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LIBERATING MASCULINITIES

KOPANO RATELE



NATIONAL INSTITUTE
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AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Contents

Acknowledgements v

1	Men no longer rule over their families	1
2	<i>Ayashisa amateki</i>	20
3	At risk of violent death	40
4	A better (sexual) life for all	57
5	Liberating masculinities	70
6	Masculinities without tradition	88
7	We black men	113
8	What value is feminism to men?	137

References 152

About the author 165

Index 166

We black men

Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men.
(Biko 1996: 28)

THIS DECLARATION IN THE 1970s by the ‘father’ of Black Consciousness (BC) politics in South Africa, Steve Biko, is one of the most frank, and yet incredibly incongruous and nostalgic assertions you will ever get on black manhood out of the struggles for the liberation of black people. It communicates a more despairing present, the 1960s and 1970s, in which black men had lost their manhood, when compared to an earlier time in history when ‘black people...were still men’. Even when they were oppressed under General Jan Christiaan Smuts, meaning roughly from 1919 until 1948, according to Biko, black men were still men. Then, seemingly, they lost it.

This loss is at the base of the challenge Biko posed to black men, namely, to regain their manly blackness. In a sense, this call to liberate men from what oppresses them, for men to find themselves, remains our challenge. However, if we are to adequately contribute towards men’s search for their lost manhood, we have to begin at an earlier point: how, exactly, is manhood lost? And then we have to try to comprehend that curious nostalgia that haunts Biko’s call to men by thrashing out an analysis of men and their intersecting positioning in gender and racial relations and working out a better understanding of the relation of manhood to blackness, or vice versa, the relation of blackness to manhood.

It is crucial that I state something bold right up front. Biko’s political project, namely to liberate black people from white racism and its effects, and his understanding of race as a fundamental political and psychological category of our lives, is one I share. The political and psychological liberation of black people from all forms of racism is my baseline. Men’s and other genders’ critical consciousness of their blackness in light of the hegemony of whiteness and their oppression by white racism is imperative to recognise if, that is, the majority of black men and women are to see pro-feminist projects as pro-black and thus enabled to transform masculinities and femininities.

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- 1 Men no longer rule over their families 1
- 2 *Ayashisa amateki* 20
- 3 At risk of violent death 40
- 4 A better (sexual) life for all 57
- 5 Liberating masculinities 70
- 6 Masculinities without tradition 88
- 7 We black men 113
- 8 What value is feminism to men? 137

References 152

About the author 165

Index 166

What if *I write what I like* is a book for men?

The challenge to black people to become positively conscious of their blackness, rise up against white domination and reclaim their dignity is most explicit in Biko's essay 'We blacks'. The essay first appeared in 1970. It was later collected in the famous volume *I write what I like*, first published in 1978. The book has been reprinted and republished several times since. Of particular interest in this essay is that Biko's influential intervention did not, however, announce itself as a tract on black *men*. In fact, the book as a whole is rarely, if ever, considered as an attempt to mobilise, liberate or transform black *masculinities*. More commonly, it is read as a call to blacks to come to awareness of their condition as racially oppressed so as to create solidarity in their blackness. However, it is hard to ignore the concerns about *men and manhood* in Biko's work. Even as he sought to challenge white supremacy and capitalist exploitation, and to mobilise blacks to overcome disunity, powerlessness and inferiority complexes, Biko (mis)recognised black men.

What could have made Biko (mis)(re)present black people as though the category is identical to that of black men? Does Biko feel women's blackness is always identical to men's blackness? Is it progressive to consider blackness as heterogeneous, similar to how we think of masculinities as diverse? Why is Biko's focus on men's gender not as critical as his analysis of race?

A formative concern underpinning this chapter is the question of black men as elements of the category of race and, simultaneously, elements of the category of gender. That concern cannot be adequately framed without including along with it a concern with the conditions of black women, other black genders and black children as they are tied in with black men in our field of vision. The concern with black men as gendered subjects calls forth the question, what of men are we likely to misapprehend when we read race-critical political interventions without availing ourselves of gender-critical insights? So, in addition to the questions above, of what benefit to men is the idea of gender justice; what might be the consequence of an anti-patriarchal position to BC thought; what can men's anti-racist activism gain from theories of feminism and women's activism?

Working through *and* with Biko to generate liberated models of manhood

While they acknowledge the criticisms of black feminist critics such as Desiree Lewis and Pumla Dineo Gqola, as well as women who were part of the BC movement, such as Mamphele Ramphele, in their book *Biko lives*, Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel Gibson (2008: 13) are ambiguous as to

whether Biko's thought was 'oblivious to gender'. However, Mngxitama and his colleagues do concede that in engaging with Biko today we might need to interrogate how and where his thought 'falls short'.

Biko was not so much oblivious to gender as collapsing race onto gender, effectively refusing to engage with feminist thought on relations of men to women. As I have sought to show in previous chapters, masculinity matters as much as race (or class, nationality, sexuality or any other social category). Gender is a fundamental category if we wish to understand men's lives. Men means gender/sex. Ideologies of gender/sex govern micro-level, psychological and interpersonal relations as well as structural, macro-level relations of men with women, with children and with other men. Inattention to gender politics and psychical investments in men's lives is therefore a refusal to examine structural conditions and everyday contestations around masculinities.

Of course, it is with the benefit of mainly black women's feminist thinking that I have come to see how men are fundamentally gendered as much as raced. Black feminist women bring us to the point where we can imagine models of BC feminist masculinity.

And yet, although it is absolutely imperative to politicise masculinities, treating the subject of men without considering the logics and metamorphosing lives of race and racism, is analytically inadequate and, under capitalist patriarchal hegemony, even politically mendacious. Questions of racial injustice, always already entangled with those of gender and other forms of injustice, are always bound to surface when looking at men and masculinities. In the context of apartheid racism, the work of representing men as men cannot but be informed by critical and reconstructive dialogue with BC thought. This is the principal reason to engage with Biko's and BC thought. The driving cause of BC thought is evident in the opening quotation. BC was a political as well as social-psychological intervention. It was a positive call to blacks to develop and maintain ties of solidarity, 'assert themselves and stake their rightful claim' in South Africa and the world, challenge white racist power and privilege, 'take care of their own business' and understand and 'use the concept of group power' (Biko 1996: 22, 42, 74).

The imperative of unity notwithstanding, in 'White racism and black consciousness', Biko (1996: 74) writes:

Hence thinking along the lines of Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being, entire in himself, and not an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine. At the end of it all, he cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood. Once this happens, we shall know that the real man in the black person is beginning to shine through.

'The real man in the black person' is an odd formulation. In working through *and* working with Biko and BC thinking, I want to open up and examine this confabulation of black men and black persons. I contend that it is highly significant and progressive to represent men as part of a racialised group, as well as black genders, to consider struggles for black lives as having to confront, at a minimum, both racial and gender questions (without losing sight of economic, sexual and other key questions). Such an assertion cues the search for and call to generate multiple, less one-dimensional, gender-critical models of black-conscious manhood, inviting us to work through men's experiences and practices as they are constituted by at least two structures, namely, race and gender (which are intertwined with other structures of power).

Biko offered a model of masculine blackness as a resistance against white racism. I propose that we generate an abundance of models of manhood and blackness. All models of manhood, as of blackness, are working models. They arise out of prevailing conditions. Some models might have worked in the past, in the face of colonial and apartheid onslaught against blackness. However, these models might be increasingly unworkable, even injurious, given the prevailing structural conditions. The more models boys and men have access to, the higher the likelihood that some will be viable, even liberatory, healthier and more sustaining.

Three key ideas drive this chapter. First, it is contended that understanding black men *as* men matters as much as understanding them as subjects of race (or economic structures, ethnicity or nationalism). It matters, for a range of reasons (including health, politics, culture and economics), to learn to see black lives as co-constructed by gender and race structures and experiences (as well as other structures and experiences), as well as how these realities are constitutive of each other.

Second, it is vital to underscore that the struggle to represent and transform black masculinities is best viewed as part of the same struggle to emancipate black women from patriarchy, racism, compulsory heterosexuality and capitalist exploitation. Free black men without independent black women will likely mean the continued subordination of black women, but it would also mean that the structures that oppress them remain largely undisturbed.

