Amabhinca subculture: re-branded expression of black masculinity in South African townships

Zama M. Mthombeni

Published online: 05 Mar 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ⍉

View related articles ⍉

View Crossmark data ⍉

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

Check for updates

Amabhinca subculture: re-branded expression of black masculinity in South African townships

Zama M. Mthombeni

Inclusive Economic Development, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Fears have been expressed that global forces diminish the integrity of local cultures through the influence of subcultures of consumption. This study examined the dynamic identities of black males, specifically within the *amabhinca* subculture to shed light on how neoliberalism and consumerist tendencies have re-shaped these identities. A qualitative research method was employed, with the researcher engaging with 30 males involved in the subculture on a social media platform. Contrary to the conventional notion of static, predetermined identities, the study uncovered a process of identity formation unfolding within distinct situational contexts. It highlights the pivotal role of clothing choices among *amabhinca* individuals as a potent emblem of identity, characterized by an urban sensibility and a preference for branded attire. These clothing selections that are often inspired by a tapestry of cultural sources, are recontextualized within the township milieu, significantly contributing to the evolution of a unique South African cultural identity. The research underscores the intricate interplay between global consumerist pressures and the preservation of local cultures, by its very existence, this subculture challenges and reshapes traditional perceptions of black masculinity within South African townships, offering a narrative of adaptability in the face of globalizing influences.

1. Introduction

The possibility of local cultures' integrity being damaged by global homogenization has been an issue of concern in South Africa (Pereira, 2019, Howes, 1996). Since the advent of democracy, the country has opened up to trade, which is accompanied by cultural exchange. Given the mechanics of globalization, global homogenization imposed by market forces affects cultures (Ogar, Nwoye & Bassey, 2019). Several scholars (Swartz, 2008, Bembe & Beukes, 2007, Hurst, 2009, Richards & Langa, 2018, Mchunu, 2017) have conducted research on the identity and culture of black residents of South African townships. This article adds to the body of literature by examining a specific subculture, namely *amabhinca*, and the identity it is linked to. Given the notion that identities are evolving due to the socio-economic and cultural circumstances experienced by black males (Langa, 2012, Richards & Langa, 2018), it investigates how black males use the *amabhinca*

CONTACT Zama M. Mthombeni ✉ mthombeni.z@gmail.com

subculture to establish their masculine identities, and how these identifications relate to the contemporary global metropolitan consumer culture.

Langa (2012) asserts that context and time affect how an identity is formed, with each context offering young people a framework within which to create specific types of identities. For instance, Langa and Eagle (2008) note that apartheid in South Africa created a socio-political setting in which black males residing in townships acquired a specific type of identity, frequently involving participation in politics and protest activities. Since 'comradeship' was highly prized in this environment among young people, the construction of black male identity at that time tended to integrate a strong 'political' and 'anti-apartheid identity' (Langa & Eagle, 2008). Males from the suburbs who belonged to paramilitary organizations shared the goal of abolishing the brutal apartheid regime.

Black men's involvement in political activities was well-nigh unavoidable and it became a daily part of their life that was closely linked to their sense of self, to the point that a 'culture of violence' emerged amongst the youth residing in townships. An increasingly military identity became the standard and everything that mattered to the young people active in the liberation movement (Langa & Eagle, 2008). The environment in which young people found themselves changed when apartheid ended in 1994. However, there has been continuity in that current identities are shaped by the settings and circumstances of the past (Xaba, 2001).

Amabhinca is a contemporary subculture group to which thousands of Zulu men belong. The term 'amabhinca' was originally intended to be an insult to individuals who were living in the past and had not embraced modern lifestyles (Mkhize, 2021). Traditionally a person associated with *amabhinca* loves anything associated with the Zulu culture. However, certain tenets of *amabhinca* values have been modernized and they are increasingly associated with wearing expensive international brands. This is seen as a symbol of wealth and going against the assertion that *amabhinca* are backwards and anti-modern. While these men still wear Zulu cultural attire, they are more likely to flaunt their ability to afford expensive clothing brands. This subculture has become more concerned with integration into the modern way of life, with deliberate pursuit of material possessions and an expensive lifestyle.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review that examines the concept of subculture within the South African context, with specific reference to various subcultures in the region. Drawing on Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital, it also considers how masculine identities take shape. Section 3 employs the theory of intersectionality to illustrate how interconnected factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality shape lived experiences in diverse social settings, thus exerting influence on these gendered identities. The fourth section outlines the methodology employed to conduct the study, while Section 5 presents and discusses the findings. Lastly, Section 6 provides a summary and concluding remarks.

2. Literature review

2.1. Understanding subcultures: definitions, evolution, and significance

The world's cultures and subcultures are calibrated representations of the relevant societies. Through culture and subcultures, one can comprehend the sociolinguistic,

economic, cultural, and political make-up of a society (Hebdige, 2012). Culture and subculture depend on their surrounding contexts and change along with it. There is no universal meaning of subculture, with scholars in different eras defining it in different ways. Some researchers have noted that subcultures are not confined to young people's attempts to diverge from their parent culture (see Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2017). According to Hall and Jefferson (1976, p. 13), they are smaller subgroups that are segregated and limited, and depend on 'structures inside one or other of the larger cultural networks.' In line with this definition, a subculture is a subset of popular culture that is practiced by a small group of individuals, a specific community, or a certain social class (Ha & Park, 2011, p. 23).

Haenfler (2014, p. 17) claims that subcultures have meanings and practices that evolve over time. He describes a subculture as a 'collection of individuals who share the status of outsiders and who actively or inactively offer some sort of resistance to the dominant or mainstream culture' (Haenfler, 2014, p. 17). Due to their identification with one another and perception of themselves as different from others, even other subculturalists, these subcultures share comparable values, beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts (Laqwela, 2021, Richards & Langa, 2018). Some subcultures in South Africa can be traced back to the apartheid era; however, similar to American schools in the Chicago region's reaction to deviant organizations, gangs have been associated with subcultures in South Africa (Hurst, 2009).

