

# Materiality, Morality and Masculinities in the Social Transformations of War in Angola

Men and Masculinities

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## Abstract

In this article we use men's changing investments in desired material objects as a window into the changing moralities underpinning masculinities in the wake of Angola's civil war. Drawing on participant observation and life history interviews with middle-aged men working in informal commerce in the city of Huambo, we examine the roles of land, houses, and cars in the construction of different styles of masculinity. We argue that analyzing differences among men's investments in these objects provides useful insights into how men construct multireferential masculinities in a contested postcolonial, postwar context in which questions of gendered cultural hegemony are contentious and complex. These masculinities map onto competing, yet overlapping, sets of moral values that rework preexisting gendered cultural forms and practices to cope with the social and economic consequences of the war and to express aspirations for disparate modernities.

## Keywords

Africa, anthropology, ethnography, hegemonic masculinity, marriage, religion, war, fatherhood, identity

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In this article we seek to understand how the socioeconomic effects indirectly associated with a long civil war in Angola affected masculinities. Most work on masculinities and war examines violence or militarization, and typically focuses on men as soldiers and veterans. In contrast, we are interested in discerning the gendered social transformation that the civil war in Angola constituted for a generation of men in the Central Highlands, viewed over a longer time period than studies of masculinities and war generally adopt. Specifically, we show that men's investment choices reveal different styles of masculinity, each of which represents an approach to coping with the gendered dilemmas generated by the civil war.

The civil war in Angola began immediately upon independence in 1975, although hostilities between competing independence movements dated to the independence war (1961–1974). The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), who took control of the old colonial state soon after independence, was arrayed against the insurgent National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).<sup>1</sup> Cuba and the Soviet Union supported the MPLA during the Cold War, while apartheid South Africa and the United States supported UNITA. Both armies enacted large-scale, compulsory male conscription and intentional destruction of infrastructure, industry and agriculture, and the country rapidly urbanized as civilians fled the fighting in the countryside. The war lasted for 27 years, ending with an MPLA military victory in 2002.

During the war, the oil sector rose as the most important economic motor, with important implications for the Angolan labor market and hence, masculinity. As James Ferguson has argued, the oil sector in Angola is the archetype of a “socially thin” (2006, p. 36 and pp. 198–202) neoliberal extractive industry, whose revenues bring few direct benefits to the general population, aside from regeneration of infrastructure. The President largely controlled its revenues through the national oil company, Sonangol (Soares de Oliveira 2015). While the country's economy was devastated, the war became increasingly costly. The indebted socialist government began a “leveraged liberalization” (de Grassi & Ovardia 2017, p. 119) in the late 1980s, reluctantly and under pressure from international creditors, with currency devaluation, price liberalization, trade liberalization and privatizations primarily benefitting the MPLA party-state elite. This series of processes severely limited men's options of livelihood during and after the war.

Following the war, many members of Angola's elite developed an ostentatious style of masculine consumption, which the broader population has both resented and emulated (Soares de Oliveira 2015). As Soares de Oliveira has found, much of this elite projects an image of globalized entrepreneurship, enriching themselves even as many simply subcontract to foreign firms. Nevertheless, the archetype of the self-made (masculine) entrepreneur has become powerful. In contrast, displacement from rural birthplaces during the war and resettlement in informal urban housing shaped the masculinities of the middle-aged men working in informal commerce with whom we worked during this research. Wartime destruction of colonial-era infrastructure, and its subsequent rapid, oil-fueled regeneration, compounded this

experience. During the war they, alongside many in the region, were forced to improvise meagre livelihoods in the informal sector, increasingly paired with agriculture after the end of the war. The contrast between Angola's party-elite masculinity of conspicuous consumption and the options available to most men was striking, and they felt it deeply.

In response to this tension, the men in this study performed a number of different, overlapping, multireferential, and often morally contentious masculinities (Aboim 2009). In particular, they each had to manage pressures for reciprocity from broader kin groups, the rewards and demands of the male breadwinner ideal, and the changing social role of cash and commodities undermining older gendered hierarchies and claims to modernity. To analyze how men sought to manage these tensions we examine three commodities in which they invested economically, socially, and in terms of embodied style and identity: land, houses, and cars. We identify two signature styles from the "full house" of styles (Gould 1996, cited in Ferguson 1999, p. 20), which reveal some of the gendered social fissures the war produced: the modern, churchgoing, man in a companionate marriage; and the playful, consumerist, heavy-drinking womanizer. To understand how masculinities changed during the war beyond violence and militarization, we use Stephen Lubkemann's idea that wars produce new "conditions of sociation" (2008, p. 216) out of what has gone before. War is not just socially destructive, he argues, rather, it severs some relations, reinforces others, and allows new connections to be made, changing both the possibilities and consequences of interactions. Men pursue masculine life projects in this transforming environment, informed both by prewar cultural scripts and by their changing circumstances.

