Men of the Global South

"highlights a population group which hardly figures in the literature of gender and development — or indeed in the literature of development in general. It describes men in all their complexity and inconsistency — violent and non-violent, powerful and not powerful, straight and not straight, maintainers of tradition and destroyers of it, as they really are and as they want and fear to be. In doing so it fills a big gap in the literature, and raises a challenge to the gender and development mainstream to explain why it overlooks the gendered lives of men as well as women."

Judy El-Bushra

"This impressive collection is a much-needed contribution to visibility and understanding of diversity in the lives of men from the South."

Dr Otsliko Zabkou, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

"Men of the Global South paints a much-needed picture of men and masculinity in the developing world. Both potentially controversial and uniquely insightful, it provides a rich new set of case-material and conceptual tools for researchers and teachers. This pathbreaking set of essays will significantly deepen our understanding of gender and development."

R Chari Carpenter, Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh

"A landmark work of global gender research, bringing fresh experiences, perspectives, and analyses."

Oystein Gulvik Holter, Research Director, Nordic Institute of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Oslo

"The book skilfully brings together literary and scholarly work, and charts out new territory for the study of men and masculinities in the Global South. The book challenges prevailing prejudices and stereotypes while indicating differences and similarities and introducing new conceptions of masculinity."

Catherine Scan, Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)

"This wide-ranging and carefully selected collection of short articles does exactly what Adam Jones set out to do: it complicates masculinity. The hegemonic gender, and the "taken for granted position" of masculinity, needs to be examined much more carefully — we need to understand its complexity. This is because the social consequences of how men understand their roles in the context of rapid social and economic change are tremendous. Particularly in the Global South, in the face of the massive social challenges posed by globalization, poverty, conflict, and climate change, this book argues that it is imperative that we understand men better in order to support resolutions to these problems that produce gender equality and social harmony."

Anne-Marie Sotz, Chief Advisor, Governance, Peace and Security at UNIFEM
Such a sporadic paternal presence is not uncommon in Egypt, and can be seen across all social classes. The collapse of rural economies has forced many farmers to move to Cairo in search of jobs. Men from the upper classes, with education and financial means, often migrate to nearby Gulf countries, Europe, or North America to earn enough to support their families.

Mohammed’s class standing is evident in his speech, demeanor, and deference to others. He is quick to help, responding promptly to the calls of “Ya Ahmed!” bellowed from windows throughout the day. He is unfailingly polite and solicitous. In spite of this, he is treated poorly by his employers, who openly deride and micromanage him.

Mohammed is religious in an unconscious sort of way. Islam is woven into his life, and he cannot imagine it otherwise. He believes that the greatest struggle for Egyptian men is to find and secure a decent livelihood. The cost of living has increased, and jobs pay little. Survival is hard. He prays regularly, and despite his own difficulties, he regularly thanks God for what he has: “Il hamdulileh,” he says when asked how he is. He seems to mean it sincerely: “Il hamdulileh.”

Four lives

It is late, and as a solstice moon arches across a sweltering sky, four men’s days draw to a close. Each of their lives is linked by a culture, a religion, and a shared political, social, and economic climate. Common notions of masculinity, and pressures to provide for dependents, also knit them together. Yet they inhabit disparate worlds. Geographically, only a few miles of Cairo’s urban landscape separate them. But they are nonetheless deeply divided by socioeconomic class, rural versus urban roots, and particular interpretations of religious practice. In this respect, they are not dissimilar to men across the global South, and indeed around the world.

UGANDA

The Men of Bwaise

Robert Wyrod*

By late morning, the metal roof was already burning in the equatorial sun, and the small carpentry workshop was stifling. But Rafik was oblivious, just finding his rhythm in the long day’s work. At 22, he already had two years of carpentry experience, and was confident in his skills as a maker of beds, chairs, tables, and cabinets.

*Special to this volume. All names are pseudonyms.
Rafik’s workplace was more a shack than anything else. The walls were half-rotted wood panels, and raw ceiling beams supported the simple tin roof. The dirt floor was covered with lumber, wood scraps, and half-completed projects. The main work area was a blackened table in the rear of the shop, surrounded by a sea of wood shavings that were occasionally gathered up by scavenger boys. Within these ten square meters of space, Rafik and two other men made their living.

The carpentry shop was just one of countless small workshops in Kampala, the Ugandan capital. Like so many others, it was located in Bwaise – a dirty, congested area that is unfortunately best described as a slum.

While Kampala’s most attractive feature is its many hills, Bwaise and other flood-prone valleys are home to many of the city’s poorest residents. Like all developing-world capitals, Kampala has its exclusive neighborhoods, populated by the Ugandan elite and a large community of expatriates. With a population of over a million, and a national population of 25 million, there is also a tiny Ugandan middle class who have staked out land on the fringes of the city, building more modest versions of the gated compounds of the wealthy.