Academics from a variety of disciplines, including communication studies, business, psychology, political sciences, etc. have recently shown an interest in youth-related subcultures specifically, *izikhothane* (Laqwela, 2021, Mchunu, 2017, Richards & Langa, 2018, Mnisi, 2015). The social representation of *amabhinca* is similar to that of *izikhothane* that is characterized by an expensive lifestyle, status and prestige which ties in with their identity as males (Mooney, 2006, Ngcobo, 2016). In addition to interacting to create the distinctive elements of the subculture, these daily rituals, 'image (style and dress), argot (or slang), popular culture (films and music), and ritual practices (such as frequenting the same places and venues), accessories, settings, beliefs, and other symbols, marked points of entry into the subculture and encouraged commitment' (Mooney, 2006, Ngcobo, 2016).

According to Bourdieu, such objects act as a kind of cultural capital in developing inclusion and exclusion criteria (1986). For those who are part of the subculture, the meanings associated with this cultural capital change it into symbolic capital, enabling them to command respect and status that they previously lacked (Richards & Langa, 2018). Under specific circumstances, this capital also enables players to be recognized. The following subsection reviews the historical and contemporary roots of the *amabhinca* subculture.

2.2. The historical foundations of African masculinity

The intricate history of South Africa has shaped diverse gender dynamics influenced by factors such as race, class, and geography. Despite the challenges brought by colonialism, African masculinity endured, rooted in pre-colonial heritage and persisting gender norms (Langa, 2012, Morrell, 1998). The aftermath of the Second World War and apartheid accelerated urbanization, giving rise to a distinctive black masculinity marked by resistance to white masculinity but

fragmented across generations (Morrell, 1998, Tosh, 1994). For Zulu men, solidarity became crucial in adapting to urban life in Durban, drawing from rural origins to reaffirm core values (Langa, 2012). Apartheid's impact on residency paradoxically heightened the influence of rural-based African masculinity (Morrell, 1998). Despite townships shaping masculinity, the enduring ties to rural homesteads and kinship ensured the resilience of African masculinity (Langa, 2012). Emerging black masculinity diverged from rural roots, grappling with job loss and emasculation, often expressed through violence (Morrell, 1998, Miescher & Lindsay, 2003). Historical ties to the countryside, including family, leadership roles, and livestock ownership, anchored workers to their rural origins, defining masculinity in fulfilling these responsibilities (Morrell, 1998).

2.2.1. Amabhinca *subculture: contemporary influences*

The term 'amabhinca' is an isiZulu descriptor for 'Zulu individuals who adhere to their traditional Zulu culture, including donning traditional attire and embracing Maskandi music' (Africtionary, 2021). It encapsulates a distinctive subculture that has gained prominence among Zulu men in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Although the term itself may not have a long historical lineage, the cultural facets and practices associated with *amabhinca* draw from a fusion of historical, cultural, and contemporary influences.

The *amabhinca* subculture draws inspiration from traditional Zulu cultural elements. Historically, Zulu men were renowned for their warrior culture, characterized by practices such as stick fighting and the donning of animal skins. These practices are deeply rooted in Zulu history and identity (Langa, 2012). Maskandi, a contemporary genre of South African music, intricately weaves together the vibrant musical traditions of the Zulu people. This musical tradition is deeply ingrained in Zulu culture and boasts a rich history of solo performances in informal settings, including gatherings for the enjoyment of beer, courtship, and entertainment (Davies, 1994, Ntombela, 2017). It is also frequently performed by groups of instrumentalists accompanied by dancers. Maskandi music primarily belongs to Zulu-speaking males who are expected to showcase their verbal prowess by composing praise songs and poetry, and conveying social messages through their lyrics (Yende & Yende, 2022). Various solo acoustic instruments are employed, including the guitar (known as 'isigingci'), concertina ('inkositini'), and piano accordion ('akhodiyoni') (Mlamla & Shumba, 2021). More recently, the tradition has evolved to incorporate ensembles featuring electric guitars and drums. Among these instruments, the guitar stands out as the most popular choice among Maskandi musicians. Traditional dances like 'Indlamu' are an integral part of Zulu cultural heritage, and dance has been a means of both expression and communication in Zulu society (Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023).

As South Africa underwent urbanization and modernization, particularly in townships like those in KwaZulu-Natal, traditional cultural practices began to evolve. The *amabhinca* subculture embodies a contemporary adaptation of these traditions in urban settings. Modern music genres such as kwaito, hip-hop, and house music have played a significant role in shaping the style and identity of *amabhinca* (Titlestad, 2005), introducing new elements, including fashion trends and public expression of consumerism. The rise of consumer culture, driven by economic and neoliberal forces, has influenced how *amabhinca* individuals express their identities. The choice of clothing brands and fashion items has become an important aspect of their self-expression.

Rooted in traditional Zulu practices, *amabhinca* culture has thus evolved and adapted to contemporary urban settings. It serves as a means for Zulu men to express their identity, preserve their cultural heritage, and navigate the complexities of modern life while staying connected to their roots in the face of a rapidly changing urban environment. Amabhinca should be viewed as a contemporary adaptation of these traditions in response to the evolving cultural landscape influenced by urbanization and modernization. The subculture serves as a means for Zulu men to express their identity and preserve their cultural heritage in the face of changing urban environments, indirectly responding to the impact of historical factors like colonialism. A closer look at the *amabhinca* subculture suggests that clothing and fashion choices are not merely expressions of style but manifestations of a broader concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital sheds light on how such choices play a pivotal role in the construction of identities within this evolving cultural landscape.

2.3. Constructing masculine identities through cultural capital: performance, branding, and boundaries

A group of people's established clothes, lifestyle, and language could all be considered examples of cultural capital. In Bourdieu's view, such cultural capital is objectified in a specific location in relation to certain individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the only way the objectified capital can be converted into symbolic capital is through the person's embodied capital, which takes the shape of relevant knowledge and the ability to choose the 'right' apparel to use public appeal as a performative strategy (Butler, 1990, Clay, 2003). Cultural capital 'brings a community into life and maps out real and imagined relationships between individuals,' through performance (Lipsitz, 1994, p. 36). People can situate themselves in relation to others in each scenario, for instance, through performance and speech, legitimating their position and identity and making it easier to recognize the borders separating distinct positions and groupings (Langa, 2008, Clay, 2003).