James Ferguson (1999) thinks about such life projects in terms of embodied cultural styles, and we draw on his argument about the micropolitical economic and stylistic aspects of embodied practice. They require the maintenance of economic relations with significant others, such as deference to and patronage of elders. Yet they also incorporate stylistic elements that signal particular social allegiances—Ferguson examines a deferential traditionalist cultural style associated with allegiances to rural relations, and a flamboyantly cosmopolitan style. These styles of masculinity require investments over time, both to master their embodied aspects and to build up allegiances—they cannot be improvised. We draw on this idea of investment, which in a complex and contested postwar setting reveals the "center of gravity" in a multireferential model of masculinity: which influences and allegiances ultimately predominate.

We particularly focus on commodities when examining these investments. Material objects are central to how men perform masculine styles and produce themselves as particular types of men. Different objects and their uses lend themselves to different relationships, and thus help organize relationships between people. For example, as Christine Jeske found in neoliberal South Africa (2016), many men in KwaZulu-Natal began to invest in cars rather than cattle partly to strategically hedge their obligations to kin, because cattle can be transferred to or shared with kin,

whereas a car cannot. A focus on commodities also links our analysis of the micro-political economy of masculinity with the macropolitical economy of postwar Angola. As Timothy Burke (1996) argues, the meanings of goods, their social power to shape relations between people, and perceptions of need for particular commodities are part of historically constituted discourses of power that are related to the domination of capitalism. Large-scale legacies of colonialism, mission Christianity, historical dynamics of capitalism in the region, and recent dynamics of extractive capitalism shaped men's perception and use of goods in Huambo. Burke argues that goods form part of the common sense of hegemony in Gramscian terms, as part of an unspoken social context. However, in postwar contexts that have undergone rapid and divisive social transformations, it is often unclear which social forces will wield the "epistemic power" (Lubkemann 2008, p. 317) to produce cultural hegemony. It may be true in many settings that "objects make people" (Miller 2010, p. 155) through nonverbal interaction with particular "systems of things" (p. 156). However, as the conditions of sociation shift during and after war, the availability and significance of goods change too, and objects can become disruptive.

Examining how men take up and invest in commodities thus provides a window into how a gendered social order transforms in the wake of war, and into the key fissures and conflicts produced as macro and micro powers intersect. As Bianca Murillo (2017) has argued, it is important to take account of how relations of domination and the interests of others shape African cultures and politics of consumption, but also how the latter are products of Africans' own agency, agendas, and social relations. We have chosen to focus on land, houses, and cars in this article, because they were the focus of particular discussion, desire, and moral judgement. They also required significant, long-term investments, signaling quite clear differences in masculine life projects, which were linked to particular social and cultural allegiances. In addition, the spatial dynamics of the Angolan civil war and its aftermath affected them all in ways that were central to the tensions these men faced.

In the next section of this article, we briefly outline our methodology. In the following three sections we discuss the three key commodities in turn: land, housing, and automobiles. We analyze how each was strategically taken up in different styles of masculine life project and how these uses related to moral contests around the changing contours of postwar masculinities. We conclude by discussing the multi-referential, overlapping, and contested nature of masculinities in postwar Angola and how the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) helps us to understand the nature of masculine dominance in such a context.

## **Methodology**

Our focus in this article is on a group of men living in the suburbs of Huambo, Angola's second city, which in 2014 had a population of 665,574 (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2014). Huambo is located in Angola's central highlands, its most populous rural region. Most of our participants fought for the MPLA government's

army in the late 1970s or 1980s. At the time of research, they were aged late 30s to mid-50s and were engaged in precarious informal work, earning enough to support the basic needs of their households but little more. The men worked selling nonfood goods in city markets, as motorbike taxi drivers, and as informal money changers. Most supplemented this income with subsistence agriculture.

Our arguments are based on ethnographic data from 2012 with around 40 men, and on a return visit in 2015, when we accompanied four of these men to visit and interview their broader kin groups in their rural home villages (*kimbos*). We first met these men in and around the markets where they worked, which were freely accessible to us as foreigners and strangers, and where they had significant amounts of free time in which to welcome us. We gradually began socializing with them several times a week in their workplaces and also in their neighborhoods, at football matches and in their churches. We selected four groups of market traders to work with and included increasing numbers of men as we became more integrated into their social networks. We selected two groups from a city-center market, and two from a market in the suburbs, mainly because of the importance of different city neighborhoods for identity and social prestige. Towards the end of the first period of research we carried out life history interviews with around half of them, since we were interested in the impact of the war on the whole life courses of men.

