Re-Thinking Aspiration and Hegemonic Masculinity in Transnational Context

Richard Howson[1]

1) University of Wollongong, Australia

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Re-Thinking Aspiration and Hegemonic Masculinity in Transnational Context

Richard Howson

University of Wollongong, Australia

Abstract

This article offers a contribution to the on-going critical analysis of the concept hegemonic masculinity. However, not in a way that seeks the demise or supersession of the concept but rather to offer a theoretical development that brings into focus certain important and specific claims: (1) that masculinity is something men do yet, (2) hegemonic masculinity requires all men to position themselves in relation to it. In trying to build some connection between these two claims as well as, thinking through some of the key issues that have challenged hegemonic masculinity over the last two to three decades this article re-introduces and develops the concept of aspiration as one important way to articulate the contemporary importance of hegemonic masculinity in the field of masculinity theory. Further it offers a brief application of aspiration and hegemonic masculinity in the field of the transnational.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, masculinity, aspiration, hegemony, transnational

Hipatia Press
www.hipatiapress.com

Repensando la Ambición y la Masculinidad Hegemónica en Contextos Transnacionales

Richard Howson

University of Wollongong, Australia

Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una contribución al actual análisis crítico alrededor del concepto de masculinidad hegemónica. Sin embargo, no en una forma que pretende hacer desaparecer o superar dicho concepto, sino que en una que ofrece un desarrollo teórico que pone de relieve ciertas reclamaciones importantes y específicas: (1) que la masculinidad es algo que los hombres todavía articulan, (2) la masculinidad hegemónica exige que todos los hombres se posicionen al respecto. Al tratar de construir algún tipo de conexión entre estas dos afirmaciones, así como reflexionar acerca de algunos de los temas clave que han desafiado la hegemonía masculina en las últimas dos o tres décadas, este artículo re-introduce y desarrolla el concepto de la ambición como una forma importante de articular la importancia contemporánea de la masculinidad hegemónica en el ámbito de la teoría de la masculinidad. Además se ofrece una breve aplicación sobre la ambición y la masculinidad hegemónica en el ámbito transnacional.

Palabras clave: masculinidad hegemónica, masculinidad, ambición, hegemonía, transnacional

One of the very real problems confronting the field of masculinities theory today is: what to do with hegemonic masculinity? There is no doubt that over the last two to three decades, hegemonic masculinity has become axiomatic and ubiquitous within the field of masculinities theory as an explanatory concept. I use the term axiom for a particular reason, that is, to emphasise the point that in much of the work that uses hegemonic masculinity now, it is treated as a self-evident principle that requires no proof of its existence or importance. Perhaps even more telling is that there remains very little engagement within the masculinity theory with the concept's foundation that is, the theory of hegemony. Further, like so many other social scientific concepts such as, civil society and social capital, the more they are applied to research, the more their hold on explanatory power is questioned. It is no different for hegemonic masculinity, whose popularity exists side by side with a very substantial and on-going challenge to its formulation, thesis, application and ultimately its value to the field.

The case for sustaining hegemonic masculinity's explanatory efficacy is somewhat hindered by a theoretical and methodological development that began in the 1980's (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.830-832) and focused primarily on developing a dominant form of masculinity as practice-based: that is, men do masculinity and therefore, hegemonic masculinity. At the same time the theoretical foundations of this development drew ideas from a wide and complex array of theories located in fields that included neo-Marxism, feminism, sexuality and psychoanalysis. This interdisciplinarity was used as an attempt to address an even more complex set of problems and issues about the way men do masculinity. Nevertheless, from the mid 1980's on-wards, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.832) would later summarise, hegemonic masculinity could, or perhaps should, be understood on the basis of a few key claims:

> [1] Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue…[2] hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities …[3] hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was

certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" [my emphases].

The aim of this article then, is to contribute to the on-going critical analysis of the concept hegemonic masculinity. However, not in a way that seeks the demise or supersession of the concept but rather to offer a critical analysis of its theoretical operation that brings into focus these specific claims: (1) that masculinity is something men do yet, (2) hegemonic masculinity requires all men to position themselves in relation to it. In trying to build some connection between these two claims as well as, thinking through some of the key issues that have challenged hegemonic masculinity over the last two to three decades this article re-introduces and develops the concept of aspiration as one important way to re-articulate its foundations as a practice-based concept and in so doing reinvigorate the contemporary importance of hegemonic masculinity in the field of masculinity theory.