The notion of 'performance' in this article can also be seen as a manifestation of 'branded, physical, and expressive masculinity,' which occurs when males use consumer goods or brand names to emphasize and define what it means to be a man (Alexander, 2003; Jensen, 2006; Langa, 2008). Wearing branded apparel can be a way for men to show that they adhere to certain male norms or that they are part of a certain class because the brand itself conjures up different meanings (Richards & Langa, 2018). Young boys draw on their disposition (capital) or understanding to know what certain branded items represent (Alexander, 2003). Acquiring these items creates a sense of achievement or symbolic capital, which is associated with a certain status in society that is mainly associated with power (Alexander, 2003; Langa, 2008). It is possible to think of hegemonic masculinity as both a form of cultural capital and one of capital in and of itself. A disposition is the 'innate' ability to select the appropriate attire, gestures, and words; it can be thought of as cultural capital. Persuasion can be demonstrated by posture, clothing, movement, or gesture (Battaglia, 1995, Clay, 2003). As a result, the cultural capital referred to that people use to define their identities and boundaries appears to be a type of performance art that enables actors to persuade others of the veracity of their point of view.

Language, dress sense, behavior, and way of life are but a few of the aspects of masculinity listed by Langa (2008). To maintain dominant identities and establish the regulatory processes of inclusion and exclusion, these elements are policed and governed by individuals in specific situations (Aycard, 2010; Langa, 2008). Langa (2008) also cites risk-taking as one of the factors that influence young people's perception of suitable masculine behavior. For instance, it is typical for young males to engage in multiple sexual relationships as well as experiment with and consume drugs and alcohol. These risk-taking behaviors are considered the main signs of local hegemonic masculinity (Langa, 2008). Young men who fail to live up to these requirements are often ridiculed, viewed negatively, neglected, and oppressed (Langa, 2008). In terms of Bourdieu's (1977a, 1977b) habitus theory, people's actions express the dominant or distinctive social discourse of masculinity in society. This refers to class and what it means, and how young men might preserve their 'feeling of blackness or a black masculine identity in the townships' are further crucial factors (Richards & Langa, 2018).

However, the intersectionality of identities within this subculture introduces additional layers of complexity. Based on the theoretical framing of intersectionality proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, it is evident that these men's experiences are shaped not only by their gender but also by intersecting factors such as race, class, and socio-economic status. Their struggle to preserve a sense of 'blackness' or a distinct black masculine identity within the townships adds another dimension to their lived experiences.

3. Theoretical framework: intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality that was initially developed to address the intersecting systems of oppression predominantly experienced by black women (Collins, 1999) is a crucial tool to understand the complex identities within the *amabhinca* subculture. It is important to note that intersectionality is not an independent theory but a framework that helps one to explore how various social identities intersect and influence one another (Crenshaw, 1991). Social identities play a crucial role in shaping individual identities, particularly from a postcolonial perspective. These identities are intricately influenced by historical context and geographical location. Moreover, social interactions and institutions make a significant contribution to the development of various behavioral aspects associated with social identities. Kimberly Crenshaw introduced and coined the term 'intersectionality' to describe the intricate interplay of multiple dimensions in the formation of identities. According to Crenshaw, it encompasses a discourse that acknowledges how identities are shaped through the intersection of various dimensions (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1299).

Within this study's context, social identities are multifaceted and profoundly influenced by historical and geographical factors. Social interactions and institutional dynamics significantly contribute to their construction. For individuals within the *amabhinca* subculture, the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation plays a pivotal role in shaping their lived experiences and identities. Contemporary perspectives on masculinity have evolved significantly, departing from traditional norms and stereotypes (Connor et al., 2021). The concept of masculinity is a socially constructed one, encompassing behaviors, language, and practices occurring in specific cultural and organizational contexts typically associated with men and classified as non-feminine (Whitehead & Barrett,

2001, Connor et al., 2021). The hegemonic nature of traditional masculinity often perpetuates dominance, stoicism, and the expectation of power over others (Connell, 1987, Courtenay, 2000). However, modern shifts in masculinity have given rise to new conceptualizations that challenge these restrictive norms (Smith & Inhorn, 2016).

There is a rich body of critical studies on males and masculinities, highlighting the evolving nature of masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018, Britten, 2001, Elliott, 2019). This emphasizes that masculinity is conceptualized differently based on the intersection of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. These intersecting factors contribute to the diversification of traditional masculinity norms (Conner et al., 2021, Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018).

The concept of intersectionality is critical in comprehending the intricate identities of the *amabhinca* subculture (Moolman, 2013). Intersectionality unravels the multifaceted realities of these men by acknowledging the intricate web of social and economic power dynamics that shape African masculinities. This analytical concept enables a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in the identities of the men in this study. *Amabhinca* individuals navigate a multifaceted web of identities and societal expectations, making intersectionality an essential lens through which to explore their experiences. This theory provides a valuable framework to comprehend the intricate tapestry of identities, power structures, and cultural expressions within the *amabhinca* subculture. It enables researchers to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of *amabhinca* individuals and the broader implications of their cultural practices in the context of contemporary South African society.

4. Research methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach, with information sourced online, particularly from users of the Facebook *amabhinca* group (see Figure 1). Data from social media platforms enables researchers to explore the complex meaning that
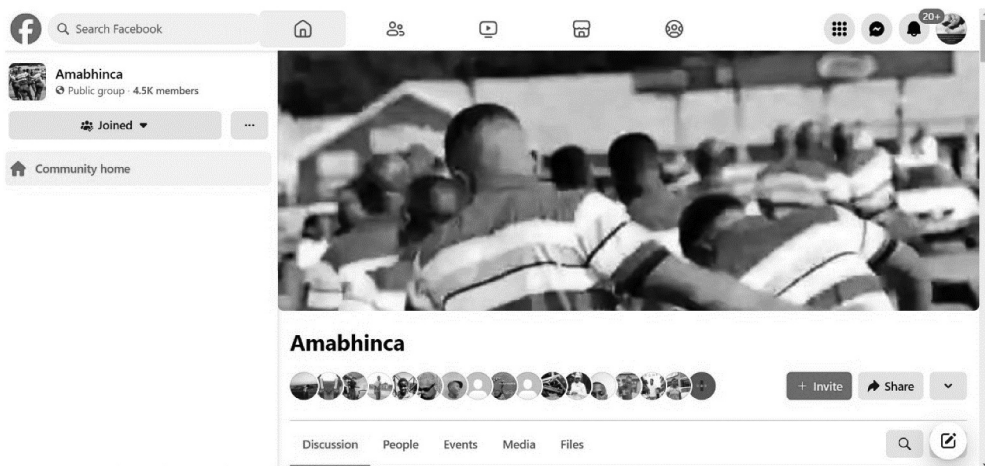