We also interviewed and conducted participant observation with younger men in the markets, with UNITA veterans and middle-class men, to discover how the cohort of men we were most focused on was viewed from other subject positions. In addition, we interviewed key informants such as faith leaders, local agricultural and veterans' affairs government officials, and NGO staff, who were particularly knowledgeable about the kind of men we were most interested in. We were careful in our research not to raise issues that could prove traumatic for these men, particularly in terms of their experience of violence during the war. We also use pseudonyms for all of the men quoted in this article, due to the potential dangers of political dissent in Angola. All of the men were aware of the uses that the data was to be put to, and were glad to have the chance to tell their stories in order to counter what they saw as the distortions of official histories advanced by the MPLA party-state.

## **Land, Gerontocracy and Intertwined Urban and Rural Visions**

We will discuss two main styles of masculine life project in this article. Most prominently we will discuss that of churchgoing men who maintained some links to their rural kin, but most of whom were keen to maintain their urban residence and build a life as a wise and respectable elder man supporting a monogamous conjugal household. We contrast this group in subsequent sections with those whose masculinities were more oriented to displaying symbols of monetary wealth, womanizing, and generally being willing to publicly rebel against norms of dignified male behavior that the churchgoing men advocated.

Most of our participants subsisted partly on the products of their family's land. The majority of these men's families had fled the countryside during the war, and day-to-day survival in towns and cities relied largely on the cash economy and limited subsistence agriculture. They purchased goods brought by armored government convoy, since unaccompanied travel risked attack by UNITA forces. Despite these dangers, their elder relatives made risky returns to their land during the war, to harvest produce and to safeguard against competing land claims. After the war, however, access to the land became possible again. Many men spoke of this access as one of the key benefits of peace—now, even if they failed to profit in their informal businesses, they would not starve. Their reliance on the land meant maintaining relationships with rural kin, of varying degrees of closeness. João (42 years old), for instance, was not directly involved in agriculture in his relatively remote home village of Cassongue, about 160 km from Huambo. However, he sent his family cash contributions; in return, they sent produce grown on their land.

Exercising control over his eldest son was a key part of João's father's masculine life project, but João was keen to maintain his autonomy: upon leaving the army, he had resolved that it was undignified for a man of his age to take orders from anyone. This resolution discouraged long-term investment in land as a commodity around which to orient his life. João's elderly father complained that younger generations did not value or maintain the family's land. This was a constant refrain in the villages that we visited, and in interviews with staff of rural development institutions. Young people were said to lack the patience to watch crops grow, craving more immediate success. João's father was the *soba* (village headman) in Cassongue, and João nodded when his father spoke of João's eventual return to the village to succeed him as *soba*. However, as soon as we got into the car to return to Huambo, João confided, "I'm never coming back here." He explained that making a living from the land was too hard and that his life would be in danger from sorcery attacks by those envious of his relative success in the city.<sup>2</sup> In addition, in these areas land is inherited through the male line and controlled by elder men—giving them leverage over the younger male kin who work the land.

Nando (40 years old) maintained a closer relationship to the land. He was preparing to retire to his *kimbo*, Honde, about 130 km from Huambo and difficult to access by car. After years of supporting his younger siblings' education, he felt he could not afford to retire in the city; instead, he was investing in cattle to support his retirement. He supported his kin despite the remoteness of his village, including by bringing them a large water tank from Huambo via motorbike. On our visit to the village, he showed pride in his popularity, noting that his presence and conversation were in demand to the point of a responsibility to eat a maize meal with each family to avoid complaints. Unlike his humbler persona in the city, where his opinions were often contradicted by colleagues, in the village he was confident and gregarious, keen to show us his social connections. The situational nature of his status illustrates a marked difference between masculine styles cultivated with a view to retirement in the *kimbo* and those cultivated for city residence: whereas the latter commanded

respect in both city and *kimbo*, the former tended to command respect only in the *kimbo*. Nando had inherited his land in the village from his father, who died when Nando was young. Thus, investing in land did not require deference to his father; he both accrued masculine respect in his village and solved some of his economic problems. Doing so required building up his social ties in the village to facilitate his good reception there upon his retirement, including maintaining respect for masculine norms that were respected in his village and fulfilling his obligations for reciprocity.

