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Masculinities

Stanley Thangaraj

James E. Hayden Chair, Professor, and Director of the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Justice, Stonehill College, Easton, United States of America

Corresponding author: Stanley Thangaraj; e-mail: sthangaraj@stonehill.edu

The study of masculinities is a recent growing field in Anthropology. Within this growing subfield, one must be careful to study masculinities within wide circuits of power. By examining masculinities instead of masculinity, I center the social context and multiplicities necessary to ethnographically chart masculinities without falling into the trap of just centering male bodies and only the social practices of men. Masculinities must be understood in relation to colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism, racism, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. Black feminist theory, women of color feminism, Third World feminism, and queer of color critique provide important theoretical tools in ethnographic research to decipher power and can destabilize singular, hegemonic Western epistemologies about masculinity. Through such a theoretical engagement, I showcase the complexity, multiplicity, and contradictions in the performance of masculinities in the global South, in queer of color communities, in Indigenous communities, and across various institutions in social life.

Keywords global South masculinities, queer and trans masculinities, masculinities of color, queer of color critique, Black feminism, women of color feminism

Audre Lorde (1984), in her insistence to theorize expansive workings of power and challenge the limited views of white feminism, underscores the presence of the "mythical norm" in American society: "In america [*sic*], this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society" (116). The mythical norm is a regulatory, normative, and aspirational category (Butler 1993; Rubin 2017). By showcasing the expansiveness of power across many social categories via the mythical norm, Lorde gives us an important way to theorize masculinities[1] in intersectional ways (Crenshaw 1991).

As anthropologists theorize masculinities, they must address patriarchy as a governing structure. Anthropologist and Gender Studies scholar Inderpal Grewal (2013: 2) foregrounds patriarchy as a "networked form of power" that exists in complex social systems of colonialism, racial capitalism, imperialism, and racism that police men and women. In this regard, Lorde urges us not to fall prey to theorizing one category—such as masculinities or patriarchy—without attending to other social phenomena (such as racism, colonialism, and nationalism) and other social categories

1 I intentionally pluralize *masculinities* to showcase the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity within the category (Lowe 1996). I use the singular form *masculinity* in various places to signal its representation in essentialized ways in some social contexts.

(such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and religion). Lorde's conception of the "mythical norm" is a reminder to be attentive to the multiplicities and contradictions embedded within normative practices so that we are aware of the "distortions" we practice by not accounting for the interconnectedness and expansiveness of power.

Therefore, scholars must address the heterogeneity within masculinity while also addressing the patriarchal structures and the "patriarchal dividends" (Connell 1995) for cisgender men. In this regard, I examine masculinities, but not just as a substitute for men or maleness. Instead, taking seriously Lorde's theoretical points, I chart a terrain for the anthropology of masculinities with an intersectional interrogation of patriarchy, race, class, gender, sexuality, nationalism, ethnonationalism, colonialism, and imperialism.

Trajectories of Scholarship

Raewyn Connell, in her foundational contribution *Masculinities* (1995), theorizes masculinities as a plural, hierarchical social practice. She presents the categories of dominant, subordinated, complicit, and marginalized masculinities. Yet Connell's categories of masculinities as organic and neatly bounded units enable various distortions and a sense of one-dimensionality. When discussing men and masculinities, the category of "man" and "male" can be hegemonic and used in a variety of ways, where practices of masculinities can simultaneously occupy places of hegemony, subservience, and resistance based on one's race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, indigeneity, ability, and social location (Arnaldo Jr. 2020; Miller 2001; Tengan 2008). Difference, as theorized in Black feminism and women of color feminism, is a foundational theoretical practice that allows us to make sure we use an anti-essentialist, intersectional theoretical and methodological toolkit in the study of masculinities (Hong 2006; Lorde 1984).

While there has been a robust engagement with femininities in the global South and in the global North, Anthropologist Matthew Gutmann (1997) and Medical Anthropologist Marcia Inhorn (2012) rightly note that there is a dearth in the anthropological literature concerning masculinities, even though anthropology has long theorized culture through (white, male) ethnographers' accounts of (global South) men. In this regard, Gutmann (1997, 400) provides an important chronology to the study of men as "engendered and engendering subjects" in anthropology. He charts the development of studies of men and masculinities from the 1920s to the 1990s and notes the importance of engaging with feminist theory while pushing the study of masculinities with regard to "national character; divisions of labor; family, kinship, and friendship ties; the body; and contests over power" (387). This article takes seriously Guttman's points about the dearth of masculinities studies in anthropology while engaging with Lorde to pay attention to the ways power circulates in multiple, contradictory ways through masculinities.