From Practice to Position: Shifting the Focus of Hegemonic Masculinity

While each of these three claims that Connell and Messerschmidt make remain important for how hegemonic masculinity is currently understood and applied (critically or otherwise), the focus in this paper will be on the two specific ideas identified above that is, that "[h]egemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice i.e., things done…[and hegemonic masculinity] required all other men to position themselves in relation to it". These ideas expose two very different tasks for men in the construction of their masculinity throughout their lives. Effectively, both relate to the idea that hegemonic masculinity as it is expressed in a particular cultural[1] situation is normative. Though for the vast majority of men, the patterns of practice it expresses are largely unattainable or unachievable realities. Therefore, even at a prima facie level the assumption that emerges immediately is that rather than practicing the hegemonic form of masculinity men alternatively "position themselves in relation to it" to gain whatever advantages may flow from it. Now while it could be argued that positioning

oneself in relation to something else is itself a practice, to accept that this can occur and is the practice that Connell refers to in the initial development of the concept is complex and problematic. Not least because two crucial questions remain unresolved in masculinities theory, for this author at least, and at the same time go to the heart of understanding the importance of the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and the concept of aspiration in masculinity theory: [1] Does hegemonic masculinity exist, if so, where? [2] How do men engage hegemonic masculinity?

To address these questions very briefly we could say that hegemonic masculinity as an explanatory concept can really only be understood within and through the theory of hegemony (its original framework) and for that, we need to return to the work of Antonio Gramsci. Further, in the context of this paper, two Gramscian concepts are of particular relevance and importance: 'commonsense' and 'good sense' and the transformation of one to the other. In the volume Hegemony it was shown, in the opening chapter, why (following Gramsci 1971, p. 323-333) commonsense is crucial to how we understand hegemony. In effect, it defines and describes the everyday life and beliefs of a particular subaltern social group, it demands conformism to the group's particular traditional practices and beliefs, which in turn leads to a fragmentation of civil society along the various and often competing lines of commonsense. For Gramsci in the context of hegemony, commonsense expressed a specific set of identities and configurations of practice that are specific to that subaltern group and how they understand their lives, practices and identities. It separated a subaltern group from the broader community or what Gramsci referred to as the national popular collective will. Commonsense cannot and does not reflect a hegemonic consciousness or necessarily, hegemonic practices.

However, through the historical development of a particular hegemony it is the case that a particular commonsense will emerge as both powerful and legitimate in other words, it becomes the expression of authority. Through this authority it is able to impose its commonsense across a cultural situation. In so doing, it no longer becomes the set of configurations of practice adhered to by a particular group but by all groups within a cultural situation. It becomes the normative content of the national popular collective will and as such, it assumes the expression of good sense. Good sense becomes fundamentally linked to authority and provides the principles about

how all groups within the hegemony need to think and act. It is in other words, the content of the hegemonic that contributes to the constitution of the hegemony. Its task then, is to shift the nature of a cultural situation from one of disunity where each subaltern group holds on to their own commonsense, to one of unity where adherence to the configurations of practice that articulate good sense are rewarded with inclusion while any group that maintains their own commonsense consciousness and configurations of practice are excluded. In the creation of the content of good sense it is possible to identify particular hegemonic formations such as, masculinity.

In the formulation of hegemonic masculinity as normative we see it become and operate as a particular component of good sense because ultimately its task is to build a 'sense' of unity within a gender order. If we can accept that hegemonic masculinity is a characteristic of some hegemony and further, that as such its aim is unification then it must engage the national popular collective will of men and women and men and women equally must engage it.