A pronounced ambivalence about family lands, and the masculine cultural styles they might support, lies under the various roles land plays in men's life projects. All our participants—even those planning to retire to their *kimbo*—represented rural living as backward and undeveloped. As Nando explained, “most people who live in the countryside are *burros* (stupid, literally ‘donkeys’),” needing city dwellers to “show them what civilization is” through the example of their own living.<sup>3</sup> This discourse echoes through what Jon Schubert (2015) calls the discourse of the “New Angola” promoted by the ruling MPLA elite, massively enriched by the country's oil wealth. This view disparages the rural hinterland of Angola and the speaking of African languages. True “Angolan-ness” is associated with the coastal cities, the speaking of Portuguese, and monetary riches. This vision is an influential aspiration (Soares de Oliveira 2015); many see it as a model of social mobility to emulate.

A different representation of the *kimbo* and the land stands against the “New Angola” vision. Our participants felt anxiety about the social role of money, including its threat to ethics of sharing and respect, male gerontocracies, and the idealized life course. As in many settings in Africa, age hierarchies in Huambo are important in organizing gender relations. The male life unfolds via transitions among life stages, such as initiation rituals, marriage, and transition to eldership. The gradual lifetime accumulation of wisdom both shapes and is considered to morally justify these transitions.

Our participants considered that the extreme wealth of the MPLA elite produced a dangerous greed in Angolans, discouraging many people, especially the young, from the hard work and patience necessary to gain social advancement over time. The *kimbo*'s association with an ancestral past paradoxically gave it moral legitimacy, suggesting a different and more moral future guided by wise male elders, with respect for intrinsic human worth and the gendered age hierarchy, rather than for wealth.

Crucially, these qualities seemed to be embodied in the land itself. The land, for many, operated as a metonym for a lost, idealized rural moral order.<sup>4</sup> João's father for example, did not refer to the *kimbo* or the countryside, but to the *terra*—land—to represent both. Many city-dwelling men we spoke with expressed anxiety about the imported food that had grown in importance since the end of the war. In a typical exchange, Paulo (37 years old) asked whether we ate the frozen chickens sold in Huambo supermarkets. He suggested that we should be afraid of the antibiotics used to conserve them, and that “even mineral water has chemicals in it that are bad for

you, and you can feel pain in your kidneys if you drink too much of it.” Jamba (49 years old) said that farmers had forgotten that they were growing food to feed their fellow men, and instead used dangerous chemicals to increase their yields and make more money—poisoning their fellow men in the process.

Conversely, the men saw food from ancestral lands and the idealized rural society more generally as free of the symbolic and corporeal corruptions of money. It was valued by all, including those who managed to grow it without maintaining other dependency relationships with the land of origin. As Paulo told us:

“In the *kimbos* they only eat what they grow there, and it’s all natural, they eat worse, but their health is better, they live longer. People here [in the city] just fall down one day and they find out that it was hypertension, or people get diabetes from eating too much sugar.”

Investments in land, then, held a complex and ambivalent set of meanings for these men’s masculinities. Most wanted to evade the submission to elders’ authority required by a strong material investment in the land, and the implications of backwardness and failure implied in rural residence. Yet the land remained an important repository for the symbols and values underpinning their preferred masculine life course, based on the gradual accumulation of wisdom and respect as one aged. It also helped them to resist the money-driven values which they saw as threatening both their status and respect, and the moral and physical health of society. They therefore chose to retain a connection to it.

## **Houses: Breadwinner Struggles and Respectable Urban Masculinity**

Although these men kept the land somewhat at arm’s length, houses were much more central to how senior masculinities were constructed in the city. They were a key site where the breadwinner ideal was performed, a tool for performing the ideal and for managing potentially problematic conjugal relations stemming from tensions around breadwinning. Houses were also key demonstrations of social status and modernity, or exclusion and backwardness, and a means to challenge such exclusions. Our participants emphasized two principal events after leaving the army: finding a house in the city and establishing a household. Although none of them were married when they entered the army, most married shortly after leaving. A “successful” marriage required purchasing (not renting) a house and having children quickly. They had entered the army as adolescents but wanted to arrive in civilian society as men, and a house was a nonnegotiable part of achieving adult manhood.<sup>5</sup>

Investing in houses implied investment in particular sets of relationships: in the breadwinner ideal, a particularly important aspect of masculinity, men are the main providers for a household that includes children, and sometimes nieces or nephews or an elderly parent. As in the “classic” breadwinner model, there was, in discourse at least, an implied balance of responsibilities and rights. The husband ensured that household members were fed, clothed, and educated. In return, other household



members—meaning women and junior men—submitted to his authority. As Lisa Lindsay found in her study of railwaymen in mid-twentieth century Yorubaland (2003), there were private and public aspects to breadwinning. It was important for men's authority in the household and their sense of themselves as successful and modern, and it was also important in earning their peers' respect. More broadly, it shaped their disappointed expectations of the income and employment that the government should help them to attain.