Yet most city residents subsist on one or two dollars a day, and in densely packed areas like Bwaise, life can be especially bleak. Behind the storefronts that line the main streets, there is a diverse array of housing, from brick and mortar one-storey houses to mud-and-wattle one-room shacks housing entire families. Frequent floods, poor drainage, and makeshift sewers make this housing almost uninhabitable. Life in Bwaise is a perpetual health hazard.

Yet there are good reasons to live in Bwaise. Its proximity to the city center generates bustling business. And while Bwaise has a reputation for seedy nightlife, day-to-day business is its main draw, with dozens of retail outlets, auto-repair shops, markets, butchers, tailors, music stores, furniture showrooms, and carpentry workshops. So while life is harsh in most of Bwaise, there is also opportunity, and a chance for young men to make a living that might lead to a more financially secure adulthood.

This essay provides a glimpse into the lives of three men in their early twenties, all living and working in and around Bwaise. Rafik hopes his skills as a carpenter might be sufficient to navigate the road to manhood. Patrick is frustrated with the difficulties of finding work and has the added burden of being a new father. Michael, for his part, has received a government university scholarship, but is still unsure what his future holds.

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Although far from lucrative, carpentry is a respectable profession for men in Kampala. It certainly ranks far below the white collar jobs that well-connected men are able to obtain in government or private companies. But such jobs are minuscule in number, and few men in places like Bwaise even aspire to such work. So across the city, many young men like Rafik hope the craft of carpentry can become their profession.
Barber outside his shop in Bwaise neighborhood, Kampala, Uganda (Robert Wyrod)
In the workshop, it was clear that Rafik took satisfaction in his work. He moved smoothly and steadily, all his motions efficient. His concentration was so intense that he often waited until late in the day to break for lunch. In a week, he could transform huge slabs of hardwood into a simple, but pleasing, king-size bed. Yet, like most workers in Kampala, Rafik never received regular payment for his labor. The owner paid him only after pieces were sold, and fair compensation was left very much to the owner's discretion.

Even a dedicated and hard-working young man like Rafik found this routine exploitation difficult to tolerate. When his girlfriend became ill, he wanted to help pay her medical bills, but the owner wasn't forthcoming. So Rafik quit – which seemed rash, given the precarious labor market and the abundance of carpenters in the area. Yet within a week, he was working in a nearby shop that produced chairs. Most importantly, he arranged payment for each chair upon completion. So while this kind of manual labor was no guarantee of a steady income, the resourceful and motivated could sometimes make it work to their advantage.

But the difficulties Rafik faced in helping his girlfriend with medical bills were only part of deeper problems in the relationship – and money was central to all of them. Rafik was eager to move on to a more adult phase of his life. In Uganda, that means finding a place of your own and having children. Rafik often spoke about how much he wanted to settle down with his girlfriend. When asked if he was faithful, he gave a resounding yes. Part of his trepidation about multiple partners arose from a fear of AIDS, which he mentioned explicitly. Pragmatic concerns about jealousy were also a factor, but for Rafik there was more at stake. As he put it, "I don't want that kind of life. It's better to be in the kind of relationship where both partners are faithful." Manhood, parenthood, and fidelity were all interwoven for Rafik, at least in theory.

Part of what Rafik found alluring about his girlfriend was that she was educated. She had been trained as a nurse, an education significantly beyond Rafik's unfinished secondary school. Employed at the main national hospital, she received a modest but steady income. Rafik didn't find this discrepancy threatening, but rather attractive. She was the kind of woman he could build a future with, as partners. "It's important to have an educated partner, so that you can be a team," Rafik explained. While other men might demand that their wives stay at home, Rafik was interested in a woman with earning potential.

But it was exactly those qualities that proved to be liabilities in the relationship. After being together for over a year, but not yet cohabiting, Rafik's girlfriend stopped taking his calls and refused to meet with him. He was surprised, but he knew exactly why she had left him. As a carpenter working short-term, unsteady jobs, Rafik's financial prospects were limited. A young woman with nursing credentials could do better, and Rafik's girlfriend most likely left him for someone with greater potential. Rafik's vision of a steady partner with whom he could build a home and family had vanished.

The fact that AIDS played some part in Rafik's ideas about relationships is not unusual in the Ugandan context. While Southern African countries have seen HIV
infection rates rise alarmingly over the last decade, Uganda’s trajectory has been the opposite. Current estimates are that nearly 7 per cent of the adult population is HIV positive: a disturbing statistic, but a dramatic decline from the early 1990s, when infection rates were closer to 20 per cent.