The claim that men engage hegemonic masculinity is not questioned in masculinity theory. What becomes problematic is the claim, as Connell makes clear, that the vast majority of men do not actually practice hegemonic masculinity. This emphasis that men do not really practice hegemonic masculinity, if it was to be taken as is, can only ever reduce hegemonic masculinity to nothing more than an abstract concept operational only in theoretical discussions. This is broadly the argument Michael Flood (2002) made when he referred to "slippage" between concept and practice or masculinity and men. That in turn sustains Alan Petersen's (1999) critique of the concept in which it is identified as the reification or the transcendence of certain characteristics that in turn are always above or out of the reach of the very complex realities of men's actual lived identities and actions. This underpins what in my own work is critically described as the over-simplified emphasis on domination or the dominative nature of hegemonic masculinity. Such critiques have resulted in the watering down of the importance of the concept so that when it is used it becomes a descriptor for the pure domination of men or masculine characteristics upon the whole of a cultural situation. However, the use of hegemonic masculinity as a descriptor in this

way obfuscates its importance in the process of critically examining what Jeff Hearn (2004) has referred to as the "hegemony of men".

Returning to the nature of hegemony as the transformation of a particular commonsense into the good sense that marks a national popular collective will about gender within a cultural situation suggests that hegemonic masculinity as a hegemonic component within a broad hegemony has a significance beyond simple description. Hegemonic masculinity when analysed through the theory of hegemony is a crucial concept in the articulation of masculinities to hegemony. Effectively, it becomes the way that men or at least the vast majority of men with all their differences align to a normative and authoritative masculinity as re-presented in and through a cultural situation. In an important reading of Gramsci's theory of hegemony the emphasis of understanding hegemony as an authoritative and normative process as opposed to an authoritarian process is clarified by Joe Buttigieg (2005) who argues that hegemony, or some aspect of hegemony, which we might call a hegemonic, is not authoritarian and imposed dominatively upon people, this would just be pure domination and in this context there could be no hegemony. Rather, hegemony requires an environment where authoritative leadership and persuasion can operate. It exposes the importance for men to go beyond a particular commonsense to assume alignment with the good sense of the hegemony. Most importantly, if hegemonic masculinity exists as a component of hegemony whose ultimate task is building a 'sense' of unification and that the unification process begins, not at the level of practice but at the level of signification and engagement, then the value of hegemonic masculinity is expressed not so much on the basis of its domination but rather, on the basis of its predominance. This is a subtle shift but one of some significance because it emphasizes now not the direct and practical attribution of characteristics to men. Characteristics that are themselves expressions of domination, for example, all men are aggressive, all men will act as breadwinners etc. But rather, hegemonic masculinity exposes the ascendancy, within a particular hegemony, of certain broad 'principles' about how to be a man. These are referred to as hegemonic principles (see Howson, 2006) and are: heterosexuality, breadwinning and aggression to which I would now add: whiteness.

Hegemonic principles play a central role in the operation of a 'hegemonic' within the hegemony. Their objective is twofold. First, they define and describe an aspect of the hegemony by setting out the frames of the content or in other words, the broad demands that then determine the identifications, configurations of practices and relationships that in turn assume power become legitimate and ultimately, normative. Second, these principles and their content come to represent the desires, interests and values that the hegemonic is able to extend into cultural life and thereby enable the hegemony to expand around them. Because of this they are also the desires, interests and values that emerge through authoritative processes of persuasion and are protected so as to ensure the continuation of the nature, operation and ultimately the reproduction of the hegemony. Hegemonic principles though, are not given aprioristically and/or essentialistically. They are, as is the case with hegemony itself, always the historical and geographical product of the complex accumulation of contradictions imposed on and being imposed by real social relations, practices and consciousness upon a cultural situation. Therefore, they and the hegemony they represent are never determined but always overdetermined (see Althusser, 1969, p. 97–101; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 97–105).

While the case for hegemonic principles could be interpreted as simply returning to an essentialist and attributional approach, the difference here is that these principles are precisely that, principles and not specific characteristics that are given to men simply because they are men. Rather, they are cultural and how men (and women for that matter) engage these principles will be different for individuals and particular groups. For example, in the cultural situation marked by the Western hegemony of men the content of the hegemonic principle: aggression, could be expressed as domestic violence, public violence, competitiveness, sport, gay bashing, etc. Therefore, different individual men and groups of men will align themselves to aggression in their own way. This raises the additional problematic of dealing with difference about men and masculinity and with difference comes forms of inclusion and exclusion. Examples of legitimate and therefore inclusive forms of aggression in the West may well appear as competitiveness or even gay bashing in certain specific contexts while terrorism on the other hand, is excluded.