In practice, there were complex gendered struggles for ascendancy both within and beyond the household, and men often felt that their position as head of the household was threatened. These struggles involved a distinction between one's duties "in the house" and those "out of the house." One line of tension was between loyalties to the conjugal household and to matrilineal kin outside the house. In matrilineal descent systems, property and statuses are inherited by a man's sister's son, rather than by his own son. This can mean that people are keen to keep wealth within the matriline and have primary kin loyalties beyond the conjugal household to their matrikin. In Huambo in 2012, descent was contested: churches and the government preferred descent running from parents to children within the nuclear family. Many people still felt important allegiances to their matriline, however, despite its stigma as backward and immoral. Thus, men often muttered darkly about their wives spending money on their brothers rather than on the household. Yet those same men might praise contributions to their households from their own sisters. This demonstrates, as in Stephan Miescher's work on Presbyterian masculinities in Ghana (2005), that men managed conflicting pressures by adopting divergent aspects of masculinity situationally, and by making some concession to contradictory pressures for reciprocity both from the matriline and the conjugal household. However, the strength of the breadwinner ideal meant that most men prioritized the conjugal household.

Men also confronted a tension between spending money on their wives and children or on their girlfriends and womanizing. Men doing the latter were called *mulherengos* (from *mulher*—"woman") and were subject to moral censure from the many men of their generation who were committed churchgoers. Their failure to spend one's earnings "in the house" was one source of this censure. This meant adopting a quite different model of masculinity, as did prioritizing spending on one's matrilineal kin.

Thus, the masculinity of the responsible and respectable breadwinning man was constructed in the house, which acted as a symbol of social attachments and a tool for their realization. Beyond houses as constellations of relationships, the location and type of construction also had important symbolic overtones. Most participants lived in the *bairros*, or suburban and peri-urban parts of Huambo: mostly improvised neighborhoods outside the old colonial center of the city (the *cidade*), without paved roads, sanitation, running water, or electricity. The *bairros* had long represented an incomplete transition to modern, urban living, and maintained visible vestiges of rurality (see Roque 2011 for a similar account in Benguela). In the *cidade*, by

contrast, there were still many Portuguese colonial brick buildings, principally reserved for the “civilized” —in practice, overwhelmingly white—population in the colonial period (Neto 2012). They had paved roads, and the electricity and running water typically worked. The character of a neighborhood represented those who lived there, and most of these men wished that their neighborhoods were more like the *cidade*—thinking that it suggested something about their social standing and modern-ness.

Another important aspect of a house, over which men had slightly more control, was the material of construction. Most of these men had adobe houses, the cheapest option and the only one most of them could afford. While fairly reliable, adobe often developed structural problems over time. Most would have preferred a house built from cement blocks, and some were saving for one. Such a house was called a “definitive” house, inferring that adobe houses were merely provisional. As David Morton argues in his study of house building in Maputo (2019), building a house out of blocks was an attempt to combat exclusion from participation in modernity and to overcome the stigmatizing spatial divisions that were a legacy of Portuguese colonialism. Claudia Gastrow (2017), in her study in Angola’s capital city of Luanda, similarly argues that building a cement block house in the suburbs constitutes a claim on participation in “good urbanism,” seen as a prerequisite for political belonging in the city, where the *bairro* (or *mussequ*e in the case of Luanda) neighborhoods were often threatened by demolition.

José (49 years old) was in the final stages of building an impressive “definitive” house in 2012: it had two bedrooms, a large living room and a kitchen, with a veranda outside and an outbuilding with two additional bedrooms in it. Constructed from a mixture of concrete and adobe blocks, the main house had sturdy metal-framed windows, and was large and solid compared to its neighbors. It materialized several aspects of the breadwinner model of masculinity: his economic prowess and ability to be the household’s main breadwinner, his successful caring for his family, and his having “made it” as a modern urban man. José’s house also suggested something about how he tackles the tensions of marital life and was an instrument in resolving them. In the courtyard, José had taken several weeks away from his market stall to dig a well 20 meters deep, lined with concrete rings. Soon, his wife and daughters would no longer arise before dawn to walk to the edge of the city, descending the dangerously steep riverbanks—“it was more or less a hole”—to fetch water.