Global South, Diasporic, and Indigenous Masculinities

I begin by examining ethnographies of masculinities in the global South.[2] Observing *Kuchipudi* dance in a Brahmin village in Andhra Pradesh, Harshita Kamath (2019) illustrates, by interjecting queer of color critique (Roderick Ferguson 2004; Johnson 2003; Reddy 2011) and Third World feminism (Mohanty 2003), how Telegu Brahmin men perform normative and hegemonic Brahmin masculinities that exceed Western epistemologies of masculinities. While patriarchy and femininity are crucial in theorizing masculinities, masculinities and femininities are neither monolithic nor only in relations

2 For interesting new scholarship on South Asia and masculinities, see Mani and Krishnamurthy (2021).

of opposition to each other. Kamath ethnographically charts how one important rite of passage for young Brahmin men involves dressing up and impersonating women in Kuchipudi dance. As a result, Brahmin men embody femininity to claim cisgender, heterosexual, higher-caste Brahmin masculinities. Unlike the dominant trends within Western scholarship on masculinities, repudiating femininity is not vital to securing masculinities in all patriarchal social contexts.

Anthropological investigations of masculinities, while challenging simple binary logics of gender, must also systematically decipher the local context and local intimacies with gender performance while accounting for the role of colonialism, imperialism, race, and transnationalism in suturing masculinities both in the Western and non-Western contexts (Thangaraj 2015, 2020, 2022). For example, Harjant Gill (2020) illustrates the multiple masculine, ethnic, and religious comportments and practices embodied by Punjabi Sikh men as they traverse national boundaries. Gill's article illustrates how Sikh men mobilize the beard and the turban as forms of "cultural citizenship" across a wide variety of contexts of "home," nation(s), and diaspora (Maira 2009; Thangaraj 2015). Thus, the relation of nations to each other and the geopolitical context of masculinities must be conceptualized and contextualized to understand these gendered practices locally. In her historical investigation of leisure, race, Philippines, and US empire, Historian Linda España-Maram (2006) uses the case of Filipino boxers and taxi dance halls to illustrate how Filipinx racial identities and masculinities were always performed against the background of Spanish colonialism and US empire. For Filipino boxers in early-1900s United States, the boxing ring was one safe site to challenge white masculinity through fisticuffs. It was also a way to invert the US colonial representation of the Philippines and Filipinx communities as "little Brown friend" (Arnaldo Jr. 2016).

This expansion of scale to understand the local must also deliberately center Indigenous knowledge and practice. Ethnographically charting Indigenous masculinities provides an interrogation of settler-colonialism, the nation-state, and sovereignty (Tengan 2008; Uperesa 2022). For example, Kim Anderson, Robert Alexander Innes, and John Swift (2012) address how Indigenous men are in conversation to create "*Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin*" (Ojibway phrase that the authors translate as "I am a kind man"). Such a practice is vital to locating masculinities and Indigeneity in Toronto, Canada, that engage critically with ongoing settler-colonialism while disrupting the colonial representation of Indigenous masculinities as dangerous (Anderson, Innes, and Swift 2012). Anthropologists must be careful not to transplant colonial imaginations of non-white and global South masculinities that erase histories of white male violence while making Western white masculinities the (prized) normative category (Smith 2021).

Historically, Western colonialism and Western imperialism have conjured up monolithic "Orientalist" images of the "Muslim" and the "Arab" man across the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region as well as parts of South Asia (Said 1978). How we understand masculinities, especially in the SWANA region and in South Asia, must be decolonized and de-imperialized from the imperatives of Western imperialism (Atshan 2020; Segall 2019). The European colonial enterprise and contemporary US imperialism hail Muslim masculinities by flattening the difference within Muslim communities. As a result, Muslim and Arab men are depicted as dangerous, ruthless, and misogynistic, in juxtaposition to Muslim and Arab women who must be saved from such dangerous masculinities (Abu-Lughod 2013).

Farha Ghannam (2013) offers a brilliant ethnography of masculinities in post–Arab Spring/post-revolution Egypt that exposes the limitations of Western epistemologies of the region. In 2011, many communities across the SWANA region organized and demanded structural change and greater accountability. This massive uprising was named "the Arab Spring." Ghannam theoretically

and ethnographically analyzes masculinities in a small neighborhood in Cairo to understand the local in relation to the national and the geo-political. While there has been limited work on young boys and masculinities across the anthropological literature and especially in the SWANA region, Ghannam connects practices of masculinities with class, national politics, postcolonialism, gender, revolutionary time, health, and aging. She connects the socialization of young and older men in the small neighborhood in relation to the contingencies of the Arab Spring, respect for elders, educational status, health, and appropriate times for fisticuffs. Refuting a singular understanding of Arab masculinities as dangerous, threatening, and equivalent, Ghannam provides an anti-essentialist framework that attends to labor migrations, local revolutions, health, and politics of heterosexual respectability.