Third, one of the main problems with many contemporary empirical and conceptual studies on black men in South Africa, studies that depart from the fact that masculinities matter, is that, unlike Biko's work, they are not necessarily doing it for the benefit of black men as a group. They gesture to but largely underestimate the burden of racial (and economic) inequality as it shapes and is shaped by gender practice. An often-unasked question in projects that call for and work to change black men's attitudes towards gender equality is, equality with whom?

A key part of the vision of liberating masculinities is to challenge white, and not only black, capitalist, heteropatriarchal hegemonies. The horizon of challenging patriarchy is not intraracial gender equality, but a world where black women are equal to all men and, similarly, white women are equal to all men. In other words, to work for a gender-equal world means working for a future where men of all races are equal to women of all races.

I should insert something about white men here. Indicating that in analysing black men we must consider global and national racialised injustice and gender discrimination in their intersections with other social inequality does not imply that white men and masculinities (and white women and femininities) are without race, gender, class, culture, traditions and sexuality. However, privilege can and often does blind us to our locatedness within its structures. Privilege tends to make us unreflexive about and all too comfortable with our privileges. White men may be presented as if they do not have race or gendered bodies. Feminist criticism, informed by anti-colonial work, African studies, post-colonialist critiques, decolonial studies, critical race theory and queer projects has shown the deceptions and denials of white (and dominant black) masculinities (see, for example, Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1991; Dosekun 2007; hooks 2004; King 1998; Msimang 2002; Salo 2001; Springer 2002). In the event, well-employed, white, heterosexual men in satisfying marriages living in a largely homogenous culture might be able to ignore their privileges. Nevertheless, that does not mean we are blind to the histories, structures and psychologies that reproduce capitalist white heteropatriarchal traditionalist power.

Black-conscious gender-critical solidarities

Biko's psychologically insightful political thinking on black people is seminal. Immersed in the politics of his time, Biko sought to bring to consciousness the politics and psychology of the domination of whites over blacks. He approached racial oppression as both a political and psychological question.

That said, as indicated, Biko's collected work *I write what I like*, specifically the essay 'We blacks', is an oblique meditation on the psychological structures and political processes enlisted in the social construction of masculinities. And yet, the book is still less likely to be considered an attempt to mobilise and transform black *men*. Perhaps there is good reason for that as it is principally focused on blacks' coming to awareness of their condition as racially oppressed so as to create solidarity in their blackness. Even so, whatever else it is, *I write what I like* is also a book on men and manhood.

Biko had an odd way of talking about men, though. It is as if black men are not men. That is to say, Biko's men are strangely and convolutedly ungendered because

they are at the same time doubly gendered. They are men and *not*-men. They are not addressed as subject of gender, yet are exhorted to reclaim their manhood.

It is true that the idea of black men as not *really* men, or half-men (but also *uninjurably* super-athletes), not invisible and then hyper-visible, is not a problem of Biko's making, even though he reproduces it. It is in fact a very common way of thinking and talking about subordinate or marginalised men – and black men in particular.

It is the benefit of history that has made it easy for some men to see that you cannot fully and honestly grasp men without considering how they get hailed into, imagine and construct gender ideologies. Perhaps the biggest gift of the local and global women's liberation movements and feminist theory to us has been in helping us to understand that men are gendered as much as women are; that gender is a cultural construction; that men 'do gender' in how they signify, dress and express it in their individual and group ways; how they position themselves, are positioned by others and contest ideas about manhood; and how hierarchies exist not only between women and men, but also among men and within groups of black men too (see, for example, Hare-Mustin & Marecek 1988; Lorber & Farrell 1991; West & Zimmerman 1987). Therefore, our enterprise needs to test some of the tenets of Biko's thought on black men (as primarily blacks, and only in rather concealed ways just as sexed and gendered as women).

Although I am concerned with manhood as a dominant yet obscured and neglected theme in Biko's writings, as it is difficult to ignore the concerns on masculinity in a piece such as 'We blacks', this piece works well to anchor this chapter.

Biko wrote 'We blacks' sometime in late 1970. One of the things we therefore need to do is to trouble Biko about what he seemed to believe black people, and as suggested already, black *women and men*, are or are not (or were or were not), and could or could not do in the 1970s. Biko at times tends to appeal to a form of essentialising, generalising or universalising thinking about blackness. He certainly appeals to some kind of essences, natures, totalities, generalities or universality in trying to explain the difference the fact of oppression introduces into racialised cultural existence: 'Whereas the Westerner is geared to use a problem-solving approach following very trenchant analyses, our (African cultural) approach is that of situation-experiencing' (Biko 1996: 43). Where is the African or black man or woman who prefers analytic tools, and so who, after Frantz Fanon (1967), strays out of bounds?

And yet I do like, to be sure, Lewis Gordon's (2012: 3) argument that 'the appeal to essence...needn't collapse into the foreclosed ascription of essentialism'. Therefore, I partly support Biko's *politically* strategic generalisations in studies of black lives. Race introduces a structural differentiation into black men's lives, radically separating them from men of other races, presenting them within a limited set of social positions and thus making them into more (and thus

simultaneously less) than simply men. Just as there are occasions when we are called to understand the pains, thoughts, experiences, dreams, losses and anxieties of a life such as Nelson Mandela's or Barack Obama's, the particulars that make a man, there are times when we commit an illiberal injustice by not speaking of collectivities and unities, when individualising our traumas and struggles effectively supports racisms and patriarchies.

Speaking of black men as a unit can but does not necessarily mean essentialisation, just as dwelling on the details of an individual's story does not always indicate a progressive element. What we ought to strive for ultimately is a critical self-consciousness and radical solidarities.

Political and psychological facts of black masculinity

Masculinity is both a psychical reality as well as structural configuration that regulates men's relations with their own bodies, other men, women and children. Although there are studies that concern themselves with the critical *psychologies* of men, as a whole, critical studies of men, which emerge from feminist studies, have largely tended to offer us the tools to understand the *social* construction of masculinity. Additionally, then, inattention to gender politics in black men's lives is also a refusal to examine everyday contestations around masculinities. Especially in societies where black persons have been treated as part of an undefined mass, without individuality, we have to concern ourselves with the politics *and* psychological facts of men's and women's lives, with the stories they tell as much as the social conditions under which they live.

Even though both the pre-eminent, politically informed psychologist Noel Chabani Manganyi (1973, 1979) and Biko, as perhaps the most psychologically minded political leader, had their writings published in the 1970s, it is in the succeeding decade that we have psychology increasingly being infiltrated by a critical sociopolitical awareness (see, for example, Dawes 1985; Foster 1985; Ivey 1985; Perkel 1988). A small aspect of this critical, politically aware psychology (see, for example, Anonymous 1986) is what I have called psycho-political recovery. I referred to this idea of the psycho-political in Chapter 4. Here, by 'psycho-political recovery' I mean projects whose aim is to understand psychological phenomena in political terms, but also political developments through the help of psychological theories.

Besides Biko, framing the work of critical scholars within psychology and psychologically astute radical activists as psycho-political recovery is informed by some of the work of thinkers such as Fanon, Paulin Hountondji (1992) and Patricia Williams. Williams, for instance, has suggested that since much of the lives of black people have tended to be disregarded, buried or distorted by history,

it is important to have as a scholarly quest the recapturing of lost, twisted and neglected aspects of these lives. She argues for shining light on those elements of black life that have made it possible for them to escape examination:

I, like so many blacks, have been trying to pin myself down in history, place myself in the stream of time as significant, evolved, present in the past, continuing into the future. To be without documentation is too unsustainable, too spontaneously ahistorical, too dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but my future as well. So I have been picking through the ruins of my roots. (Williams 1988: 5)

A reading of *I write what I like* indicates that in tandem with the politics of blackness, history, cultural roots, identity and self-representation had a central place in Biko's work. For instance, in 1974, 13 leaders from the BC movement were detained without trial for a long spell, only being charged under the Terrorism Act and brought to trial in 1975/1976. Biko would give evidence during the trial in May 1976 (a month before the epoch-making student-led Soweto uprising). Even at a political trial where lives were at stake, Biko remained clear on the connection of the would-be political treason his comrades were charged with, on the one hand and, on the other hand, what someone less acutely observant would perceive as irrelevant *cultural* and *historical* experience:

What we are saying now is that at the present moment we have a culture here which is a European culture. This country looks, My Lord, like a province of Europe. It has got no relationship to the fact that it happens to exist in Africa, and when Mnr Pik Botha says at the United Nations 'We are Africans', he just doesn't know what he is talking about. (Biko 1996: 131)

While the concept of psycho-politics seeks to bring out the close ties of the domains of politics and psychology as they work in the thinking around, and white domination over, blacks, with recovery the focus is on re-examining and offering a different critical historical understanding of the association of power and psycho-social relations. Psycho-political recovery aims to convey the ubiquitous play of political forces in black personal life, as well as how psychic life is written into the operations of power. The psycho-politics of masculinities therefore reveals the manner in which power makes men, as well as how masculinities in turn feed into shaping power: how the fears, fantasies, needs and proclivities of men are part of political structures and power and are a fact of daily life for men. Psycho-politics informs us of the work and effects of the political machinery in the life between a man and a man, or a woman and a man. It tells of

how power may try to hide itself, but is never absent, how it is the greatest part of forces that produce the context in which individuals and groups name and relate to themselves and others.