The well was part of José’s effort to build a relationship with his wife based on a companionate idea of marriage, as advocated by the Seventh Day Adventist church he attended. Many participants, in contrast, did not socialize with their wives and spoke bitterly about the threat they posed to the men’s breadwinner status: gossiping about their temporary failure to provide, managing household income in a way their husbands objected to, or conspicuously out-earning them.<sup>6</sup> Such men gave a distant and conflictual picture of their relationships with their wives.

José had been a church marriage counsellor and spoke of how couples should work as a team, managing their income together. For more committed churchgoing men, this represented a solution to some of the insecurities raised by the breadwinner model of masculinity, while allowing men to maintain, they implied, a preeminent position over women. It also represented a particular aspirational and cosmopolitan modernity. The men often referred to the global nature of their churches (Catholic, Congregationalist, or Seventh Day Adventist), and presented companionate marriage as something rational and modern, which we, as Europeans, should admire.

Houses, then, were central to these men's masculine life projects. They were the material setting where the ideal of the breadwinner was realized, an ideal that was important to all our participants. The material and location of these houses also illuminates the legacies of colonial segregation and the ongoing exclusion of most residents from employment that would allow them to create decent housing. It also demonstrates how men sought to escape these exclusions, how they used houses to manage conjugal relationships and defuse some of the tensions inherent in the breadwinner ideal, and how they laid claim to a style of modern, cosmopolitan, and morally upstanding masculinity. Diverse types and levels of investment in houses thus reveal the commitment of different men to different cultural styles of masculinity as ways of coping with the gendered dilemmas thrown up by the social legacy of the civil war.

## **Automobiles: Mobile Masculine Status Symbols Beyond the Household**

Automobiles represent a different kind of investment compared to houses: those who can afford their own means of transport can use it to generate an income. Most people in Huambo rely on public transport, since, as in much of Africa (Hart 2016) they cannot afford private cars. Many of the men with whom we worked were *kupapatas* (motorbike taxi drivers), a profession compatible with being the respectable head of a conjugal household. The capital outlay to buy a motorbike taxi,<sup>7</sup> moreover, could generate earnings that in turn could purchase a Toyota Corolla taxi (Nando, quoted above, had made this step.) The more lucrative taxi service could generate proceeds toward a Toyota Hiace minibus, which provided much of the public transport in Huambo—and in other cities in Angola (and further afield, see Mutongi 2017). By investing in this series of progressively more expensive transit, therefore, men can move from riding in other men's minibuses to driving their own.

Cars suggested considerable earning power and upward social mobility. One of us [John Spall] spent time as a neighborhood football team photographer, taking photos of games and celebrations on special occasions. At these celebrations people who did not own cars commonly asked to have their photo taken sitting in the driver's seat of someone else's car. Car ownership suggested an upward social trajectory, perhaps even towards joining Angola's modest middle class—as an entrepreneur, nurse, teacher, or government functionary—something many of these men aspired to

for their children, as a form of generational progress. These were careers that the deceitful and kleptocratic party-state had denied them, as they saw it. These careers represented stability, education, and successful, modern urban living—and the men saw cars as part of that picture. As Burke (1996) argues, the style of an affluent class may be attractive even to people who are not a part of it.

Cars were very expensive in Angola at the time of our fieldwork, making them hard for our participants to acquire. No importing of used light vehicles over three years old was allowed, and new cars were subject to heavy import duties. The men we worked with deeply resented this situation, viewing it as an attempt to limit access to a dignified modern life to those connected to the party-state elite (see Chalfin 2008 for a similar case of state bodies limiting social mobility in Ghana).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, there was no shortage of cars on the streets of Huambo. Cars had important practical uses that were newly possible since the end of the war and the ensuing infrastructure repair; cars were much more than simply status symbols. Nevertheless, a new four-wheel drive car with air conditioning—preferably a Toyota or a Mitsubishi—was the ultimate (and ultimately masculine) success symbol for many men.

This achievement was out of reach for most of the men with whom we worked, though a few had second-hand four-by-fours, and one or two had elderly, unreliable hatchbacks that they nursed through multiple breakdowns. Men who could not afford a car often owned motorbikes, some customized with transfers and chrome accessories to suggest upward social mobility. The choice of motorbike could also gesture towards class mobility: the stylized, Italian-style motor-scooter was considered by some as more fashionable and prestigious, for instance, than the more prosaic Indian-manufactured Triumph-style bike.

Investing in transportation over land or houses was clearly a personal choice as well as an economic strategy. However, just like land and houses, prioritizing investments in transport over competing obligations carried negative social consequences. Our participants expressed widespread disapproval of men who prioritized spending on cars rather than on their houses and households. We often heard of men investing in a car while living in an adobe house and failing to properly clothe their children. (While this might have been an exaggeration, at least one man we knew had a brand-new Toyota four-by-four yet lived in an adobe house.) Even in similar situations, different men approached this decision differently. For instance, we worked with an uncle and nephew who were equal partners in a market business. One, Flávio (42 years old), saved up \$15,000 to buy a used Toyota Rav4, whereas his uncle, Jamba (49 years old, quoted above) bought a plot of land on which to build a concrete block house.