So the question now for masculinity theory is not so much whether hegemonic masculinity is a practice or even whether men position themselves to hegemonic masculinity. In effect, hegemonic masculinity enables and requires both. Instead, masculinities theory needs to consider what mechanisms are available for men to enable this positioning and alignment with hegemonic masculinity while allowing for the very real differences in men? In this paper I want to suggest that a key mechanism is aspiration.

Applying Aspiration to Masculinities Theory

Aspiration itself has had a long and somewhat 'patchy' history in the humanities and social sciences. Within the latter, it has been the field of social psychology that has seen most of the work to develop the concept. However, what has been produced are varying approaches and definitions that have in turn, seen aspiration linked to concepts such as, motivation, expectations, drives and goals. Almost everything that masculinities theory, organized around the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been trying to critique and move beyond. Notwithstanding, Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley's (1999) social psychological work presented in the article 'Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices' has brought the concept of aspiration in direct engagement with hegemonic masculinity. Very briefly, the aim of this work by Wetherell and Edley can be interpreted as a unique as well as important intervention into masculinity theory by presenting hegemonic masculinity effectively as an "aspirational goal" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p. 337). Therefore, it gives for the first time a way of recognizing hegemonic masculinity not simply as configurations of practices that all men actually engage in their everyday life but as a set of rules to which all men must try to align to albeit in their own way. For this reason alone it becomes a particularly important piece of work even though this idea has remained undeveloped if not marginalized in the development of the broader masculinity theory that followed.

For the purposes of this paper it is possible to draw a line through the diversity of social psychological explanations about aspiration as well as, draw ideas from other more sociological approaches. Further, aspiration

works closely with the operation of hegemony particularly in the context of Buttigieg's argument that hegemony is crucially about persuasion to and therefore complicity. It can be argued then, that aspiration represents the expression of the difference between what men can achieve and what men should achieve. More importantly, within a cultural situation, aspiration operates as a process (constituted by consciousness and practice) that enables the alignment of men's practices and identities to a goal that exposes achievement as always already heterogeneous. In this context the notions of attribution, practice and achievement need to be subordinated because by not subordinating these notions there will remain a slippage within hegemonic masculinity from it as configurations of practice to the description of what is actually occurring. As a result all the old explanatory problems reemerge that in, turn distracts analysis from the more important task, that of examining the conditions for the existence and operation of hegemonic masculinity.

But here I want to go a bit further and suggest that aspiration does not operate as a purely subjective condition but that in line with the discussion so far, and in particular with respect to the operation of hegemonic principles, that aspiration reflects the enabling of men's subjectivity about their masculinity to be directed towards the objectivity[2] of hegemony. The idea here is to begin and continue the development of a careful definition of aspiration that attempts to avoid the traps of psychologizing the whole thing and then try to measure the aspiration gap, that is, the distance between what men can and what men should achieve. I would argue that there may well be some sort of aspiration gap but this can only be conceptualized within hegemony and at the intersection of the historically and geographically produced social, economic and political conditions that are prevalent.

An important starting point in the development of a social understanding of aspiration within a hegemonic conceptual framework is the work of Arjun Appadurai (2004, p.67) and particularly his chapter 'The Capacity to Aspire' in which he develops the idea of a "culture of aspiration". Here there is a particular focus on the poor, undeveloped peoples or as Gramsci would refer to them, the subaltern groups and their situations in India. Appadurai is correctly insistent that aspirations are socially determined, the consequence of which is unevenness in the capacity to aspire between powerful and less powerful people in society. He states:

> [Aspirations] are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life ...a poor Tamil peasant woman's view of the good life may be as distant from that of a cosmopolitan woman from Delhi, as from that of an equally poor woman from Tanzania.