Figure 1. Facebook group for *amabhinca*. Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401

exists within a small group of participants (Dudwick et al., 2006), uncover the underlying values, assumptions, and beliefs (Yauch & Steudel, 2003), and gather more illuminating or original data than would be obtained using methods like close-ended survey questions (Yauch & Steudel, 2003). Due to the nature of Facebook data, qualitative research approaches may need to be adapted to accurately capture interactions on social media which often occur through texts, images, and videos (Atieno, 2009). Despite the rise in Facebook research, little is understood about the best techniques to gather and analyze qualitative information from Facebook users that is different from that gathered by means of traditional methods such as focus groups, individual and group ethnographic interviews, and individual and group interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Barbour, 2018).

4.1. Active and passive approaches

Qualitative research methodologies in the realm of social media can be categorized into two main approaches: active analysis and passive analysis (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). In active analysis, researchers engage in direct conversations with Facebook users. For instance, Cheung et al. (2017) employed a proactive approach by inviting participants to become members of a study-specific Facebook group they established. Within this group, a designated member of the research team took an active role in generating content, including posts and comments, with the aim of fostering interaction among the study participants. In this study, individuals within the Facebook group were encouraged to actively contribute, and a designated time was allocated to collect data from consenting participants each week. I also adopted a passive approach by monitoring interactions within the group. This observation allowed me to identify recurring conversations and themes that warranted inclusion in the data collection process.

4.2. Recruitment and sample size

Given the existence of an accessible Facebook group dedicated to *amabhinca* that is open to all, I opted not to create a separate group, but join the active community. This decision was based on the utilization of both passive and active analysis. I had already communicated with the Facebook group's administrator and other members, explaining my research objectives and my interest in discussing *amabhinca*-related topics, and seeking permission to use the group's photos. This approach enabled me to gather ample information and content given the group's substantial membership of more than 3 000 individuals. I obtained active interaction from 30 male members during the dedicated question and answer session. Many participants were reluctant to divulge their age; however, the group administrator was able to provide the age range as the data analytics show such, the geographical location of people in the group and other specifications. It was established that the group members ranged from young adult men in their 20s to individuals in their 50s. It should also be noted that there are some female members, but who did not form part of the study. Most of the males come from different townships and rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal, are isiZulu-speaking and share the same taste in music (Maskandi).

4.3. *Data analysis*

Thematic analysis was employed to unpack the intricate narratives within the *amabhinca* subculture. This well-established qualitative research technique enables the systematic identification, exploration, and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was particularly suited to unravel the intricate layers of identity, culture, and consumerism within the *amabhinca* subculture. The process began with immersion in the data, including Facebook group interactions and visual content. This was followed by systematic coding, where data segments were labeled with descriptive codes. These codes were then organized into emerging themes, providing a structured framework to understand the subculture's complexities.

5. Findings and discussion

In order to fully comprehend the forms of capital (cultural, financial, familial, aspirational, linguistic, and social) one needs to be considered *ibhinca* (singular of *amabhinca*), the discussion is limited to who *amabhinca* are and the social markers associated with their identity (Richards & Langa, 2018). It also focuses on how this subculture interacts with masculinities and class.

5.1. *Who are* Amabhinca?

Traditionally, a person associated with *amabhinca* loves anything connected to the Zulu culture. While the collective notion was that *amabhinca* specifically refer to Zulu men who are devoted to embracing the Zulu culture, a member of the Facebook group noted that:

> Group Member 1 (GM1): 'Historically ibhinca is a person who was considered backward and out of tune with modernity, this was something never to be proud of. So many things associated with amabhinca have been ridiculed because we are seen as alienated from broader society. For instance, if you lacked the ability to speak English or even dress according to modern ways you would be called ibhinca not in the sense of celebrating culture but in the sense of being ridiculed for being backwards.'

Another member echoed these sentiments in reflecting on the modern meaning of being *ibhinca*:

> GM2: 'Being ibhinca is not just about being clueless as people believe, but it is the ability to express your identity as a Zulu man or woman in this modern world. It is to be part of broader society but also not being ashamed of your culture and identity. This also has no age bearing as you can see a lot of amabhinca artists who sing maskandi (Zulu folk music that is evolving with South African society) are relatively young and they are proud of who they are.'

GM1 and GM2's reflections cite the issues of ethnicity and belonging to a tribe (Zulu) as well as the importance of culture. Another member spoke of issues of class and how this has contributed to people associated with *amabhinca* being ridiculed:

> GM3: 'In general, black people are mostly born into poverty and not in prestige, so being behind in modern life is inherently a poverty thing and not just a zulu thing. To me it never made sense why only zulu people would be ridiculed as being backwards because any person born in impoverished living conditions will be backward because they lack exposure to these so-called modern ways of living. That is why as amabhinca today we are showing that

ububhinca has nothing to do with shame and backwardness we are just proud Zulu people who love our culture.'

These analyses of the essence of *amabhinca* demonstrate the significance of culture in maintaining this subculture's standards and values. However, they refute notions of backwardness and emphasize '*ubuhle bomzulu*' (the beauty of being Zulu) in contemporary society, where subcultures often reject the dominant values and conventions of society. A subculture thus denotes a conflict with a dominant culture. While there may be some truth to this remark, closer examination reveals that there are also some similarities because there is resistance and opposition to the dominant culture.

Figure 2 portrays *amabhinca* in their traditional outfits in frame one. One is wearing *Umblaselo*, pants and a top with decorative patches worn by men performing the traditional Zulu dance (*ukusina*). The second frame shows them wearing what is called *Ibheshu* made from animal hide. Whilst this traditional apparel is worn for occasions such as weddings and any traditional ceremony, it is not commonly worn on a regular day such as going to work.