Psycho-political recovery is constituted of analogous elements to what is called reclamation or retelling by figures such as Thabo Mbeki when president of South Africa – with the vital addition that this type of rediscovery extends beyond historical macro-political and economic forces into psychological and cultural realms. Hence, if there is a corresponding spirit detectable in such a project as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), whose vision is to work for Africa's revival, this other recovery seeks to diffuse the vision of Nepad with embodied psyches – with people's cognitions, affect and behaviours, rather than only with statistical means and variances.

The psychological literature referred to earlier, then, as these latter works, needs to be grasped as arguing that interwoven revitalisations, not just political or economic, but also cultural and psychological retelling – and stories and narratives are powerful tools – are what are needed if there is going to be a sustained defence against and defiance of the unrelenting assault on black people's lives by those who would write them out of historical and social agency in the first place. In reading this work, one observes a diffused consensus that a renarrativisation of other versions of the practices and relations of the oppressed is crucial if people wish to recentre the worlds they participate in.

While it is true that the recovery of history, culture and identity is always vital, it is also the case that what goes by the name of recovery has a tendency to read like praise-poems, what might otherwise be called victimhood. It is correct that there are numerous recovery missions that wish for us to romanticise our culture and history, particularly the culture and history of political struggle: monuments are being erected, memorial lectures are being given and new histories are being produced. But if romanticisation is the only sort of project that is allowed, especially as there is an increased tendency to privilege race (or gender) rather than undertaking the kind of project articulated here, there is no need for politically aware, psychologically insightful work into men and masculinities (or psychologically informed political work into men and masculinities). It is vital for a project that takes seriously the idea of being critical against the very things we most cherish to watch out for this, regardless of how deep the painful emotion underlying the task is. Even though any psychological analysis that ignores the world of politics is, in short, not worth bothering with, good psychologists make for bad politicians. Good critical analyses are as necessary in the face of unceasing assaults on black culture as they are in the anti-sexism trenches.

Let it be clear: although basic science has an important role, we also need knowledge to have practical utility. As has been said, there are few things as

practical as good theory. But even findings about South African men's personality profiles, or black people's attitudes to new Omo soap powder packaging or European tourists or living in new human settlements can be put to good use. It is psychological studies that *only seek to find* how blacks used to wash their clothes or live freely before the white colonisers and Afrikaner racists oppressed them that can be summarily dismissed. These kinds of projects have decreased likelihood of offering any rigorous analysis or applicability to contemporary life.

Ironically, projects that aim only to glorify black men (or women) are as likely to make for the worst kind of political programmes. If we were so great, we should be unafraid to ask ourselves, why did we become enslaved, colonised and pushed around under apartheid? Perhaps, more significantly, what has the fact of having a great history such as that of Mapungwube contributed to understanding why tens of thousands of black women are raped and abused by black men, year in and year out, after freedom? And so, in addition to questions to Biko and BC thought on the possible futures of African history, culture and identity, we need to concern ourselves with masculinities, with men's relations to each other and men's relations to women and children.

What Biko does not like

Before offering an overview of the ideas expressed in 'We blacks', I want to sketch the context out of which they emerged, as well as that of their writer and the BC movement. This is necessary before I turn to discussing the ideas about black life that might generate ambivalence when reading Biko, particularly matters of masculinity that he overlooked. Let us, at the same time, take note of the fabric of contemporary South African life. There have, of course, been many who over the years have applied their minds to this or that part of Biko and his comrades' ideas, but relative to the ideas that have received attention – his overtly political ideas – there are aspects of Biko's thought that have received rather little attention, such as my analysis of African masculinity and men.

As noted earlier, Biko is the acknowledged 'father' of BC thought in South Africa. His thought remains the guiding spirit of the politics, psychic development and cultural current of black self-love. His torture and murder in September of 1977 before he turned 31 by apartheid state security is taken as inspiration for an unshakeable self-belief and belief in the cause of black power. Even prior to and certainly following his murder, Biko became another lighthouse for the struggle for social and political liberation in South Africa. Since the late seventies, from being an enemy of the state, he has become part of South Africa's and the world's popular culture. His image, like Che Guevara's, is not only pasted on T-shirts worn at political rallies, but also sold at exclusive boutiques. A new edition of

I write what I like was published in 2011 by Picador Africa and even today the book is sometimes offered as a prize on radio shows. Not only is he annually commemorated, being closely related to the 16 June 1976 student uprising, and his words widely quoted, he has been immortalised in popular history and culture around the world, in films such as *Cry Freedom*, in stone, in paintings and in music of diverse genres such as that of Peter Gabriel and Wyclef Jean. Recently, a number of young black men established a Steve Biko Foundation that carries out projects under his name in South Africa and around the world, with a flagship annual memorial lecture series. The Institute for the Advancement of Journalism offers Steve Biko scholarships. Although there has always been an interest in Biko since his torture and murder, these current moves signal a veritable swell of attention to his life and work and, indeed, must be taken to mean the institutionalisation of the man's political thought and BC in general.

On its own this monumentalisation urges a closer look at Biko in relation to his times and to ours. In addition, these events (including this chapter) around Biko become especially significant if the interest is seen as part of a larger inspiration associable with the ideas of Nepad and the African Renaissance. However, it is for the fact that, like many black men (and women), I learned from Biko and regard him as implicated in our development, that I see it as imperative not just to employ his thought, but also to engage critically with it. I think this is what he, in fact, encourages in his work. It is for the fact that I see it as non-negotiable for us to always approach ourselves with scepticism, for us to always apprehend our blackness critically, that we cannot afford to let through ideas about black people without subjecting them to tests, especially if they come from a recognised political figure. Like many African men (and women) though, I remain inspired by Biko's analysis of the nature of our condition. When I enter into dialogue with Biko's work, I am also fully cognisant of, if you will, his writing on the run – the urgencies that were generated by apartheid and the daily struggle against it.

However, in considering some of his reflections about who black *people* are and why they are that way, I have to demur. Therein lies the rub: Biko's understanding of the world is clearly critical, while all the time departing from a love of black people. Only if it were outright reactionary, or showed some hate of black women, would there be no trouble actually, would it be less of a problem and easy to dismiss. However, the problem is that he was no doubt a radical thinker, lover and man of practical affairs. According to his contemporaries, he was a committed, strong black man, a charismatic and hands-on leader who felt deeply about the condition of his chosen people. Some of this can easily be read in his words: his articles reveal a strong heartbeat, an intense analytical engagement and always impassioned, acute political judgement.

About 'We blacks'

History of 'We blacks'

The newsletter of Saso (South African Students' Organisation) published 'We blacks' in its edition of late 1970. In the early 1970s the author had been presenting and writing articles around a number of issues related to the BC philosophy. The articles were signed 'Frank Talk'. As Biko would say under cross-examination at his trial, Frank Talk was not Strini Moodley, as the prosecutor seemed to believe, but himself. The Frank Talk papers were part of the series 'I write what I like' that Biko was writing and putting out as publications man of Saso.

An important point to take note of here is that a couple of years prior to writing the series, the author and his comrades had split from the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) and in July of 1969 Biko had become the first president of the new organisation. When 'We blacks' came out, Saso was still working at mobilising black tertiary students and recruiting new members to its ranks and, as publicity secretary, Biko was at the forefront of articulating the political philosophy underlying the organisation.

