

LSA 2026
The State of African Studies in the 21st Century

Panel Proposal
Caring Masculinities in Africa:
Beyond Western-Centered Research and Approach

Organizer
Dr Delphine Manetta
IFRA-Nigeria

This panel focuses on the role of care in the construction of masculinities in Africa, but proposes several shifts in perspective from the literature on “caring masculinities”. Like the study of masculinities in general, research on “caring masculinities” was initially based on studies of the West (North America, Europe, and Australia), driven by Western feminists scholars (Coltrane 1996; Doucet 2006; Elliott 2016; Hanlon 2012; Wojnicka & Boise 2025), at the expense of African-centered empirical research and theories (Mfecane 2018). They have also been focused primarily on the study of fatherhood (Beglaubter 2021; Enderstein & Boonzaier 2015; Eerola 2025; Hunter *et al.* 2017; Joshi 2021; Swartz & Bhana 2009), on the one hand, and men’s relationship with nature (Brettin 2025; Burrell and Pedersen 2025; Daggett 2018), on the other hand. With the exception of a few theoretical and programmatic works calling for the degendering and/or decolonization of care (Morell & Jewkes 2011; Nayak 2023; Prattes 2022), care therefore remains an under-explored phenomenon in the empirical study of masculinities in African societies.

This panel uses care as a critical tool for discussing the imaginaries surrounding masculinities in Africa and understanding experiences of masculinity in different social settings. Firstly, while the intimate lives of men in Africa (sexuality, friendship, brotherhood, etc.) have been the subject of particular attention from researchers, none have developed any reflection around the question of care. Secondly, literature on women and gender relations in Africa, as well as development projects seeking to engage men in gender equality programs and mainstream opinion, have tended to describe African masculinities through the prism of precarity, violence, or predation.

Approaching care as a practice and an emotional investment (Tronto & Fisher 1990), that men direct towards people, but also materialities and places (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), this panel aims at recounting the standpoints of men, from various time, socio-cultural groups, classes, and generations, in order to question how care shapes plural, original, hybrid, and changing masculinities in Africa. Far from offering a romanticized view of men and masculinities, the notion of care is a prism to capture the dynamics, tensions and ambivalences

that shape masculinities on the continent. Through care, and caring, this panel examines how attention, solicitude, protection, and emotional or financial support contribute to building sensitive relationships of interdependence and, conversely, to challenging norms, hierarchies, and male relationships. For instance, to what extent does care place men in power dynamics or, to use the terminology developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in hegemonic, subordinate, or marginalized forms of masculinity? On the contrary, how does care shape “horizontal” relationships of friendship, work, trade, neighborhood, etc.? How does it also build relationships between male citizens and public and customary authorities? Is care can be both seen as a response to violence, uncertainty, precarity, and insecurity, and an attribute of elders, leaders and elites, giving rise to expectations and aspirations? How does cleaning, arranging, repairing, maintaining, or upkeeping a private or public space contribute to the construction of men’s subjectivities? Does caring about/for people, things, and places reinforce or challenge the masculine ideal of the “breadwinner” or “provider” (Crompton 1999)? Can we identify different forms of care provided by men according to social background and age? How care can intersect with religious relationships, beliefs, and practices?

This panel aims at bringing together contributions from different disciplines: history, anthropology, sociology, geography, and political science. However, all contributions must be based on archival research and/or ethnographic case studies in different African settings. The contributions submitted for selection must therefore clearly identify the context of the investigations and the empirical data used.

Submission Guidelines:

- Abstracts should be approximately 800 words (exclusive of bibliography), clearly outlining the main question and arguments and the data used.
- They should be sent to delphine.manetta@ifra-nigeria.org
- Submission deadline: January 1, 2026
- The final text of the communication will be sent by May 26.

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