While the government has been credited with addressing the epidemic early on, there is no consensus as to why infection rates dropped so dramatically. Some point to the success of prevention campaigns focused on condom use, partner reduction, and more recently, abstinence – the now-famous Ugandan ABC model (Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms). Others have highlighted the grim fact that as large numbers of people with AIDS died throughout the 1990s, the number of HIV-positive people declined.

So whether through the tragic loss of life or effective prevention campaigns, AIDS has become part of the cultural fabric of Uganda. This raises a question: has the AIDS epidemic affected what it means to be a man in Uganda? It is no doubt unproductive to think of AIDS changing ideas of manhood in any straightforward way. The AIDS epidemic, relationships, sexuality, and gender are too complex to fit into neat causal formulas. As Rafik’s story illuminates, AIDS is just one of many issues that young men contemplate when attempting to become a man in a place like Bwaise.

Yet Rafik’s account indicates that AIDS is indeed part of the social calculus that Ugandans employ in making intimate relationship decisions. For some, AIDS has symbolic value, representing a constellation of anxieties about adulthood, family, sexuality, and gender roles. For others, the threat of AIDS may have directly influenced key life decisions. And for those living with AIDS, the disease obviously has an immediate impact on their everyday lives and the lives of their loved ones. Thus, when thinking about what it means to be a man in a place like Bwaise, it is important to recognize that AIDS has shaped Ugandans’ lives, but also that AIDS is just one of many issues affecting conceptions of masculinity in Bwaise.

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As Bwaise goes, Patrick’s home was not bad. Tucked behind some older houses that were slowing being eroded by floods, Patrick’s rented house was relatively new. The owner had built three one-storey spaces that, at first glance, looked more like storage sheds. Each had a large red metal door; the stucco was still cream-colored, not yet burnt orange from the dust of the laterite soil. Most important, the one-room structures were set on concrete foundations that provided some protection from the inevitable spillover of the nearby sewage canal.

Inside, Patrick lived with his wife and newborn daughter. The double bed consumed most of the space, but there was still room for a small desk with a radio. Hanging laundry added some color to the bare walls. Although the space was too small for visitors, Patrick was clearly proud of the home he and his wife had created. It resonated with the feeling of a nest created by a young couple still excited about their independent adulthood.
Yet this sense of domestic harmony rested on shaky foundations. Although Patrick had nearly completed a university program in business administration, he had been unemployed for two years. At 22, his frustration with job hunting had turned to fatalism. “Me, I just give up now. I’m waiting for my time to come,” Patrick admitted. While not unwilling to do manual labor, he did not have the right connections to secure such work — or so he said. Ideally, he hoped to open a computer training center in Bwaise. But he knew that such a venture was impossible without start-up capital.

Instead, Patrick filled his days by working as a volunteer for two non-governmental organizations: one focused on family planning, the other addressing domestic violence. While such work provided only a tiny monthly stipend, he found it attractive. It tapped into a genuine desire to do something positive for his community, especially his peers. Such volunteer work also offered regular training that brought him additional respect in the community. In addition, these organizations provided access to the large development industry in Uganda and the possibility that he could network with the right people.

Yet Patrick was a realist. He knew it was unlikely he would get a staff position at the NGOs or that a scholarship would suddenly materialize. But having given up on the job market, he found himself at a standstill. Patrick’s wife was luckier when it came to employment. She worked for a while as a gas-station attendant, and then found a position as a teller at a government bank. As the family’s sole breadwinner, her small but regular income had to stretch a long way.

Like Rafik, then, Patrick found himself in a relationship with a woman who earned more money than he did. Patrick was well aware of the danger this posed for the relationship, acknowledging that his lack of income might lead his wife to stray. While supportive and grateful for his wife’s contribution to the family, he knew her job put her in contact with many men, and it was possible one might seek to woo her. Patrick was as fatalistic about this as about his lack of employment. “I see myself in a fix where I cannot meet some of her basic needs, and then — most people call it temptations, but you never know what might come up, and she could get in trouble. I don’t know, that’s my worry.” AIDS was a concern too, with Patrick stressing the need for safe sex if his wife felt the urge to stray. “I always talk about it [AIDS] with her,” he said, “and I always advise her, in case something comes up that is inevitable, to use condoms. I always emphasize condoms, condoms, condoms.”