Style and emotion of 'We blacks'

Given these constraints and objectives, 'We blacks' is a short piece, 12 paragraphs in all, most of which are less than half a page. It is bold. The style is an affectively powerful oratorical one: 'Material want is bad enough, but coupled with spiritual poverty it kills' (Biko 1996: 28). It is also a plea, a very impassioned one. Imagine two men standing almost nose to nose, with one grilling the other, yet not without a prayerful undertone: 'Why do you fail like this? Are you convinced of your inabilities?' Biko is mad with anger, surely, even if his row is such as one would have with a lover who is not likely to leave one: 'Deprived of spiritual content, [you] read the bible with a gullibility that is shocking' (1996: 31).

A black person's life under apartheid

Biko opens by asserting that for a person born during the reign of the Afrikaner National Party government, its policy of separate development would be central to his development and outlook on the world. Separate development came to determine South African life, and in particular black people's existence, installing itself and the idea of 'non-white' inferiority in their affect, their cognitions, their attachments and their will. That does not indicate that black or white South Africans did not have agency. However, evidence abounds that a large part, if not the whole of the establishment, was geared at determining, and was able to determine, where one could and could not live, the possible friendships one could entertain, the loves had and missed, whom one could or could not marry,

the extent and quality of education received; even the possible ideas, motivations, will and aspirations: indeed one's total self. It is important to keep in mind that at the end of these opening remarks Biko reveals that he managed to disentangle himself from some of the determinations of the government.

'The basics' of struggle

The next part of the article tackles 'the problem' in South Africa. This it does in four paragraphs. In this part the writer dismisses other organisations fighting against apartheid as having misread the problem and working from an oversimplified understanding. In short, Biko says that the fact is that the ideology of racial separation on its own was unjust, even malevolent, whichever way you spin it.

Because of its importance and apparent contradiction within the context of the ideas of BC specifically, and racial thinking in general, let me repeat: the ideology of the separation of races in practice and in thinking about the world is in itself retrogressive if not downright degenerate, however you look at it. Biko goes on to argue that when coupled with supremacist ideas, capitalism creates social and economic depression for the oppressed. But material deprivation and legal oppression under a system of racial supremacism and capitalist exploitation is not the worst that blacks face.

In Biko's view (and I agree) the worst of it is the *poverty of souls* generated by, or spinning off from, colonialism, apartheid and capital power. An impoverished ego, a mind that believes in its own oppression, a lack of belief in one's personhood, destroys because it dehumanises. Spiritual poverty turns the black person into a shell. When he or she is poor in their heart, the individual is a shadow. Bereft of his or her humanity, the person turns into a sheep, an ox, an animal; that is, a slave. When the psyche 'dies', what is left is a form of human, a human only in form.

Culture, religion and history

The latter half of 'We blacks' is taken up with a discussion that weaves together the interlocking ideas of culture, history and religion. Biko shows the uses of these discursive practices for those engaged on both sides of the power divide. In respect of the recorded past, he says the African child learns self-hate from school because of the negative image of African society in history. 'Part of the approach envisaged in bringing about "Black Consciousness",' he proposes, 'has to be directed to the past, to seek to rewrite the history of the black man', delivering on the same a truism of anti-colonial and national revolutions and cultural and ethnic struggles: 'a people without a history is like a vehicle without an engine' (Biko 1996: 29). His reasoning is that such a people cannot be roused to revolution against their oppressor because they live in the shadow of the oppressor, even celebrating their defeat.

Regarding culture, Biko refers to the ease with which Africans communicate with each other as a trait that is deeply ingrained in their character. It is important to note that later on, however, he warns that we should be careful not to lose this and other indigenous cultural virtues, such as the oneness of community that lies at the heart of African culture. He adduces Indians who confound white hospital officials by bringing gifts for strangers as a 'manifestation of the interrelationship between man and man in the black world as opposed to the highly impersonal world' (Biko 1996: 30) in which white people live.

Christianity is a white man's religion, Biko says. It was erected on rotten foundations. The reason young black women and men leave the church is precisely this: there is no message for black people in Christianity. Those who believe in it, he contends, are gullible because they already have no spiritual content. A Christian God who allows people to suffer under an immoral system is an anachronism. The only religious message fit for the oppressed is that contained in black theology, an attempt to redefine and adapt the message in the Bible and make it relevant to the revolution. Even while basing itself on Christ's precepts, black theology takes cultural context seriously. It is an attempt to show that the Bible resonates with black people in their 'long journey towards realisation of the self' (Biko 1996: 31). Black theology sees Jesus, who accepts ancestor worship, as being on the side of the struggle for freedom.

BC philosophy and movement

Last is the principal and driving idea that characterises 'We blacks' specifically and Biko's writing in general – the BC philosophy and movement. BC is the river from whence Biko drinks. BC is a methodology, a liberation project, a call to self-awareness and reawakening, and an output. It is an approach, a cause, a set of values to live by and a truth (Biko 1996). It is from this understanding of what is meant by BC that Biko says what he says to black people about their situation. Not just once, but at several points in the piece, Biko defines and outlines, intimates and tells us what the political philosophy and movement of BC means to him and Saso, what it is all about and what it seeks to do for the oppressed. An inward-looking process, the intention of BC is 'to make the black man come to himself' (1996: 29). This (re)awakening occurs when a life of pride and dignity is pumped back into the shell black males have become. This is a philosophy of everyday life that reminds black men of their complicity with racism. The aim of BC philosophy is to show the value of their own standards and world views to black people themselves. On behalf of BC organs, Biko urges black people to use BC standards, and not those of white society, to judge themselves. Black people are given a positive view of their situation. Although hating white people may be comprehensible, Biko states that this is not what BC is about. Biko sees hate as heedless, short term and

unproductive for both black and white alike. What is sought, he says, is a meaningful and directed channel for the pent-up anger of the forces in the oppressed. The desire of a BC philosophy is to make people of one mind and to involve them, the masses, in a struggle that they must come to feel is theirs. The principal reason BC makes sense is, in Biko's view, that it speaks the language of the black man in every sphere of life.

Men and their historical contexts

The desire to revisit Biko arises out of a desire to understand how an identifying political and psycho-social affiliation saturates what one eventually says about the world, about oneself and about others. For somebody who is disenchanted with much of psychology, some of the questions I have been asking of myself and of others tend to come down to this: what does this (whatever *this* is – act, attitude, disorder, emotion, IQ test score, relationship and other subjects on which psychologists are experts) have to do with economic, cultural and political positions?

Simultaneously, there is also disillusionment, the origins of which are to be found in the workings of the state. Here psychology helps to formulate questions about stories that individuals – in particular, but not exclusively, bearers of political office – tell or do not tell about the world, about themselves, about us, about how they make sense of their own and others' actions, lives and relationships.

The line between what we say, on the one hand, and our position in society, on the other, is of course never a straight one. One does not have to be a white person to have a problem with this black politician; one does not have to be a white, upper-middle-class South African to say something like, 'I can't really say of BC that it is fallacious to claim that "as a black man I can tell you what black men think".' Proceeding from this last point then, on first mentioning the words 'black man' Biko could be taken to be referring to himself, not other black men or black people. The second time he utters the phrase though, we sense that perhaps the first reading was too gentle, incomplete, maybe even incorrect. The sentence in question is, 'What makes the black man fail to tick?' (Biko 1996: 28). That the question follows from a reference to 'black people' alerts us to the slippage. In the paragraph where he asks and answers the question, he mentions the phrase 'black man' three times in all and the term 'man' twice, in addition to the masculine form used here and throughout his article.

Blackness is politics and a psychic attitude at the same time. That is how Biko sees it. Blackness is value and view of the world. Yet, while he holds that blackness is not only personal identity, but a social position, Biko is addressing himself not to blacks, but black *males* foremost. Even with that single move, he puts black males at the head of the march to liberation. Blackness will become positive, and

black people will be able to face up to their oppressor, when blacks (males) have learned to act like men. African culture and the black world will be enabled to rise up against white racism when black men's bodies are pumped with new BC life.