Appadurai sets "culture" as the frame for this understanding but I would like to argue that there is value in understanding the cultural frame as hegemonically produced. One justification for this movement is that culture has its own problems when trying to explain the complexity of a cultural situation. For example, does culture differ from the social or the psychological, if so how? Does culture engage these two realms equally? What do we do in a cultural situation where there are many competing subaltern cultures all of whom are competing for space and scarce resources? What we do know is that not all these subaltern cultures have equal power to express themselves or to mobilise resources to ensure attainment of hegemonic outcomes. This is why Appadurai applies to culture the concepts of 'terms of recognition' as well as, 'voice' and 'exit'. While the meaning of voice and exit are perhaps obvious, for Appadurai terms of recognition represent ways of being that are given to the poor and thereby allow their poverty to take on a generalized autonomous form. The "given[ness]" of these terms occur because the poor lack social and economic capital, and thus have little to no influence on how they are represented and/or perceived in the larger community. Of course Appadurai's use of the concept: terms of recognition can be seen as closely related to the Gramscian concepts of commonsense and good sense particularly as it applies to and is operationalised by subaltern groups. Without these concepts, the use of culture lacks the explanatory social, economic and political foci and as a result assumes a blandness that struggles to effectively express the complexity of cultural and hegemonic life itself.

Incorporating hegemony into this model takes us a little further into the complexities of a cultural situation and gives increased explanatory power to the concepts of culture, terms of recognition and exit and voice. It allows us to think historically and dialectically across the most important aspects of culture: power (politics), production (social and economic), cathexis (emotions/attachments) and symbolism (signification). Most importantly,

examining the operation of aspiration in the context of hegemony enables an understanding of how and why people struggle to achieve in their life, even when achievement for some ensures failure and/or struggle for the other. This is particularly evident in Appadurai's discussion of poor people in India. Regardless of the fact that poverty is the way of life for these people, Appadurai makes the point that they are not simple dupes dominated and forced to accept the certain principles as norms. Rather that they have a "deeply ambivalent" relationship to these principles. For example, the "untouchables" excluded from the strict Hindu Caste structure are nevertheless complicit with the religious structure and aspire to its beliefs and principles thereby supporting and even actively contributing to sustaining the very same caste system that completely marginalises them from society.

This broad approach to aspiration has a real resonance with the discussion of hegemonic masculinity and in particular the claim that men position themselves to it creating a system of complicity. More specifically, we can begin to accept that the very system of persuasion and complicity that ensures the vast majority of men will never achieve the hegemonic 'prize' is the very same system that contains precisely those things that men continue to aspire towards. Further, and drawing from Appadurai, men who are subordinated and marginalized within the gender system exercise an ambivalence towards the system but nevertheless, regardless of the difficulties continue to aspire to engage it and thereby position themselves effectively towards the hegemonic. Complicity is not a simple process particularly with a hegemonic masculinity whose principles exclude specific content. As a result it will make it difficult for some men to achieve, unless of course new and alternative strategies are put in place.

Men and Aspiration in Transnational Contexts

Transnational is a concept that since its introduction into the literature on migration and settlement in the mid-1990s, is increasingly becoming an important aspect of a wide range of feminist and gender-sensitive work that examines global change (Hearn & Pringle, 2006, p.10). It can be understood as people moving between countries and the actions they take that link together the societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Glick Schiller, &

Blanc-Szanton, 1994, p.6). Therefore, transnationalisation may be understood as a process in which operates a series of dynamic and unstable identifications and practices through which complex conceptions of membership are established in both the country of origin as well as, the country of settlement (Baubock, 2003, p.700-701). From its introduction gender has figured in the development of the concept. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) for example, stressed the importance of gender not just to identification in migration processes but also for effective settlement by showing through her research that '[g]ender is not simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organise immigration patterns'. Smith and Guarnizo (2007, p.26) have more recently outlined the importance and complexity of gender within transnationalisation and stress that gender must be studied as part of a systematic analysis that includes meso and macro-dimensions. The importance of analysing the dimensional intersections (micro-meso-macro) in the transnationalisation process is that this allows for a better understanding of the diversity of experiences operating across and between the structural-subjective constraints of a particular locality. Thus Mahler (2007, p.83) stresses that there needs to be consistent examination of the degree to which participation in activities within transnational social spaces in general is gendered and, most importantly, examination of the consequences of this gendered participation. Notwithstanding this important work, until recently scholarship that has focused on the transnational has largely escaped scrutiny within the field of masculinity theory[3]. As such there remains immense scope for 'extending critical analysis into national and cultural contextualisation of men's practices and masculinities, and their problematisation' (Hearn & Pringle 2006, p.10-11). More importantly, examination of migrant men with a focus on the transnational nature of their lives in their new cultural situations offers the analyst a new clarity into the way aspiration operates with hegemonic masculinity because of the need to be cognizant of the complexities involved when crossing source and host cultural situations and their hegemonic content. This complexity of transnationalisation as an ongoing process and how it operationalises aspiration as an aspect of migrant men's development of their masculinity became particularly evident in two recent events in Australia. Both events highlight and bring to the fore the distance that exists between what men can do and what men should do

and even more important, how men existing in transnational contexts negotiate these questions as part of their alignment to a particular hegemonic masculinity.