The following section discusses the markers associated with being *ibhinca*, that is, how *amabhinca* dress on a daily basis and other traits associated with this subculture.

5.2. Social markers associated with Amabhinca: *from fashion to music*

In an attempt to debunk the notion that they are backward and alienated from modernity, *amabhinca* are known for wearing expensive, popular brands. This is similar to the subculture of *izikhothane*. Asked which brands they favor, two members of the Facebook group responded:

> GM4 &5: 'We mostly wear Brentwood pants because we have been known for having the wrong sense of style and for wearing clothes that do not match which we still do. We are known also for wearing brown sandals especially when you belong to the older generation. If you are young, you are most likely to wear carvella shoes. For our T-shirts we mostly wear Fabiana or checked shirts then we will wear our fashionable hats.'

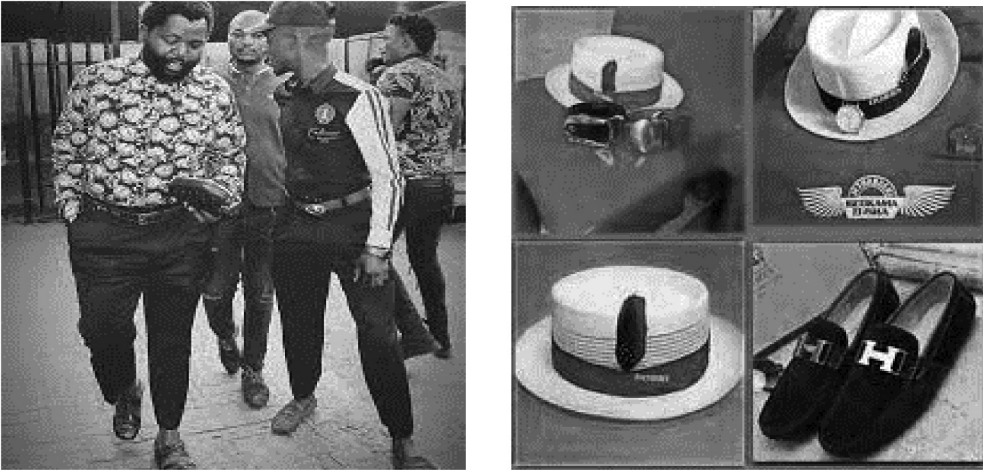**Figure 2.** *Amabhinca* in their traditional Zulu outfits. Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group (https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401)

Figure 3. Fashionable items worn by *amabhinca*. Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group (https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401)

The first frame in Figure 3 shows an older man wearing brown sandals and Brentwood pants and a younger *ibhinca* wearing red carvella, Brentwood pants, and a Fabiana shirt and a cap. The second frame showcases what *amabhinca* typically wear on daily basis versus what they wear for traditional occasions as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 4 shows the full outfit typically worn by *amabhinca* who are more elderly (the brown sandals, Brentwood pants and checked shirt alluded to by participants, and the hat).

Figure 4. Checked shirt worn by an elderly *ibhinca*. Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group (*https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401*)

Figure 5 shows the typical dress code of the younger generation of *amabhinca*, black carvellas, Brentwood pants and T-shirts. The differences in the young and old *ibhinca's* attire mainly relate to the type of shoes, with the older generation typically wearing sandals whilst the younger generation wears carvella. Both generations favour Brentwood pants, shirts and Fabiana t-shirts. It is significant the members of *amabhinca* have a reputation for donning attire in the same colors and brands, which is an expression of their cultural capital. The uniform attire helps to establish their group identity and grants them a certain level of prestige. It also combines collective and individual identities by displaying participants' distinctive characteristics through their personalized modifications during competitions with their male counterparts.

Clothing is thus a kind of validation, with *amabhinca* demonstrating their acquisition of capital (financial and cultural). They also demonstrate their taste and ability to stand out from the crowd, raising themselves above others. This enables the players to appropriate dominant symbols and acquire symbolic capital. *Amabhinca* present a new image, where they are perceived as not being backwards but rather contemporary thanks to clothing brands and their expensive tastes. To be regarded as a 'genuine' *ibhinca*, one must wear pricey apparel and footwear. Participants should also be familiar with maskandi music, which is a component of the traditional Zulu dance known as *ukusina*.

During the conversations with *amabhinca* it was emphasized that an *ibhinca* does not listen to hip hop and commercial music, but mostly maskandi. According to Ntombela (2016) and Hadebe (2000), maskandi is considered as a way of safeguarding cultural riches. However, this indigenous music type can also be used to promote peace and reconciliation. Maskandi music is most frequently heard and consumed in KwaZulu-Natal

Figure 5. Outfits worn by younger *amabhinca*. Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group (https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401)

due to its strong roots in Zulu culture and significance to the Zulu tribe (Hadebe, 2000). It is the second most popular genre in South Africa and in recent years, young maskandi artists have played an integral role in mainstreaming young people into this subculture. This challenges the view that being *ibhinca* is only for the older generation.

Both frames in Figure 6 show young maskandi artists who are very popular in South Africa and especially KwaZulu-Natal for their unique offering in the genre. Figure 7 showcases some of the instruments used by maskandi musicians. The older men spoke about how these items are loved as they are easily accessible and transportable.

Maskandi musicians have made a significant contribution to raising awareness of South Africa's social and economic challenges. In discussing music in this subculture, many of the participants highlighted the importance of speaking isiZulu and sticking to the traditional way of life.

> GM6: 'Ngiyazi siphila esikhathini semphucuko kepha uma usuzibiza ngebhinca awukwazi ukuqelelana nolimi lwakini. Ngoba iyona into esiziqhaja ngayo, uma ulalela umculo wethu asiwuculi ngesingisi ngenxa yokuqonda ukuthi umyalezo uzwakala kangcono ngolimi lethu.'

Figure 6. Young Maskandi musicians. Source: Madibongo (2022)

Figure 7. Piano accordion (left) and concertina (right). Source: Facebook *amabhinca* group (https://web.facebook.com/groups/210806343542401)

[I know we live in the modern world but if you call yourself ibhinca you cannot be alienated from your mother tongue. Our language is what we pride ourselves with. Even when you listen to our music maskandi we never sing it in English because we believe that our message is best portrayed in our language].