All this is easy to see. It has been written on by Biko's comrades – for example, Malusi Mpumlwana and Thoko Mpumlwana (1996). Writing in an introduction to an edition of Biko's work, the two have said that although they shared a passion for black freedom with him, they have come to recognise the gender bias of Biko's work: 'The struggle to reorder the attitudes and relationships of women themselves, between women and men, and the socio-cultural and economic milieu of our existence is as fundamental as the struggle ever was for the re-ordering of race relations for Blacks in South Africa and the world' (Mpumlwana & Mpumlwana 1996: xiii). They also state that they have since realised that the experience of being excluded and regarded as non-persons because of gender is as painful as being excluded and regarded as nothing because of one's skin colour. It must be said, though, that these comrades of Biko also tread with caution in their efforts to answer for him. They explain away Biko's practices, rather than making us understand them. For instance, in spite of their views given above, they argue that the masculinisation of blackness and gender bias in Biko's work must be seen in the context of his historical period. What this sounds like is an attempt to protect or excuse Biko. The historical conditions that these authors have deployed as a reason for Biko's ungendered politics are themselves important to try to decipher. Behind their one-line explanation lurks a deterministic and unidirectional notion of individual/social relations. To say 'Biko was a product of his time' does not shield, contextualise or help in making him more relevant to our times. The relations of individuals to their discursive and material world, that is, their cultural, political and economic context as a concrete reality and climate, is complex. To claim that somebody is 'of his or her time' is therefore of little use when one wants to understand the times that produced the person and shaped his or her life and work. More importantly, though, the attempt to use his time, the seventies, to cover Biko's back from a thorough analysis on this particular point does his work harm rather than good. I believe such efforts calcify the passion that was present during a life, making it inflexible, brittle and out of date. More than merely rendering the black struggle male and ungendered, a problem that characterises many national revolutions even today, Biko becomes parochial, irrelevant; dead as far as contemporary conditions are concerned.

The truth is Biko was in many ways not of his time. Indeed, the connection of self and time, or self as time, is one that should not be taken for granted. I have noted that, at the end of his opening remarks, Biko declares that he was able to be something other than what the government intended him and other black people to be. He stood up against the racial order that was in place. This challenging

attitude was not only directed at the establishment; it cannot but have been part of the same understanding, positioning or, if you will, energy that enabled him to challenge other things. This attitude informed Biko's lead in the departure from Nusas, which was recognised as the representative union of students in South Africa at the time. This attitude can be read in his 'Letter to SRC [Students Representative Council] presidents' where he rejects the black media. Where he speaks about the black political leaders, which included the leaders of the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania and the South African Communist Party – people such as Oliver Reginald Tambo, Mandela and Robert Sobukwe – Biko's tone is brusque, showing very little respect for them and not even caring to call them by their names. If anything, this reveals that he was not a very good product of his time.

Concerning the notion of loss of manhood

What are some of the hidden or silent parts of Biko's anti-racist rhetoric? If anyone has doubts about the extent of his unconsciousness of gender in his politics, the skid marks we gestured to earlier, *from males to blacks* and *from black men to human beings*, are ineluctable in the line quoted in the opening of this chapter: 'Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men' (Biko 1996: 28). Until black feminists called it out, there was silence around the fact that anti-colonial, anti-racist and black liberation politics privileged black men's experiences and marginalised the voices of black women. Black freedom was effectively about the liberation of black men from under white men's oppression. As indicated earlier, an odd way of talking about men, where gender is neglected as a fundamental political category, yet males are essentialised in their manhood, has characterised the national revolution in South Africa. Some have explained the silence by saying that the nature of the rhetorical political subject of the BC project was determined by the nature of apartheid. Others have said it was necessary for 'the people' to stand united in the face of colonialism, racism and apartheid, and that the plan was that the gender question would be settled after the national racial struggle was won. A more revealing view has been the argument that males are naturally more politically conscious than females and that the struggle against sex/gender oppression was seen as secondary to the racial struggle.

Given how far we have travelled, it is now easy to see that the view that females are naturally less politically aware than males is retrogressive. The same pertains to the view that the struggle against sexual and gender oppression was not as important as the racial struggle. Equally important, we need to recognise that the argument that the gender or sex of the imagined subject of the BC project was determined by the nature of apartheid is duplicitous. Such arguments seem

oblivious to the irony of patriarchal and sexist assumptions underpinning both the laws of apartheid and the struggles against those laws. At once, it must be indicated that these assumptions are not limited to BC thought and Biko's project. Numerous gender-conscious writers have articulated the same: that within the national project in South Africa, any analysis of the oppression or exclusion of black women tended to be in respect to their race and not their sexuality or gender or class. One can also recognise similar sorts of insularity within nationalist revolutions and cultural movements in other parts of the world.

What seems to trouble Biko most in 'We blacks' is loss of black manhood. The intimation in the statement about when our fathers (and mothers) were men, which was during General Smuts' time, is that the recovery of black masculinity is what will lead to the freedom of the race. Biko suggests that reclaiming a certain form of being male, in contradistinction for instance to the recovery of some way of being an African woman, is the key to a true humanity. Put differently, a requirement for racial emancipation is the restoration of the self-esteem of black males. That, in short, is the essence of the inward-looking recovery process of BC: to look inside the person of the black in order to find truth. It turns out that that truth is masculine. But, as has already been said, a project that undertakes archaeological work on the African self does disservice to us if it goes back to the past *simply* to tell us how great we were.

Black man in relation to women and children

What is a surprise in the assumptions and arguments of 'We blacks' is that they hide as much as they talk about the identities of black people and black males. About black females Biko says almost nothing. Even so, his silence on the subject can be read to show what it refuses or neglects to utter, something we are touching on lightly. The smoothing out of tensions and ambiguities of *masculinity* and of *race* in Biko's project are not hard to track. We can read them right from the start in the use of the exhortative and repeated singular 'black man'. Clearly, black 'man', in fact, stands not only for *various sorts of black men*. Black 'man' also covers *very many differing black people*.

When Biko sets out to inspire blacks to rescue themselves, do we really know what it is they must rescue about themselves, except for the self-esteem eroded by a racist political and social structure? Except in relation to a lack of political freedom, while Biko provokes the black man to come to himself, we are uncertain where the black male as a man got lost.

Of course, part of the answer is that the black man got lost in the maze of reserves of the colony and apartheid bantustans. However, that response is unsatisfactory for one crucial reason. Yes, it considers the psychological aspects of

freedom, and yes, it recognises the anti-black values in which ‘non-white’ people existed. But it fails to adequately address itself to patriarchal aspects of white racism. After the black man develops a political awareness, self-pride and finds himself, so as to free the black nation, we remain uncertain as to which way is up for black men from that point onward. What are free black masculinities after apartheid? What does it mean to be a black man when you are *not* struggling against white racism? Thus the other irony of this trope of loss and recovery of black masculinity is that the black-conscious man may need rescuing still. The black man may still need to find his self, because, ironically, the fall of apartheid may have come too soon for him.

Black men’s fairy tales

If Biko knew his man, what readers are left with are hints at the type of man he has in mind. The man we are left with is one who fights for freedom and comes into being, or as Biko says, ‘comes to himself’, a minute after he takes off his chains. Rather than spelling out what happens after ‘ever after’, what remains is something that ends like a political fairy tale. A formula might be helpful:

slave + BC + political struggle → political freedom = free black man.

In other words, if you are mentally enslaved and politically subjugated, get a dose of BC, get involved in the liberation struggle, fight to become politically free: this is how you get to be a free black man. But it is not. The magical story of black-conscious masculinity flies in the face of realities of how men become men. Many questions are left unanswered. For instance, some of the quotidian questions that one might ask when looking at who Biko’s real man is, are: could this man be androgynous in appearance or does he have to be muscular and strong? Can he be a good ballet dancer and bisexual at the same time, or are only potential and actual straight by-the-book family men allowed? Does he read the Koran yet indulge in a little masochism? Is it absolutely essential that he be monogamous and ought it to matter to him if others like watching pornography? What does he think of Khanyi Mbau and Thandi Newton, Bonang Matheba and Lupita N’yongo? What is his view on lesbian marriages? Where does he live? Can he be filthy rich in the new South Africa? Should he like any of Sindiwe Magona’s writing? Let us imagine he is a big 30-something, cisgender, heterosexual male who likes soccer and lives in Alexandra, Gauteng province: would it be all right if he prefers *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Stranger* over *Things Fall Apart* and the writing of Mazisi Kunene, Günter Grass, Sylvia Plath and JM Coetzee over Zakes Mda, Noni Jabavu, Wole Soyinka and Ama Ata Aidoo; opera rather than jazz and kwaito; penne

arrabiata instead of samp, spinach and tripe? And while we are discussing food, what is his favourite dessert, his favourite restaurant in London?