Inhorn's (2012) research on infertility in the SWANA region foregrounds an understanding of masculinities in relation to the social context of ecology, toxicity, and war. By carefully examining the social pressures on infertile and childless couples in a society that values reproduction and children, Inhorn illuminates the ways that Arab men in childless marriages practice masculinities centered on deeply intimate, supportive, and expansive forms of caring and connectivity. Through the concept of "conjugal connectivity," Inhorn details how childless men manage their familial vulnerability and pressures for children through such affirming, supportive connections with their wives while working with reproductive technology to hopefully improve their fertility. Inhorn provides us with an important, expansive, and wide list of practices of masculinity that is not singular, one-dimensional, or essentialized. When it is their wives who are infertile, the Arab men care for them, support them when others lash out against them for being unable to bear children, refuse to divorce them or have more wives, and offer shared anxieties and vulnerabilities that strengthen their marital bond. This counters the dominant Western stereotype of Arab men and Muslim men as stoic, who readily leave infertile partners, and with little to no affectional reservoirs.

In this sense, we see how failure within the realm of heterosexual reproduction provides insight into practices of masculinities connected to larger geopolitical contexts and the local environment. These ethnographic projects point to the importance of feminist science studies and queer feminist science studies in critical investigations of gender (Rubin 2017). It is important to theorize the history of race, capitalism, and ecology to understand health, health disparities, race, and masculinities in relation to normative-national masculinities and normative-global masculinities. Vanessa Agard-Jones (forthcoming) theorizes Black masculinities by investigating how men manage infertility in Martinique. Systemically investigating Western crop plantations as a site for profit, Agard-Jones illuminates the increased toxicity to the island nation as a result of increased use of pesticides, fertilizers, and other (unregulated) chemicals in the natural landscape. This toxicity deeply impacts men's fertility and destabilizes the strong masculinities associated with such crop labor. Through reproductive failure,[3] masculinities must be understood in relation to how men cope with infertility in relation to shifting job opportunities, where there is an erosion of social services and an increase in the toxicity of the local environment.

Understanding the dynamic shifts in capitalism, expansion of industries in the global South, the removal of social welfare guards, and the increasing importance of finance centers across the world is vital to understanding how normative and non-normative masculinities are negotiated on the ground. For the financially elite Vietnamese men in Kimberly Hoang's (2015) ethnography of the sex industry, the practices of masculinities are informed by Asian ascendence, Western financial

3 See Jack Halberstam's (2012) *Queer Art of Failure*.

crisis, postcoloniality, racialization of Asia, pleasures in heterosexual courting, and the desires to claim powerful Vietnamese masculinities in relation to global capital. By illuminating the various niches within the sex industry, Hoang demonstrates how masculinities are negotiated through race and class where the elite bars cater to Vietnamese and Asian men. On the lowest end of the sex industry, the sex workers cater to white backpackers whose performance of white masculinities is part of the white savior syndrome to save Vietnamese women by financially supporting them. With the hierarchies within the sex industry, white masculinities are no longer the prized and cherished category across the globe.

Constancio R. Arnaldo Jr. (2016, 2020) addresses the transnational resignification of Asian and Asian American masculinities through the case of Philippine boxing legend Manny "Pac-Man" Pacquiao in relation to white normative sporting masculinities and other racialized masculinities. Arnaldo Jr. brings in queer of color critique, women of color feminism, queer diasporic critique, and Black feminism to emphasize the multiplicities of masculinities in the boxing ring and in the larger (global and diasporic) audience that showcase the differing and overlapping manifestations of masculinities within nationalistic and ethno-nationalistic sites (Roderick Ferguson 2004, 2018; Gopinath 2005; Hong 2006; Lorde 1984; Pierce-Baker 2000). Positioning Pacquiao's muscular Philippine Christian masculinities in relation to the racialization of Latino and Black masculinities, Arnaldo Jr. deeply explores the ways Filipinx Americans invert Asian American emasculation[4] by denigrating other masculinities of color through sexual slurs and homophobia. As a result, as theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2003) discusses, gay masculinities are already an essential component for structuring heterosexual masculinities (see also Pascoe 2011).

Queering Masculinities

As we conduct our ethnographies, we must be wary of the very real trap of heteropatriarchy in our theorization of masculinities. To destabilize the one-dimensionality prevalent in renderings of gender, we must account for both nationalism and ethno-nationalism while interrogating the power of the medical designation of sex and matters of disability (Açıksöz 2020; Roderick Ferguson 2004; Rubin 2017). We have to guard against falling into the trap of the biomedical interpellation of "male" and its conjunction with "masculinities." Rather, anthropological investigations would benefit from systematically examining masculinities as social practice, comportment, and signification. What are the possibilities for female masculinities and trans masculinities (Halberstam 1998; Rand 2013)? It is integral to queer masculinities in a way that accentuates masculinities as a multitude of social practices that operate outside binary, essentialist thinking while acknowledging trans masculinities (Kumar 2015).