Patrick, however, was adamant that he would stay faithful to his wife. He had seen the consequences of infidelity and polygamy in his childhood. Patrick’s father had had three wives, with three families in separate homes. With 21 siblings and half-siblings, his father had nowhere near the resources to support such a large family. As the second wife, Patrick’s mother, fell out of favor with her husband, she and her children were left to fend for themselves. Still bitter, Patrick had no interest in a similar fate. “I suffered so much because my father had three women. I don’t feel like having any other wife, and I want to have as few children as possible, because I’ve seen the burden it put on my parents,” he confided. The threat of AIDS hardened these attitudes, as Patrick admitted. “Maybe I have a feeling that if HIV was not prevalent, I would have copied my daddy’s ways and had more than one girlfriend. But because of HIV/AIDS, I have to stick with one partner.”
Given Patrick’s precarious financial position, it was surprising to hear that he and his wife were having a baby. As a volunteer for a family-planning organization, Patrick was well versed in birth control, as was his wife. Still, they made a conscious decision to have a child. “At first we used condoms, but we decided to have that kid. Maybe we get some [feelings of] responsibility . . . It was after my young sister [had a baby that] we saw there was a need for us to have some responsibility too.”

Despite his inability to be a breadwinner, Patrick wanted to move up the ladder of male adulthood and become a father. While some of his NGO colleagues thought that having a child without a good job was irresponsible, for Patrick it was precisely the way he and his wife would prove they could assume fully adult responsibilities. So despite—or perhaps because of—his inability to fulfill the male role of provider, he was ready to become a father.

* * *

For Michael, who had lived in Bwaise for all his 22 years, the future seemed more promising. After struggling to find money to complete his secondary education, Michael was about to enter the country’s top university on a full government scholarship. No one in his family had ever attended university, and all his peers were on a manual-labor career track like Rafik’s.

For a young man from such a poor community, this was quite an accomplishment—the result of focus and determination. Prioritizing his studies, Michael had avoided the daily temptations of an area like Bwaise. Unlike his friends, drinking and clubbing were not part of his regular routine. More significantly, Michael saw relationships with women as detrimental. Not only was he still a virgin at 22, but he had never even had a girlfriend. For Michael, relationships were too fraught with complications that could derail his education. “Girls in Uganda know men should give them money,” Michael said. “You can’t sustain her. She can get a man who has money. You will not know. You will [only] know later. You are infected [with AIDS] and things like that. That’s really what turns me off.” Relationships were not only potential distractions and financial drains; they presented serious health risks as well.

Michael’s concern about AIDS was hardly unusual, but it was perhaps made more intense by his family’s experience with AIDS. He lived with his HIV-positive mother, who was still very healthy and active, and an HIV-positive aunt who was dying of AIDS. While he cared deeply about these female relatives, his home life made relationships seem unpalatable. “You know, when I look at my family home, I look at the patient’s home. That really turns me off.” It made him realize that “I should be very conscious about whatever I’m doing.”

Without the AIDS epidemic, Michael might have still abstained from sex and viewed relationships as problematic. But having experienced the horrors of AIDS, he perceived relationships as burdened with danger. So Michael opted out of them completely. While the effects of AIDS were very real to him, AIDS also came to symbolize all the aspects of life in Bwaise that he wanted to leave behind.
As proud as Michael was of his government scholarship, he knew a degree from the top university was no guarantee of employment. "So now my main goal [is to] study up to my mid-thirties, and then I will look for a family. That is my first [priority], I want to get at least my Master's, and I want to study with my Master's abroad." Relationships, and a family, were low on his list of priorities.

If he waited too long to marry and become a father, Michael knew his community would label him a perpetual youth – someone who had never quite crossed the threshold to manhood. But whatever pressure he felt to become a real man, and show he could take care of a family, was overshadowed by his realistic assessment of his career prospects. Perhaps campus life would change his attitudes. But his mother remained a constant remainder of the hazards posed by relationships in Uganda.

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There is no straightforward, guaranteed path to manhood in a place like Bwaise. All routes are beset by complications, compromises, and risks. Consciously or unconsciously, young men in Bwaise weigh risks and responsibilities as they forge their own paths to adulthood. With few successful male role models, many men make poor decisions, unable or unwilling to acknowledge the long-term impact of their actions on themselves and their families. But even more thoughtful and well-intentioned men can feel despair when assessing their options for attaining adulthood. AIDS casts their decisions in stark relief, making them truly matters of life and death. Nearly a quarter century after AIDS was first discovered in Uganda, the disease has been subsumed into the fabric of everyday life. It underlies decisions both mundane and consequential, and is now inextricably bound to conceptions of masculinity.

MEXICO

Fathers and Children

Matthew C. Gutmann*

In earlier studies of families and parents in rural Mexico, anthropologists have emphasized how economic pressures have often influenced couples to have more children. The presence of more children has meant more family members can work at home and