Being *ibhinca* means one will be a traditionalist who remains very close to the tribal way of life. As one member of the Facebook group noted:

GM7: 'It is important to stay in tune with traditional way of life; we are known to be people full of respect, for instance we do not settle disputes the modern way. We believe in our traditional authorities and structures; importantly respect we must have outmost respect for our elders.'

A younger member agreed:

GM9: 'As younger men within the group we depend on those who have walked before us to show us the way especially with understanding traditional authorities and how we should conduct ourselves.'

5.3. *Intersecting terrains of masculinities within the subculture*

Despite being portrayed as distinct social categories, race, class, ethnicity, and gender are mutually constitutive. Some of the inadequacies in how men as a group practice their collective masculinities are exposed by changes in race, social class, ethnic, and gender formations (Moolman, 2013). Men's everyday behaviors vary because of macro-social processes, and this must be taken into consideration in designing social policies and interventions that are able to adapt to a constantly changing environment (Moolman, 2013). In examining the history of racial segregation, colonialism, and imperialism, as well as separatist agitation throughout these times (such as apartheid), the polarization (and hierarchy) of racial identities (Fanon, 1967) serves as a useful starting point.

Asked why they brag about wearing expensive apparel, members of the Facebook group responded in different ways. A younger *amabhinca* said:

GM10: 'When you are associated with amabhinca you are known to be backwards, no money, no direction so this is one way we show people we have money. It is a way to prove your worth.'

Two of the older members expanded on GM10's argument:

GM11 & 13: '*Ubuhle bendoda zinkomo zayo*' (isiZulu proverb, 'A man is defined by his cattle'). Cattle have been historically considered a symbol of wealth, status, and prosperity. It has been embedded in the Zulu culture that a man must be able to show in some way or another his status and wealth. Wearing expensive clothes is a modern way that we do so with the intention of getting attention from ladies. This is not just a show but also a way to show that you can take care of your lady, first thing when you approach a person, they look at how you present yourself. It would be difficult to find a lady in my traditional gear (ibheshu) though in its own right it is an expensive gear. But you have to find ways that speak to how people live now, and people are really determined by labels and that's how they see wealth."

These views are in line with the literature on African masculinity that argues that black males have been able to enter the ranks of the elite in post-apartheid South Africa and should therefore not be seen as *excluded* and *helpless* (Moolman, 2013). Ratele (2008)

notes that in African society, masculinity was predominantly defined by age. However, power relationships between distinct groups of males based on what they can afford are clear markers of the redefinition of blackness and masculinities (Ratele, 2008). The post-1994 consumerist and capitalist milieu is impacting black middle-class and working-class families' perception of class, as seen in the *amabhinca* subculture's focus on the ability to afford high-end products.

Cultural practices like polygamy and circumcision have been described as signs of social and cultural uniformity (Hunter, 2005). Culture and ethnicity are equally important in distinguishing themselves from (and combatting) whiteness/Europeanness and creating an exclusive and genuine African manhood. The *amabhinca* cited polygamy as a crucial part of how they identify their subculture and African manhood:

> GM8: 'Self-renowned amabhinca leaders are all polygamous and those who hold pertinent positions in the sub-culture who serve as role models are all polygamous. It is nothing shocking to find ibhinca to have multiple partners because this is how most of us grew up and were raised under this circumstance.'

> GM12: 'There is a Zulu concept of "amasoka" [that] represents the ideal of a man who is highly desirable to women. We grew up knowing that is good thing as a man to have multiple partners even if it's at the girlfriend and boyfriend stage. That is why KwaZulu you find that for a man to have multiple partners girlfriends/wives is prevalent.'

The notion that men should demonstrate their masculinity by having multiple sexual partners, which is seen as both a natural inclination and a crucial aspect of their identity as men, contrasts with the fact that females with numerous partners are called names that denigrate their womanhood. This demonstrates the different expectations of men and women in terms of romantic relationships. In understanding the identities of *amabhinca*, it is important to note that culture, ethnicity and class intersect in creating the many manifestations of masculine practices and their lived reality.

6. Summary and concluding remarks

The *amabhinca* subculture represents a unique fusion of traditional Zulu practices and contemporary urban influences. It has evolved as a means for Zulu men to express their identities while navigating the complexities of modern life. This subculture provides a platform for both young and old people who are already immersed in these practices to engage with their cultural heritage in a way that resonates with their present reality. Furthermore, the embrace of *amabhinca* practices, which include a distinctive clothing style and appreciation for Zulu folk music (Maskandi), ensures the preservation and continuation of these cultural elements. Rather than compromising Zulu music, *amabhinca* individuals actively participate in and promote Maskandi music, contributing to its sustainability and growth. It is important to note that amabhinca, as outlined in the paper, does not necessarily project a false image of wealth. Many iconic figures within the amabhinca subculture, particularly renowned musicians, could serve as positive role models. These individuals have achieved recognition and success in their careers, and their influence can inspire young African men. The prominence of these figures challenges stereotypes and demonstrates that cultural expression can be accompanied by meaningful achievements and contributions.

Furthermore, Zulu men's desire to engage in *amabhinca* practices can be seen as a strategy to assert their status and agency within the broader societal context. Given the historical challenges and stereotypes that Zulu men in South Africa have faced, this subculture allows them to express their individuality and demonstrate their cultural pride. It is a powerful form of self-expression that challenges preconceived notions of identity, culture, and consumerism.

This article has shown that subcultures are dynamic and alter as the political landscape changes. The *amabhinca* have adopted several components of previous subcultures, as evidenced by their dress code, which resembles *izikhothane*. These new identities appear to have their origins in the shifting class relations that exist among people in townships and are associated with neo-liberal politics of consumerism and the culture of materialism. The 'genuine' *amabhinca* are those who possess certain branded clothing. Maskandi music, the isiZulu language, and polygamy are further symbols used by the *amabhinca* to draw inclusionary and exclusionary lines. This shared cultural capital creates a sense of belonging to a community with a common identity. Through its emphasis on traditional attire, engagement with Maskandi music, and incorporation of modern influences like kwaito and hip-hop, amabhinca individuals express their identity and preserve their cultural heritage. The collective responsibility observed within amabhinca towards the well-being of the community aligns with Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness and shared responsibility. Additionally, the acknowledgment and respect for traditional practices, including the rich musical traditions of the Zulu people, echo Ubuntu's recognition of the wisdom and cultural contributions of elders. Amabhinca, therefore, serves as a modern manifestation of Ubuntu principles, weaving together traditional values with contemporary expressions, fostering a sense of communal identity, and contributing to the preservation of cultural richness within the Zulu community.