The contrast between the two men's investments and its relation to their masculine styles is instructive. Whereas Jamba was a committed Seventh Day Adventist, Flávio was a notorious *mulherengo*—his friends talked about “go[ing] on the rounds” to pick up women. Cars were useful in this endeavor, as a powerful mobile status symbol that did not require the sort of investment needed to buy or build a

concrete block house in the *cidade*. They could be useful in impressing business connections but were also useful in forming casual sexual attachments with women (quite a different way of asserting power over women than through companionate marriage). Owning one was “a performance of success beyond the financial means of the actor in question” (Newell 2009, p. 385), at least as viewed from the normative moral position that a man should prioritize investments in the household. However, this element of a “bluff” (Newell 2009, p. 379) was not necessarily visible to the women whom these men sought to meet. Cars were an investment in the “performative competence” (Ferguson 1999, p. 96) required to successfully enact the *mulherengo* style.

As has been found by scholars in Mozambique (e.g., Aboim 2009), men who find establishing a household difficult may see public performances of implied sexual prowess as powerful alternative routes to masculine respect. Impressive cars and the masculine characteristics they suggested were excellent tools to achieve the sexual conquests this respect required. Owning a car implied, then, a move away from investments in the land or a house, to prioritize a purchase that hedged demands for reciprocity and support. The kind of status cars gave these men was more individualized than that of land or houses, limiting demands for support not just from broader kin groups, but even from one’s own household. Cars represented a status claim by the man driving, not his household. This intrinsic individuality of automobiles is a reason that cars have provoked moral debates about the practice and effects of automobility (Hart 2016). As in the case studied by Jeske in South Africa (2016), individuality did not mean the complete abandonment of relations of kin reciprocity and caring; rather, there was an uncomfortable oscillation between the two modes. Nevertheless, the investment in cars shows a clearly different center of gravity in the *mulherengo* style of masculinity than that of the companionately married man.

Investments in cars also represented a greater willingness to embrace the values of the “New Angola” and a move away from the “African traditions” of the hinterland (see also Soares de Oliveira 2015). They reflected aspirations to rapid class ascension in postwar Angola and to a style of masculinity that suggested monetary wealth. The *mulherengo* style of masculinity embraced opportunities apparently offered by the postwar Angolan economy to demonstrate upward social mobility and to emulate the (pseudo-)entrepreneurs of the party state elite. Paralleling how companionate marriage implied a link to global churches and moralities viewed as modern and transnational, investments in cars gestured towards affluent lifestyles associated with the global North, newly visible on television since the end of the war.

These points should not be overstated: these men still had relatively stable households and marital relationships, and not all who owned expensive cars were womanizers—car ownership was much higher for those on higher incomes, including, for example, pastors. Investments in cars, however, suggested a clear difference from

those who prioritized investments in land or a house. Men not yet able to achieve clear upward class mobility often used cars to perform *mulherengo* masculinity.

## Discussion

Most of the men with whom we worked invested to some extent in all three commodities: land, houses, and automobiles. Thus, the models of masculinity we describe are not mutually exclusive, but in fact overlap substantially. However, the “center of gravity” was clearly distinct for men’s investments in different objects, implying the fulfilment of different moral obligations to different sets of people, and appeals to different sets of social and cultural allegiances beyond their immediate social setting.

Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a useful lens through which to see these data. Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as a historically constituted “pattern of practice . . . that allow[s] men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). As Lindsay and Miescher have argued (2003, pp. 6–7, 21), social settings in Africa are perhaps particularly contested due to the legacies of colonialism, and as we have shown in this article, that is doubly true in the case of postcolonial countries emerging from civil wars. For Lindsay and Miescher, it is not always obvious in Africa which notions of masculinity are dominant, and there is a continuing interaction and transformation between different models of gender. They therefore urge caution in the use of the concept in work on Africa. Which sorts of morality ought to orient senior men’s masculinity, including the role of materiality, is vigorously contested in Huambo, with no single, coherent vision exercising dominance. Being a successful breadwinner was important for all of them, but it was subject to significant, contested variation: some men had distant and conflictual relationships with their wives, others aspired to a companionate relationship, and still others oriented to a womanizing identity.