We can go on and on in this way to show how many things we do not know about the masculinity of the men we are given. We do not know how men actually construct masculinities. We need studies on this. We need to theorise men in their situatedness. Most of all, what is being suggested here is that it is important to recognise not only the multiplicity of masculinities, but also the divergent forms of blackness.

Perhaps the most stinging criticism of BC is that men's violence against black women, children and other men is high and we are only now at the beginning of understanding how not only racism, but also heteronormativity, capitalism and patriarchy might have shaped the making of black men. Compared to global rates, the violence against women, children and other men in South Africa is among the highest in the world (see, for example, Jewkes et al. 2012; Seedat et al. 2009; South African Police Service 2012; UNODC 2011). Studies point to the influence of men's gender and sexual attitudes on violence. Therefore, after political freedom, the levels of men's violence against women, children and other men suggest that there is unfinished business around the gender of black men.

We will never know Biko's answers to many of the questions because he did not get to write about them. Does that mean he thought them unimportant, or did he take it for granted that we all knew and agreed on what a black person, a man and a woman are? I do not believe that he thought them unimportant. I believe Biko did not, in that odd way I have pointed out, consider the work to conscientise black men's gender-critical consciousness to be as central as the work to raise their critical awareness about racial powerlessness and white power and privilege.

I have noted that when he begins the article, Biko refers to the fact that apartheid segregation touched every aspect of black people's lives, from their intimate personal relationships, thoughts and feelings to their education, careers and social mobility. A few months after Biko wrote the article, he would get married. As is often the case with some political leaders (not forgetting scholars), the fact that he was going to get married does not receive even a footnote mention in the piece. But, you might well ask, who does that in a political tract? The difference between Biko in this piece and Biko in other pieces he wrote, and Biko and other political activists, is his self-reflexivity. He is writing not simply about racial macro-politics. He is writing about himself as a part of blacks: 'we blacks'. Still, one could further ask, am I not expecting too much? Is there perhaps a chance that he believed these matters are private and have nothing to do with his politics? And Biko might not have anticipated his marriage. Even if one concedes that the activist may not have known that he was going to get married in the space of a few months, this is obviously a contradiction since the fact that he saw apartheid as

affecting all manner of things in black people's lives, including their intimacies, shows nothing if not the imbrication of the private and public spheres. In addition, we must note that Biko, when he feels like it, does confront the mundane and the private, such as workers riding home in a bus or a man in a toilet:

In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent condemnation of White society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call. In the home-bound bus or train he joins the chorus that roundly condemns the White man but is first to praise the government in the presence of the police or his employers. (Biko 1996: 28)

If Biko can get down to lift the everyday experience of a bus or train ride to the level of the political, or see fit to publicise the anguish of a man in a lavatory, surely we can put to Biko and the BC programme the matters we have at hand – who are black men when they are not out chanting against the white man? – as well as the question of why he did not pay any attention to the condition of (black) women.

Liberating black men from racism and patriarchy

In addition to the question of what kind of men the black men at the centre of 'We blacks' are, there is the related and equally difficult consideration of whether there is anything progressive, any possibility for developing a critical consciousness, in retaining blackness as the basis for an understanding of post-apartheid South Africa and a supposedly post-racial world, besides understanding ourselves. It is particularly in respect to reading the work of those one assumes share one's view of the world that I want to note the importance of a continuing critical engagement with the political contradictions of our lives as self-identified black men, women and other genders.

Nkiru Nzegwu raises a similar matter while speaking against what she sees as the smug ignorance of white intellectuals in the United States and Europe. The stories of people in North America who act as though Africa is a small village (where, for example, Kenyans may go out to South Africa for lunch, which is one reason somebody would ask a Kenyan whether they know such and such a student from South Africa) are well known. Nzegwu gives the example of professors who tell of tribes where women do this or men do that, using as their sources for this crude images of Africans on the Discovery Channel. She notes the fact that white academics characterise African female intellectuals as of B-grade quality, lacking the material to be leaders in studying even their own experiences, as they 'function only at the level of group consciousness' (Nzegwu 2001: 2). The trouble of course is old: in a more or less similar way to speaking, research is sometimes

less about finding things out or communicating, and more about finding grounds for authority and even justifications for dominating others. But it is for white members of the sisterhood who do not want to give up their assumed positions of authority on Africa that she reserves her bite. Nzegwu says that for years white females helped in objectifying African women: ‘The structures of the academy work to the advantage of White women by assigning them positions of authority and relegating us to the margins’ (2001: 7). She then makes a move whose import is far-reaching. Whether or not it is her intention to tear the assumed shared black or African consciousness I do not know. Be that as it may, she effectively lumps together white women with African men. These two groups are said to all be pulled up the academic ladder by white males, while African women are kept on the bottom rung. She asserts that African women scholars must refuse to be juniors in work done on the lives and experiences of women in Africa.

What Nzegwu is suggesting has two parts to it: that African women’s (intellectual) struggles should continue to be separate from those of white women and that, along similar lines, African women’s struggles should disengage from those of African men because the latter are increasingly being offered space in the academy and perhaps even colluding with whites. And so what Biko said for the black man in politics, Nzegwu posits for African women in the academy: go it alone. Should black men continue believing they are on their own, also? What might be the consequences of these separatist programmes for the recovery or creation of black- or African-centred knowledges? Are there no commonalities whatsoever between African men and African women, between white men and black men, between African women and white women? Regarding those groups who tended to have less political and social power historically, and thus have had their work given less value, is there no chance of helping each other to understand our various struggles better, even if there is no ‘us’? Is there no way to resolve the contradictions, which in fact are there in my own words and in Nzegwu’s writing about Africa from the United States of America?

The work to change black men and undermine oppressive patriarchal power relations entails learning from and working with black feminist women and women’s organisations generally. The insight from feminism that gender is a social and political construction and men have unearned social power over women impels us to work with women in their struggles to emancipate themselves from patriarchal, racist and capitalist forms of oppression. Liberating black men without freeing black women will mean the continued subordination of black women, not only to capitalism and racism, but also to black men as a group.

In his public lecture on Biko, Njabulo Ndebele (2000) spoke about what he referred to as our ‘historic responsibility’. How I understand this idea is that, in thinking about Biko and BC thought on black political identities specifically,

and oppression and marginalisation generally, critical scholars and activists will need to go beyond the past and the constraints it may have brought with it, so as to liberate black men. It suggests that, given the benefit of history, and the forces that define the times we live in, which are different from when Biko and his fellow travellers mobilised around blackness, we have to allow ourselves to reimagine the meanings of blackness, of black masculinities and of black femininities. Being concerned with BC from a gendered perspective comes with that historic benefit. To black people of all genders, men and all who are committed to social justice, I think this moment in history is inviting a still urgent and new consciousness-raising work around complex politics and identities that hold some of the keys to better gendered, racial, economic and cultural relations. Again, it seems that black men's liberation from racist, capitalist, heterosexual patriarchy is best fought for alongside black women's struggles against patriarchal, heterosexual, racist capitalism in broad society and within academic institutions.

'I wanted to be a man'

In 'The fact of blackness', Fanon (1967: 113) wailed: 'I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man.' As Fanon well knew, the fact of being a man, like being black, is a political project, a historical idea, a group identity and not only a psychological desire, not simply, as BC asserted, 'a reflection of a mental attitude' (Biko 1996: 52). As such, though we have to be reminded that what we do as individuals has ramifications either of replicating or sabotaging the widely shared meanings of masculinity and femininity, gender is something that exceeds what individuals are and do. What we still need is, it seems to me, a critical yet reparative vision that liberates black men from the injurious hegemonic model of global and local, black and white capitalist patriarchal masculinities. We need a vision of pro-feminist masculinities that opens up the vision of a socially just, gender-critical, black-conscious utopia.