Amabhinca should be appreciated as a dynamic and authentic expression of Zulu culture in a contemporary context. It not only engages young people, but also ensures the preservation of cultural elements like Maskandi music. It represents a positive affirmation of identity and deserves recognition as a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on African culture and its evolution in the face of globalization and urbanization.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Zama M. Mthombeni is a Chief Researcher in equitable education and economies at the Human Sciences Research Council. Her PhD in Development Studies with the University of KwaZulu Natal focuses on the intersection of technology and society. Her research publications focus broadly on African philosophy, higher education and African development.

References

Africtionary. (2021). *Definition of Ibhinca*. https://africtionary.com/definition.php?word=Ibhinca#:~:text=Ibhinca%20is%20a%20Zulu%20person,Mr%20Trends%2C%2023%20August%202021

Alexander, S. M. (2003). Stylish hard bodies: Branded masculinity in men's health magazine. *Sociological Perspectives*, *46*(4), 535–554. https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2003.46.4.535

Atieno, O. P. (2009). An analysis of the strengths and limitation of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, *13*, 13–18.

Aycard, P. (2010). How the youth of Soweto have turned language into a transformable object in the context of a changing society. In M. de Bruijn & D. Merolla (Eds.), *Researching Africa: Explorations of everyday African encounters* (pp. 56–75). African Studies Centre.

Barbour, R. S. (2018). Doing focus groups. In U. Flick (Ed.), *Doing focus groups* (2nd ed., pp. 1–224). Sage Publications.

Battaglia, D. (1995). Problematizing the self: A thematic introduction. In D. Battaglia (Ed.), *Rhetorics of self-making* (pp. 1–15). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520087989.001.0001

Bembe, M. P., & Beukes, A. (2007). The use of slang by black youth in Gauteng. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *25*(4), 463–472. https://doi.org/10.2989/16073610709486475

Bourdieu, P. (1977a). *Outline of a theory of practice* R. Nice, Trans., Vol. 16. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812507

Bourdieu, P. (1977b). Sur le Pouvoir Symbolique. *Annales: Économies, Sociétiés, Civilisations*, *32*(3), 405–411. https://doi.org/10.3406/ahess.1977.293828

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital (R. Nice, Trans.). In J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. J. (2018). On the elasticity of gender hegemony: Why hybrid masculinities fail to undermine gender and sexual inequality. In J. W. Messerschmidt, P. Y. Martin, M. A. Messner, & R. Connell (Eds.), *Gender reckonings* (pp. 254–274). New York University Press.

Britten, A. (2001). Masculinities and masculinism. In S. M. Whitehead & F. J. Barrett (Eds.), *The masculinities reader* (pp. 51–71). Polity Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Cheung, Y. T. D., Chan, C. H. H., Wang, M. P., Li, H. C. W., & Lam, T. H. (2017). Online social support for the prevention of smoking relapse: A content analysis of the WhatsApp and Facebook social groups. *Telemedicine and E-Health*, *23*(6), 507–516. https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2016.0176

Clarke, J., Hall, S., Jefferson, T., & Roberts, B. (2017). Subcultures, cultures and class. In K. Hayward (Ed.), *Cultural criminology* (pp. 47–116). Routledge.

Clay, A. (2003). Keepin' it real. *American Behavioural Scientist*, *46*(10), 1346–1358. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764203046010005

Collins, P. H. (1999). Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination. In *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (pp. 221–238). Unwin Hyman.

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Allen & Unwin.

Connor, S., Edvardsson, K., Fisher, C., & Spelten, E. (2021). Perceptions and interpretation of contemporary masculinities in Western culture: A systematic review. *American Journal of Men's Health*, *15*(6), 15579883211061009. https://doi.org/10.1177/15579883211061009

Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health. *Social Science Medicine*, *50*, 1385–1401. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536(99)00390-1

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Davies, N. (1994). The guitar in Zulu "maskanda" tradition. *The World of Music*, 118–137. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=The+Guitar+in+Zulu+maskanda+Tradition&btnG=

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

Dudwick, N., Keuhnast, K., Jones, V. N., & Woolcock, M. (2006). Documents & reports - all documents | the World Bank. *Analyzing social capital in context: A guide to using qualitative methods and data*. https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/601831468338476652/Analyzing-social-capital-in-context-a-guide-to-using-qualitative-methods-and-datawebsite .

Elliott, K. (2019). Negotiations between progressive and "traditional" expressions of masculinity among young Australian men. *Journal of Sociology*, *55*(1), 108–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318802996

Eysenbach, G., & Till, J. E. (2001). Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, *323*(7321), 1103–1105. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.323.7321.1103

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks*. Grove Press.

Gwerevende, S., & Mthombeni, Z. M. (2023). Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: Exploring the synergies in the transmission of indigenous languages, dance and music practices in Southern Africa. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *29*(5), 398–412. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2193902

Hadebe, J. S. (2000). *Izwe Alithuthuki by Phuzekhemisi as sung in KwaZulu-Natal: Maskandi song as social protest analysed as an oral-style text* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of KwaZulu Natal.

Haenfler, R. (2014). *Subcultures: The basics*. Routledge.

Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (1976). *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. The University of Virginia.

Ha, J., & Park, J. (2011, January). Significance of changing Korean youth subculture styles. *Asian Culture and History*, *3*(1), 23–30. [22 September 2022]. http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ach/article/view/6700/6550

Hebdige, D. (2012). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. Routledge.

Howes, D. (1996). *Cross-cultural consumption: Global markets, local realities*. Routledge.