Instead of essentializing trans masculinities, Miriam Abelson (2016) addresses the heterogeneity within transmasculine communities through the varying relationships trans men have with feminism. Abelson explains that for some trans men, their practice of trans masculinities is directly connected to feminism: "It entailed not wanting to appear as threatening to women and being conscientious of taking up too much space in various contexts… . The most common expression of being a feminist man was to critique and intervene in the misogynist behavior of other men, with a particular focus on other trans men" (2016, 18). Those coming to their transmasculine identity without feminist communities considered feminism to denigrate transmasculine identities. Accordingly, some of

4 See David Eng (2001) on racial castration and Asian American emasculation.

Abelson's (2016) interlocutors practiced masculinities through transmisogyny by disparaging trans women.

While there is important emerging work on masculinities as the perpetrators of violence (R. Brian Ferguson 2021; Maringira 2021), the scholarship on trans men and trans masculinities implores us to consider men and trans men as victims of state and everyday violence (Açıksöz 2020; Halberstam 2005). Cultural theorist C. Riley Snorton and sociologist Jin Haritaworn (2013) illustrate the frequent and commonplace material and corporeal violence against trans communities. With regard to symbolic, epistemic, and bodily violence, queer feminist science studies scholar David Rubin (2019) elaborates how the medical model perceives the individual as the site of transformation. This results in a failure to heed the social context that trans men and intersex men inhabit. In this regard, Rubin identifies the paucity of knowledge and literacy within medical institutions on how to support and care for trans men and intersex men.

With institutions as sites of gender formations (Pascoe 2011), we see how the state, its categories, and the biopolitical realm of knowledge production reproduce cisgender identity, middle-class respectability, and heterosexuality in the management of masculinities. African American studies and performance studies scholar Marlon Bailey (2013) challenges such representations of gender by capturing the ways that queer masculinities of color, specifically Black and Latinx, challenge simplistic gender logics (see also Allen 2011). Providing an important intervention into studying urban queer culture outside of New York City and San Francisco (Manalansan 2003), Bailey (2013) investigates the vibrant ballroom culture in the economically struggling city of Detroit. Instead of seeing Detroit as merely a site of precarity, Bailey underscores the pleasures, desires, and world-making of queer men of color and queer of color communities in Detroit. The performances on the floor in queer ballroom spaces destabilize binary logics of male/female, gay/straight, and cisgender/queer through a multitude of shifting masculinities, femininities, trans masculinities, and trans femininities in a single body, across bodies, and across the spectator space.

It is thus important to note that hegemonic masculinities are not always privileged. Performance studies scholar Kareem Khubchandani (2020), in his ethnographic investigation of queer leisure spaces in Bangalore/Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Western sites, captures the terrain of cool, pleasure, intimacy, and identity. Khubchandani centers South Asian idioms, South Asian desires, and pleasures that exceed the confines of Western homonormativity. Both Khubchandani and Bailey encourage us to rethink socialities, social connections, and forms of intimacy that foreground queer forms of kinship, queer embodiments, and queer masculinities that do not privilege normative national masculinities and the "mythical norm" (Lorde 1984).

Conclusion

Black feminism, women of color feminism, and queer of color critique (Roderick Ferguson 2004, 2018; Hong 2006; Lorde 1984) offer important ways to conceptualize and reconceptualize masculinities by foregrounding how difference operates within the category of masculinity, challenging nationalistic and ethno-nationalistic framings of gender that exclude queer and non-normative formations, and illustrating its connections with other social categories. Thus, we can conceptualize masculinities within circuits of local and global power while staying attuned to the various desires without being bounded and contained by the nation and its organizing logic (Chuh 2003; Gopinath 2018; Montez de Oca 2013). Anthropological research on masculinities must cross over various disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and methodological grounds to understand masculinities

as a social practice, as sites of pleasure and desire, and as social power that includes a wider assortment of actors and histories beyond just cisgender men. Our study of masculinities must not be in service of the mythical norm.

Masculinities must be theorized and ethnographically charted as a social practice that is not dependent on just men—it can be something that girls, boys, men, women, trans people, nonbinary people, and genderqueer people practice in different, shifting contexts of power. If masculinities as a category and an identification is to stick around, it must unstick from coherence and from the normative associations with white, cisgender, heterosexual, fit, Christian, and affluent men (Lorde 1984). Studying masculinities requires that we stick to the flexibility of the social practice and foreground uncontrollable epistemologies to more fully understand the powerful, important, dynamic, and shifting terrains of masculinities.

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