My aim in this chapter has been to show the political and psychological undesirability – as well as social-psychological limits – of folding questions of black masculinity into questions of black personhood. Although intertwined, gender and race in black men's lives deserve equal, intersecting and rigorous analyses. The argument has been that it is important to look at black men as *men* and not only, or even primarily, as *blacks*. I argue against glossing over the differences among black males, among which I suggest differences of class, sexuality and cultural traditions, but also of education, values, preferences, personalities and desires. It goes without saying that if it is agreed that intragroup differences exist among black males, there will be differences between black males and black females, but also among black females. The gesture towards intraracial and intersex dissimilarities is also relevant to the fact that thwarting disagreement is

not only confined to blacks but troubles any group that historical circumstance such as apartheid, cultural hegemony or capitalism pushes together.

The question that runs through this chapter is, seeing we are now officially free, what are the grounds for unity – where a nuanced unity is indeed what is needed – to reimagine critical but positive black masculinities? What makes black men black and men when they are no longer oppressed? When the ambiguities, silences and gloss that identity theorists have been talking about have been taken serious note of, many of the sentiments of BC on social and personal identity continue to make very good and practical sense. Racism it seems keeps returning, usually in different forms, in the world as in South Africa. There are too many stories to tell about the everyday hurt inflicted on black people, but all of them seem to indicate the persisting need for BC politics. Precisely because racist marginalisation, similar to economic exploitation, sexual discrimination and homophobia, is so intransigent, there are enduring possibilities for a more just and free society in a more militant yet gender-critical BC. An involved but vigilant watch on its limitations, omissions, biases and unwitting injustices, alongside its hopefulness, is always necessary.

In the end I hope that three main ideas remain. First, I hope that it is clearer why it matters to see black men as men in practical political and academic work. Alongside questions around racism, we have to generate more interest in issues of gender power and powerlessness. Race and gender are mutually constitutive.

Second, the struggle to represent and transform black masculinities is part of the same cloth as the struggle to emancipate black women against patriarchy, racism, heterosexuality and capitalist exploitation.

Third, any work that seeks to engage with black men but is uninterested in doing so primarily for the benefit of black men (women and other genders) as solidary but distinct groups is suspect. Gender equality without racial and economic equality is untenable. Working to liberate black men has to entail working with them to challenge patriarchal domination and racist exclusion and marginalisation. Indeed, to be able to truly free men, we need analyses that comprehend the breadth and intersection of oppressions and privileges that characterise their lives, including but not limited to patriarchy and gender injustice, capitalist exploitation and institutionalised racialised hegemonies.

What value is feminism to men?

Blackness, I reasoned, meant that I could finally be myself.
(Wallace 1982: 6)

THE PURPOSE OF CRITICAL engagement with men and masculinities is not critique for its own sake. Critical inquiry might be a form of action. However, 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 engagement with men and masculinities is meant to ultimately contribute to the development of progressive masculinities, a term used as shorthand for non-patriarchal, non-sexist, egalitarian and caring masculinities. Critical studies of masculinities investigate 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 Raewyn Connell (2007) has noted.

If this is the case, the existing body of work on men and masculinities in South Africa has reached or is, as I have said, close to a dead end, as far as the goal of pro-feminist liberation of 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 the country remains high by global standards (South African Police Service 2012). The 2011 *Global study on homicide* reported:

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 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. (UNODC 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 & 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 women's thing? This chapter 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 liberating masculinities would need to be addressed. Among these are, ironically, a gender discourse that remains sceptical about men as subjects of feminist interventions or, at best, is largely indifferent to men, except in connection to 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 (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'. Non-sexists, pro-feminists and feminists can ill afford to be dismissive of, uninterested in or immutably angry with patriarchal, sexist and undemocratic, violent, racist, consumerist and uncaring men. So I propose that feminist women and pro-feminist men face up to arguments made by or on behalf of black males to enable the transformation of dominant forms of black masculinity.

There is in evidence a strand of the black radicalism, specifically a Black Consciousness philosophy-influenced view, that understands black men's troubles as emerging out of the historical white racist order, yet underemphasises black men's complicity with heteropatriarchy. BC scholars and activists concentrate more effort on racial conscientisation in the 'long journey towards realisation of the self' (Biko 1996: 31). Racism is not the only thing that imprisons black men from actualising liberated masculinities. Intragroup gender power contestations are equally responsible for black men killing each other.

There is a resurgent muscular African gender traditionalism that seeks to retribalise black people. Several criticisms can be levelled 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.

Also, it seems blind to the fact that tradition can hurt the very members it claims as its own (Ratele 2013a).

Last, there is a hyper-visible media-favoured black masculinity that champions capitalist consumption. Discourses about black men with regard to what car they drive or what clothes they wear effectively stand opposed to not only the reduction of intraracial economic inequality, but also the development of socially conscious and egalitarian masculinities.¹

This enumeration of resistant discourses to the development of new models of progressive black masculinities is by no means exhaustive. I will not enter into a direct engagement with this inventory here. Focused on black South African men and masculinities, I wish to respond to the principal question in broad strokes by arguing that critical and empathetic (re)engaging with specifically black feminist ideas could be what is needed to liberate black South African masculinities from apartheid racist patriarchal traumatising and towards new black masculinities. While anchoring itself in the phenomenon of masculinity as a media headline issue, this chapter is also 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 also be observed that the media is not homogenous. There are ongoing contestations within the media about masculinities. Even though the chapter employs ‘the masculinity issue’ in a leading North American publication, before turning to the South African edition of *Gentleman’s Quarterly* (GQ) and a piece in the *City Press*, this is not a comparative analysis of masculinities in the United States and South Africa. Directed at both critical work on masculinity as well as at the subjects of that work, the three media pieces discussed are used as a springboard to highlight the currency of the topicality of masculinity, as well as the gaps in how black men are thought of, so as to respond how we might negotiate a way out of the current impasse.

Why masculinities are in the headlines

Perhaps more than ever before, 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 idea that it is not essence, but ‘a set of actions, relations and discourses’ used to distinguish an individual from others or one group of subjects from another (Ratele 2011b: 414). After Connell and James 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 laws, traditions, institutions, rules and discourses. The same applies to being black, queer, South African and other social identities. The regulation of social identities is the domain of relations of the political, economic, religious and cultural orders, of course. However, they are equally about an individual's early life, attachments, traumas, insecurities, fantasies. Robert Morrell (2001b: 7) has observed 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'.

Heroic and dastardly deeds of men have always made news. What is new in what is seen in the mass media is what men do to others and themselves conceived of as an *issue of masculinity* rather than, for instance, politics, business, 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 building muscles). 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 in crisis, changing, under scrutiny or gone wrong. Whatever view is expressed though, 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 say 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) reports that fashion magazines such as *GQ*, *Men's Health* and *Blink!* are used by her participants to 'identify trends but also provided the imaginative material to embody new performances of masculinity' (see also Viljoen 2012). *Blame me on history* (Modisane 1963), to which I referred in Chapter 2, also tells of black men's historical partiality to 'fashion' themselves.

To students of masculine orders in South Africa and internationally, the ‘unnaturalness’ of masculinity and men as gendered may be old news. Brief observations on masculinity on the covers of two periodicals, one local and another from the United States, 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 the South African issue of *GQ* of June 2012. The headline reads: ‘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)’, as Stella Viljoen (2011: 311) has said in a related context, in its (re)presentations of masculinity. Viljoen’s main concern, to be sure, is not the omission of race, but references to men’s relational commitments and attachments in men’s lifestyle magazines.

On the opening page, the article features a picture of a well-turned-out, unsmiling Jason Statham, famous leading action man, presumably in a tyre factory. The actor is said to be ‘displaying some manly poses in a masculine environment’.² 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 a thing 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 (as well as 5 tips by Victoria Coren in a side bar with a 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. What the article suggests is that all men can be like Statham, if they can get the art right and abide by the rules.

However, the article in *GQ* gives false hope to men. These rules are made up for entertainment, although to the unwary reader they can become a new hegemonic masculine ideal. The rules omit 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 this piece have an unsettling, troubling meaning. Probably, they conceal their true intentions. Is the intention to create a new hegemony? What are black male readers to make of the rules *GQ* lists regarding masculinity? Assess their manhood against them, memorise them, ignore them or laugh? 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 some men might not take the 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 manufacturedness of masculinity.