We find Sofia Aboim’s idea of multireferential masculinities useful in understanding this complex picture (Aboim 2009). These men in Huambo had significant tensions to manage as they sought to build lives as respected senior men. These included the demands of the breadwinner ideal, which promises an authority that is always vulnerable to being overturned in straitened and unequal times; the competing demands for support from kin within and beyond the household; and the tension between an older idea of masculinity based on seniority and accumulated wisdom and an emerging masculinity based on the display of monetary wealth through commodities and extramarital sexual relationships. Each of the object investments described above adopts different but overlapping approaches to managing these tensions.

This sometimes meant, as Aboim also found in Maputo, Mozambique, ambivalence and normative conflict—masculinities were not always coherent constructions. For example, many men made an appeal both to some of the values associated with rural “Umbundu tradition” and male eldership, *and* a desire to limit

reciprocity and embrace modern urban living over rural life—and this was true of both the companionately married churchgoing men and the *mulherengos*. As Aboim also argues, there are pluralities in the concepts and practices of modernity to which these masculine styles appeal. For churchgoing men, there was an appeal to Christian moralities conceived of as modern and global; the *mulherengos*, on the other hand, also made global references in their masculine performances, but to a globalized consumer idea of the good life and the consumer style of the party-state elite. This drew on the example of members of the party-state elite, and on the examples of lifestyles in Europe and North America.

However, contrary to some readings, neither Gramsci's concept of hegemony, nor Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity depend on static or coherent models. Gramsci's vision of hegemony, rather, conceives of it as something that encompasses a "compromise equilibrium" of different interests and tendencies (Gramsci 2000, p. 211), related to a common sense which is "fragmentary, incoherent" and constantly changing (Gramsci 2000, p. 343). In a similar vein, Connell and Messerschmidt emphasize that a "degree of overlap or blurring" between divergent masculinities is "extremely likely if hegemony is effective" (2005, p. 839), and that the concept of hegemonic masculinity "is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process" (p. 841), rather than positing a static model. The moral contention we describe between overlapping styles of masculinity does not, therefore, undermine what Demetriou terms its "external hegemony" (2000, p. 341), i.e., the hegemony of men over women, even though the "internal hegemony" among competing styles of masculinity was more uncertain, at least at a local level. Around the core ethic of breadwinner masculinity, premised on the subordination of women, swirled a contest for prominence between masculinities respectively premised on a more distant model of marriage, a companionate model of marriage, and a more demonstrative *mulherengo* model that emphasized the display of monetary wealth.

A final point is that, as we suggested in the introduction, the changes brought on by the civil war that most troubled these men were not directly related to either violence or militarization. Rather, the puzzle of how to adapt preexisting gendered cultural forms and practices to legacies of enforced urbanization, the way the war had allowed the rapid, ostentatious accumulation of mineral wealth by a small elite in a context of a corrupt liberalization, and the changing relation of commodities to masculine respect, were of greater long-term concern in everyday life.

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## Notes

1. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) was also involved at the beginning of the war but was rapidly defeated as a military force.
2. Fears of sorcery attacks due to comparative success are often mentioned in the historical literature on this part of Angola in the twentieth century (Edwards 1962; Heywood 2000; Pössinger 1973).
3. These views may be partly self-justifying, given that they were not shared by those men who had chosen to settle in the *kimbo*. However, that even Nando was ambivalent, despite investing in his village and planning to retire there, suggests that this view may be more broadly shared.
4. It is important to note here that land ownership in the region had already been disrupted by processes of commoditization in the colonial period and was far from stable (see Heywood 2000; Pössinger 1973). Pressure from colonial land grabs for settlers, land becoming private property, the growth of cash cropping and the breakdown of broader kin groups into smaller family units were just some of the factors producing rapid change before the civil war.
5. This requirement has a longer history. As two anthropologists working in the early and mid-twentieth century noted (Childs 1949; Edwards 1962), adolescent boys left their parental home after puberty, and built their own hut, in which their future wife would later join them.
6. As Lisa Lindsay has argued (2003), there is often a disjuncture between discourse and practice in breadwinning. The discourse often suggests that women are homemakers and men earn the lion's share of the income. In a household survey of veterans' wives (Spall 2020, p. 136), wives' estimations of their own income earning outstripped that of their husbands in 49% of cases.
7. See Lopes (2011) for an analysis of the economics of informal public transport in Huambo.
8. It is worth noting, however, that the original Presidential decree for this measure (number 135/10) had some economic motivations for the import limitation: the limited foreign exchange available for spare parts, potential damage to newly built asphalt roads, and the desire to develop a domestic car manufacturing sector. This import limitation has more recently been slightly relaxed (in decree 161/18).

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