In the first event, which took place between 2009 and 2010 Australians became aware of a growing series of attacks on predominantly male university students visiting from India but living and working, while studying, in Australia. It is unclear from the media reports precisely who the perpetrator/s were or what their motives could be. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is males who are the target and in this situation males who have exposed the existence of a new transnational identity that is, the international student. As Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2008) point out, international students encounter difficulties seldom experienced by domestic students and that these difficulties relate to academic and social aspects of their stay in the host country. International students are particularly caught in a transnational context because they need to adapt quickly to a foreign education system and a foreign language and culture and then just like migrants, they also need to adjust to being part of a social minority; that is, they encounter difficulties associated with being different. Although some of the problems faced by international students are related to adjustment in a foreign culture, "some of the more serious challenges are due to inadequacies within the host society". With language and culture embedded in the social structures of the host country, it is not surprising that international student groups such as, Asian students often place great importance on informal networks as opposed to utilising the host country's formal structural procedures when in need. What becomes evident through this research and the violent events against male Indian students is that there was a lack of aspiration and thus alignment to the Australian hegemonic masculinity and as a result of the compounding effects of a maintenance of a commonsense amongst the male Indian students and inadequacies in the Australian social structures that was unable to incorporate the differences in practices operating in these new transnational contexts, the result was violent reactions.

In a different way, violence also operated in the other event to be discussed here. In October 2009 five Australian men, all Muslim, were sentenced to substantial jail time for conspiracy to carry out terrorist acts as part of Jihad against Australia. This followed the earlier arrest, charging and sentencing of four other men. All these Muslim men were Australian citizens

who had immigrated earlier and lived and worked within Australian communities. Yet they were willing to attack their new home country. These events highlight the complexity of masculinity in transnational contexts in terms of social exclusion. As discussed above aggression operates as a hegemonic principle but as a principle its content becomes culturally specific. The operationalisation of aggression is hegemonically masculine but the specific practice that is, terrorism, through which aggression is expressed in this event actually marginalizes these men and enables the potential for social exclusion in the country of settlement. The exclusion of this content from hegemonic masculinity is very often, and was the case in the Australian context, generated by the host culture. It was a content that these men could not or would not engage thus leaving what these men saw as few options available to align to the hegemonic masculinity of the host country. In the case of these Muslim Jihadists their actions operated at the intersection of religious and gender at least, but nevertheless it reflected a conscious intent to act as men and Muslims. This aspiration to enact violence appears associated with full awareness of their current and future exclusion. The latter instance is merely a specific particularly deliberate example of migrants' undertaking actions despite awareness of exclusionary consequences. Other instances might include domestic violence or cultural practices which are unacceptable to the host culture. The crucial point here is that the examples of social exclusion both imposed and 'chosen', specifically involve men as key players and expose a inability by transnational men to align to the particular hegemonic masculinity.

Conclusion

Neither masculine nor transnational practices take place in imaginary 'third spaces' (Bhabha, 1990). The notion that men operate in a space apart from gender, or that transnationalisation is effectively a deterritorialising process producing 'liberatory' and 'boundless' possibilities (to perhaps follow Jihad or even complete a degree) in a new land, underestimates the imperatives that 'contextuality' imposes (Smith & Guarnizo, 2007, p.11). This raises the issue of the ways in which transnational men might be caught between the local and the cosmopolitan, between supposedly bounded and unbounded conceptions of hegemonic masculinities. What becomes evident even in this

brief examination of aspiration and hegemonic masculinity in transnational contexts is that regardless of the fact that men will differ in the way they practice certain aspects of masculinity such as aggression, men do align themselves to certain broad principles. In turn this raises the question about which conception of masculinity do these men align too? The emergence of a return to liberal integrationist policy on migration in Australia (see Hearn & Howson, 2009, p. 53) signals a new imperative to engage and re-examine the ideas of aspiration and boundedness in relation to masculinities but also, a new requirement to explore how men conduct themselves when bounded by a given context.

