for their children and support their wives or partners when women are the main breadwinners given the global crisis of capitalism that has affected male dominated jobs in construction and manufacturing more adversely than in service industries where women tend to predominate though COVID-19 resulted in more female service job losses in 2020.

To combat the negative issues while affirming the positive attributes, we must be able to celebrate girls' accomplishments in education and society as well as the achievements of the boys equally. It should not be treated as zero sum game in which education is equated with femininity while trouble is equated with masculinity. In addition, we need to take a much more strategic approach to boys' education. There may be a need to examine if the education system is catering for the needs of our young people adequately. "The assumption of a link between girls' achievements and boys' difficulties needs to be exposed as unnecessary .... polarised masculinities must be resisted." (Plummer 2005).

The issues expressed in the papyrus must also go one step further as we have to find well rounded, diverse male role models who need to be visible and accessible. This group of male role models do not only have to come from the usual sources such as education and business. But programs should be developed to work with men who fit the stereotypical masculine archetype but do not parrot the expectations that society has placed on males. These programs must challenge the prevailing views of society to create the new male standard to produce new notions of masculinity that are strongly connected to educational achievement, social justice, and community support.

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