It is possible to engage in further analysis of the kinds of representations of and omissions about masculinity conveyed in this article. 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 issues of *GQ* and other men's glossies can, of course, be analysed for their productive claims and what they remain quiet about regarding masculinity. Of immediate relevance here is the article's gloss on intra-male differences such as status, sexual orientation and race. However, nothing further needs to be said on the issue here as some of this has been ably undertaken by others already (see, for example, Viljoen 2008). Suffice to say that, though there is an effective admission that masculinity is 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, even essence.

Rethinking 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, namely *Newsweek*.³ The import of the cover of a periodical such as *Newsweek*, as opposed to a men's glossy such as *GQ*, is arguably that the most revelatory sites to understand masculinity ideologies, discourse and cultural repertoires are not 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 and not only when they speak or act dominantly.

The *Newsweek* masculinity edition came out in September 2010. It had several articles on men and masculinities. The articles explicitly concern themselves

with the demands the 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.⁴ The full text on the cover of the *Newsweek* 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 saying, ‘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.’⁵ The piece begins by pointing out some of the answers offered in the media to the question, ‘What’s the matter with men?’ – answers such as men being ‘in decline’, getting ‘stiffed’, the ‘war on boys’, as well as some hard, new realities of changing economies, which are useful in considering the future of men and masculinities in South Africa. There are, in fact, interesting changes facing men in the United States, some of which apply here and elsewhere in the world too.

While these are pertinent facts that reinforce the need to focus on pressures on contemporary masculinities, it is clear, however, 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 local context, without losing sight of global influences that shape localised relations. Neglect of the historical, political, economic and cultural contexts of men’s genders is tantamount to wilful blindness. Social power and powerlessness are possibly the most important shapers of masculinity as much as the thrownness (per Heidegger) of birth. Hence, the question ‘what’s the matter with men?’ asked in the *Newsweek* article is actually ‘what is the matter with the once-unblushing and mighty *white North American* men?’. As Joshua Alston points out in another article in the same issue, 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’.⁶ He argues 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 the definition of black masculinities, a global phenomenon with local inflexions? Of course not. It is not hard to imagine that there are

many individual black men – but, possibly, white individuals too – in the United States and South Africa who are contented 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 a core element of a new prevailing form of masculinity among blacks, it is critical not to be unsympathetic to men's past trauma (a point to which I shall return later). It is commonplace that the lot of black men historically has been characterised by racialised socioeconomic oppression. In South Africa, blacks are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder when compared to whites (Statistics South Africa 2008, 2012, 2013).

Partly as an attempt to nuance the homogenising question in *Newsweek*, partly in response by the presumably American writers of the two pieces under scrutiny, and partly in support of some of their observations, it is necessary to insert here 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 rates of labour-force participation historically have been lower than white men's, dependent on 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. And in contemporary South Africa employment rates are still much higher for white men than for black men (Bhorat, Van der Westhuizen & Jacobs 2009; Statistics South Africa 2015).

It is true that the phenomenon of females staying longer than males in school and overtaking them in numbers in universities is observable not only in the United States. In many African countries where girls' and young women's education has been taken seriously, changes are afoot. It is true, too, that males, especially blacks, in South Africa and the United States tend to have higher rates of premature death from non-natural causes and higher rates of incarceration. Nevertheless, it is absurd to pretend that the 'hostile world' that confronts well-employed men in the United States is the same world unemployed men in Syria, Sudan or South Africa face in their daily lives. Consequently, while there may be overlaps in the racial facts of black American men and South African black men, even that does not tell enough of the story about the local conditions, pressures, frustrations and changes in the political, economic and cultural circumstances that men in the different countries are confronted with. Turning a blind eye to differences among men (including economic, North–South, interracial and intraracial differences) opposes 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 that supposedly speaks for all males. Perhaps, even among students of masculinity, there is a crypto-imperial attitude.

In contrast, Tim Carrigan, Connell and John Lee (1985: 598) note that different histories around the world, such as histories of the women's movement, homosexuality and 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, I want to offer a reading of a curious piece of writing that, unwittingly maybe, points to 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 we might reignite critical studies on black masculinities with the purpose of 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 then deputy editor Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya. The article is curious precisely because it does not explicitly problematise men's genders, for instance, even while it talks of fathers, sons, men, the army and '*baas*' (Afrikaans for [male] boss).⁷ 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.

Moya's article was about 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 was, and remains, the governing party in the Cape Town metropolitan municipality and was gunning to wrestle Johannesburg from the ANC. Moya said 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.

As Moya goes on to assert, 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 only how to weigh 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 if gender and class and sexuality, for instance, were 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 one might believe 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.⁸

Put differently, says Moya, individuals do not only vote 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 psycho-social 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 were doing a good job of delivering what these recovering men need. And yet, what black people need is not only ‘clean, well-run cities’ (and decent jobs, adequate housing, electricity and water), but all that which informs social justice – not only redistribution, but recognition too (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 shapes how black men as a group define themselves. In as much as it has not been dealt with at a collective level, 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 be enabled to be 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 irreproachable. Highlighting the imperative to (re)engage black men from the location of black and African feminism, Moya gestures to the necessity of engaging with black men’s apartheid humiliations with respect, yet stops short of thinking of disgraces that welded themselves to black masculinities as arising also from *patriarchal* capitalist domination. His representations of black men are thus

incomplete. Similar to, for example, Frantz Fanon (1967) and Steve Biko (1996), he is weighed down by the conditions of men as subjects of an almost fetishistic race sign. He then 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 mentioned above, 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 subjects 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 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 with 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 of masculinity can imprison black men.

Many 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 essay referred to at the beginning of this chapter was aimed at showing 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 got to appreciate that in trying to liberate black masculinities it is necessary to actively and simultaneously struggle 'against racial, sexual, heterosexual, class oppression' and aim to develop an 'integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems oppression are interlocking' (Combahee River Collective 1982: 13). Chandra Mohanty (1988) advises us that, just like women, men are not an ahistorical, universal and fixed category of analysis. Patricia Hill Collins' (1989) work suggests that like black women's studies, it is important to try to access, for a start, both Afrocentric/African and feminist thought to analyse and practically engage with black men and masculinities. Kimberlé 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 feminists' 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'. In an interview with Elaine Salo, Amina Mama contends:

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. (Salo 2001: 62)

Answering the question 'can one 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 too. And last, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Josephine Beoku-Betts and Mary J. 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'.⁹

Developing on these and other insights originated within (black) feminism, critical studies of men and masculinity have underlined that, among other things, men are fundamentally gendered, meaning not only raced. There are different, competing masculinities – including subordinate, marginal, complicit and

hegemonic masculinities – in any one context (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Kimmel, Hearn & Connell 2005). Men do oppress other men, not only women. Black men do oppress black women and other black men. In critically engaging with black men in the project of working towards progressive black masculinities, we thus need to be conscious of the entwining 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 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 us to 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 anti-racist 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 oppressive, racist, patriarchal, homophobic and capitalist pasts (Collins 1989).

In conclusion, it seems that what is needed in engaging with black men and masculinity towards developing progressive masculinity is a critical-sympathetic approach towards their realities as racialised and gendered, among other social categories. Clearly, as can be seen in Moya's article, some men hold deeply to the memory of the past and therefore what black men might need is not to make light of that memory, but both 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 and gendered subjects of racial ideologies seems precisely what is needed in order to free them from oppressive heteropatriarchal pasts.

This chapter has also sought to show that for black men to understand power relationships in general, and to grasp their lives in relation to women and gender, it is useful to know what black and African feminisms have said about the interaction of 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 struggle with regard to gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, culture and race. And the history of black and African feminisms suggests to us 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.

Notes

- 1 Mohamed Z, You are what you wear: Power dressing – Romeo Kumalo, executive, *Mail & Guardian*, 13 April 2012.
- 2 Parsons T, Man up! *GQ*, June 2012.
- 3 *GQ* is also a leading global publication, but different editions are published and tailored for local conditions.
- 4 Incidentally, the picture may have influenced the image 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 had revealed his fatherly side when he horsed around with his daughter after the Bulls won the Super 14 trophy in 2010.
- 5 Romano A & Dokoupil T, Men's lib, *Newsweek*, 20 September 2010.
- 6 Alston J, For black men, goal remains the same, *Newsweek*, 20 September 2010.
- 7 Moya F, How I exercise my X: I vote for more than potholes and streetlights, I vote for my scar tissue too, *City Press*, 27 March 2011.
- 8 Emphasis added.
- 9 Emphasis added.