Hunter, M. (2005). Cultural politics and masculinities: Multiple-partners inhistorical perspective in KwaZulu-Natal. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *7*(3), 209–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050412331293458

Hurst, E. (2009). Tsotsitaal, global culture and local style: Identity and recontextualization in twenty-first century South African townships. *Social Dynamics*, *35*(2), 244–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950903076196

Jensen, S. Q. (2006). Rethinking subcultural capital. *Young*, *14*(3), 257–276. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308806065820

Langa, M. (2008). Using photo-narratives to explore the construction of young masculinities. *Psychology in Society*, *36*, 6–23.

Langa, M. (2012). *Becoming a man: Exploring multiple voices of masculinity amongst a group of young adolescent boys in Alexandra township, South Africa* [PhD dissertation]. University of the Witwatersrand. Accessed online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328513295_Izikhothane_Class_and_Masculinities_of_Black_Male_Youths_in_Katlehong_Township_South_Africa

Laqwela, B. B. (2021). *Youth sub-cultures: The case of Izikhothane amongst youth in port Elizabeth townships* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Nelson Mandela University.

Lipsitz, G. (1994). *Dangerous crossroads: Popular music, postmodernism, and the poetics of place*. Verso.

Madibongo, J. (2022, February). Maskandi royalty goes after the KwaZulu-Natal entertainment awards organisers. *News24*. https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/the-kwazulu-natal-awards-that-made-empty-promises-20220226.

Mchunu, K. (2017). Izikhothane youth phenomenon: The Janus face of contemporary culture in South Africa. *African Identities*, *15*(2), 132–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2016.1227691

Messerschmidt, J. W., & Messner, M. A. (2018). Hegemonic, nonhegemonic, and "new" masculinities. In J. W. Messerschmidt, P. Y. Martin, M. A. Messner, & R. Connell (Eds.), *Gender reckonings* (pp. 35–56). New York University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1pwtb3r.7

Miescher, S., & Lindsay, L. (2003). *Men and masculinities in modern Africa*. Heinemann.

Mkhize, S. (2021, January). "Amabhinca" do it again as they rule the airwaves on Ukhozi FM's song of the year. *The Purpose News*. https://www.thepurpose.co.za/news/history-repeats-itself-as-amabhinca-continues-to-fly-high-flag-of-maskandi/

Mlamla, N. E., & Shumba, K. (2021). A critical discourse analysis of the voice of Maskandi on hostel killings in KwaMashu, Durban: Implications for community safety, health and well-being. *African Journal of Development Studies*, *11*(3), 271.

Mnisi, J. G. (2015). *Burning to Consume? Izikhothane on the East Rand as spectacles of style, consumption and status-seeking among young black South Africans* [Unpublished MA Dissertation]. University of Johannesburg.

Moolman, B. (2013). Rethinking 'masculinities in transition' in South Africa considering the 'intersectionality' of race, class, and sexuality with gender. *African Identities*, *11*(1), 93–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2013.775843

Mooney, K. (2006). *'Die Eendstert Euwel' and societal responses to white youth subcultural identities on the Witwatersrand, 1930–1964* [PhD Thesis]. Wits University.

Morrell, R. (1998). Of boys and men: Masculinity and gender in Southern African studies. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *24*(4), 605–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079808708593

Ngcobo, N. B. (2016). *S'khothane: Representation in, and influence on, contemporary visual arts practices* [MA Thesis]. University of South Africa. Retrieved April 16, 2018, from http://hdl.handle.net/10500/23181

Ntombela, S. A. (2016). Maskandi: A critical discourse analysis of indigenous isiZulu songs. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *34*(2), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2016.1194219

Ntombela, S. A. (2017). Maskandi: A critical general inductive analysis of zulu maskandi songs. *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies*, *27*(1), 42–52. https://doi.org/10.25159/1016-8427/1465

Ogar, J. N., Nwoye, L., & Bassey, S. A. (2019). Archetype of globalization: Illusory comfort of neo-colonialism in Africa. *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)*, *2*(3), 90–95. https://doi.org/10.33750/ijhi.v2i3.46

Pereira, M. S. (2019). Batuques negros, ouvidos brancos: colonialismo e homogeneização de práticas socioculturais do sul de Moçambique (1890–1940). *Revista Brasileira de História*, *39*(80), 155–177. https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-93472019v39n80-07

Ratele, K. (2008). Analysing males in Africa: Certain useful elements in considering ruling masculinities. *African and Asian Studies*, *7*(4), 515–536. https://doi.org/10.1163/156921008X359641

Richards, J. G., & Langa, M. (2018). Izikhothane: Class and masculinities of black male youths in Katlehong Township, South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology*, *49*(2), 86–104. https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2018.1493395

Schutt, R. K. (2018). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. Sage publications.

Smith, S., & Inhorn, M. C. (2016). Emergent masculinities, men's health and the movember movement. In J. Gideon (Ed.), *Handbook on gender & health* (pp. 436–456). Edward Elgar.

Swartz, S. (2008). Is kwaito South African hip-hop? Why the answer matters and who it matters to. *The World of Music*, *50*(2), 15–33.

Titlestad, M. (2005). Jazz discourse and black South African modernity, with special reference to "matshikese". *American Ethnologist*, *32*(2), 210–221. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2005.32.2.210

Tosh, J. (1994). What should historians do with masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth century Britain. *History Workshop Journal*, *38*(1), 179–202. https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/38.1.179

Whitehead, S. M., & Barrett, F. J. (2001). The sociology of masculinity. In S. M. Whitehead & F. J. Barrett (Eds.), *The masculinities reader* (pp. 1–26). Polity Press.

Xaba, T. (2001). Masculinity and its malcontents: The confrontation between 'struggle masculinity' and 'post-struggle masculinity' (1990–1997). In R. Morell (Ed.), *Changing men in Southern Africa* (pp. 105–124). University of Natal Press.

Yauch, C. A., & Steudel, H. J. (2003). Complementary use of qualitative and quantitative cultural assessment methods. *Organizational Research Methods*, *6*(4), 465–481. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428103257362

Yende, S. J., & Yende, N. E. (2022). The quest for curricularisation of uMaskandi Zulu traditional music in higher education in the context of africanisation. *Journal of African Education*, *3*(1), 103. https://doi.org/10.31920/2633-2930/2022/v3n1a5