Notes

[1]A cultural situation is as a term that will be used here to refer to the synthesis of the social, economic and political aspects of life in a particular geographic and historical context. It is a term that follows what Gramsci referred to as the "historical bloc".

[2] I want to note that the use of the term objectivity to describe hegemony is always cognisant that the objectivity of hegemony is problematic as described by Gramsci's (1971, p. 137) through the idea of 'unstable equlibria' and Laclau's (1990) argument that hegemony is always marked by 'antagonism' and 'social dislocation'.

[3] The recent volumes *Migrant Men* (2009) and *Rethinking Transnational Men* (2013) are of course exceptions to this claim.

References

Althusser, L. (1969). *For Marx*. London: Allen Lane.

Appadurai, A. (2004). *The capacity to aspire: Culture and the terms of recognition*. In R.Vijayendra & M.Walton. (Eds.), *Culture and Public Action* (pp.59-84). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Basch, G., Glick Schiller, N., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, post-colonial predicaments and deterritorialized Nation-States*. Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach.

Bauböck, R. (2003). Towards a political theory of migrant transnationalism. *International Migration Review, 37*, 3, 700-723.

Bhabha, K. (1990). *Nation and narration.* New York: Routledge

Buttigieg, J. (2005). The contemporary discourse on civil society: A Gramscian critique. *Boundary 2,32*(1), 33-52.

Connell, R.W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity, rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829-859. doi: 10.1177/0891243205278639

Donaldson, M & Howson, R. (2009). Men, migration and hegemonic masculinity. In M.Donaldson, R.Hibbins, R.Howson, & B.Pease (Ed.). *Migrant Men: Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience* (pp.210-217). New York: Routledge.

Flood, M. (2002). Between men and masculinity, An assessment of the term masculinity in recent scholarship on men. In S.Pearce & V.Muller (Eds.), *Manning the next millennium: Studies in masculinities* (pp. 203-2013). Perth: Black Swan.

Forbes-Mewett, H., & Nyland, C. (2008). Cultural diversity, relocation, and the security of international students at an internationalised university. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*(2), 181-203. doi:10.1177/1028315307308136

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hearn, J. (2004). From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist Theory, 5*, 49. doi: 10.1177/1464700104040813

Hearn, J., & Pringle, K. (2006). *European perspectives on men and masculinities: National and transnational approaches*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

Hearn, J., & Howson, R. (2009). Policy, men and transnationalism. In M. Donaldson, R. Hibbins, R. Howson & B. Pease (Eds.), *Migrant men: Critical studies of masculinities and the migration experience* (pp-41-59). New York: Routledge.

Hearn, J., Blagojevic, M., & Harrison, K. (2013). *Rethinking transnational men: Beyond, between and within nations*. New York: Routledge.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered transitions: Mexican experiences of immigration*. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Howson, R. (2006). *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*. London: Routledge

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*. London: Verso.

Mahler, S. J. (2007). Theoretical and empirical contributions toward a research agenda for transnationalism. In M. P. Smith & L.E. Guarnizo (Eds.), *Transnationalism from below* (pp.64-100). Transaction Publishers: New Jersey.

Petersen, A. (1999). *Unmasking the masculine, 'Men' and 'Identity' in a sceptical age*. London: Sage.

Smith, M. P., & Guarnizo, L. E. (2007). Locations of transnationalism. In P.M. Smith & L.E. Guarnizo (Eds.), *Transnationalism from below* (pp. 3-35). Transaction Publishers: New Jersey.

Wetherell, M., & Edley, N. (1999). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practices. *Feminism Psychology, 9*, 335.

Richard Howson is Senior Lecturer in the Sociology Program at the University of Wollongong.

Contact Address: Direct correspondence to Richard Howson, School of Humanities & Social Inquiry, Building 19, University of Wollongong, Northfields Avenue, Wollongong, NSW 2522, Australia, email: rhowson@uow.edu.au.