

# BOOK REVIEW

**Daniel Jordan Smith. *To be a Man is not a One-Day Job: Masculinity, Money, and Intimacy in Nigeria*.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 262 pp. Acknowledgments. Notes. References. Index. \$27.50. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-226-49165-3.

This is a remarkable book that Daniel Jordan Smith was perhaps uniquely positioned to write. Drawing on over twenty-five years of fieldwork, Smith ambitiously chronicles what it means to be a man in contemporary Nigeria across generations and social classes, from boyhood to old age. The book's life-course approach gives the reader an expansive understanding of men's lives, providing a comprehensive account of the pleasures, challenges, and many paradoxes of Nigerian manhood. In this sense, this book extends the growing literature on masculinities in Africa by presenting an unprecedentedly full portrait of how masculinity is lived by a wide range of Nigerian men.

This is not a book Smith intended to write. Instead, it emerged out of his decades of research among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. This includes his study of kinship and fertility; his research on youth, migration, and HIV; another AIDS project focused on marriage; and his work on Nigeria's culture of corruption. Masculinity was a common thread through this research and Smith uses this book to tie all the strands together. Crucially, Smith also weaves the personal into his account, drawing on his own life experiences in Nigeria to add nuance and emotion to his analysis.

The central theme that structures every aspect of this book is the intertwining of masculinity, money, and intimacy. In all domains in which men strive to be men—as sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, grandfathers, friends, community leaders—money is the main preoccupation. As Smith argues, this nexus of masculinity and money reflects how money has become the key lubricant of sociality in Nigeria; without money, social ties from the most personal to the most public cannot be sustained. This book illuminates the ways that men pursue and use money to maintain sociality on many levels, as they strive to embody normative notions of Nigerian manhood. Crucially, the significance of money to sociality is a source of much anxiety for all Nigerians. Money is necessary for social intimacy, but it is also seen as

the corrupting force in contemporary social relations. As Smith convincingly shows, performances of masculinity are at the center of this paradox, and this ensures that men's experiences of manhood are riddled with contradictions and tensions.

The masculinity-money nexus is inculcated early on. The book's first empirical chapter focuses on how school exposes boys to new forms of consumption, especially how boys scrutinize each others' clothing. Boys also learn that attracting girls and young women requires money; this is an introduction to the entanglements of love and money that will shape their adult intimate relationships profoundly. Chapter two chronicles these entanglements in detail, making clear that marriage—a pivotal step toward male adulthood—is highly dependent on a man's access to money. This is in part due to rising expectations of elaborate traditional and Christian wedding ceremonies as well as the continued importance of bridewealth payments. Fatherhood and entry into true male adulthood creates additional financial pressures, especially children's school fees. These costs, Smith argues, increasingly fall on the parents alone. This is a byproduct of the growing emphasis on companionate marriage and the focus on the nuclear family. This transition in family organization can bring benefits for children, especially greater emotional intimacy with their fathers, but also heightens men's financial burdens, because men are still expected to be the primary economic providers.

The vagaries of men's work receive extensive consideration in chapter three, which is structured by case studies of seven men, from the most modest farmer to the most successful business tycoon. Across this spectrum, Smith reveals that struggles surrounding money, from not having any to the challenges of sharing one's wealth, are the common theme. The problem of having money, exemplified by the business tycoon, brings into relief the book's key conceptual contribution: Smith's notion of "conspicuous redistribution." For Smith, it would be a mistake to reduce men's fixation with money to greed or materialism. There is something much more social at work in these dynamics. Conspicuous consumption is certainly a facet, but in the Nigerian context, consumption itself does not produce the status and prestige men seek. For monetary wealth to be converted to social prestige, it must be transformed into wealth in people. Thus, men with money are expected to share their wealth with others, and in so doing they are cementing "their webs of social and political connection" (210) that make them high-status men. But like all entanglements of masculinity and money, this is no easy feat, and men must navigate spending ostentatiously on others while not being perceived as arrogant or condescending. As Smith reveals repeatedly, this is a balance that few men successfully strike.

Performing masculinity in Nigeria is replete with exhibitions of conspicuous redistribution, especially during rituals marking life transitions such as weddings and funerals. But conspicuous redistribution is also a recurring element in more everyday interactions, including among

groups of elite men. In the most engaging chapter of the book, Smith vividly illustrates these subtleties, drawing on his longstanding membership in two men's tennis clubs. These clubs are bastions of male bonding and camaraderie that reveal the centrality of male-male social interaction to the performance of masculinity. Key to maintaining this form of homosocial intimacy are the displays of conspicuous redistribution. Members are expected to spend lavishly on food and alcohol for each other, which provides endless opportunities for richer men to exhibit and share their wealth. There is an intricate hierarchy that needs to be respected, with micro-distinctions in men's status. Smith compellingly describes his own feelings of pleasure as a man in these clubs and how mastering these social protocols has provided him a powerful sense of belonging as a man.

Importantly, Smith discusses how this fraternal bonding also works to reinforce men's privileges and power over women. The club is a space where men are free to flaunt their extramarital relationships, and, as Smith recounts, the pressure to have a girlfriend, even if a man were married, could be intense. Throughout the book, Smith also discusses how conspicuous redistribution buttresses and reproduces class inequality. While this form of consumption does have prosocial elements, ultimately it serves the interests of elite men. The redistribution of wealth is largely minimal and often ephemeral, doing little to address true structural class inequalities while burnishing elite men's social images. While ordinary men are often willing accomplices, Smith argues that these inequalities are not lost on them. This then fuels the pervasive undercurrent of suspicion and resentment of rich men. As Smith notes, "the specter of money's immoral aspects always looms, even in seemingly successful performances of masculinity" (143). This dual nature of money in Nigerian society, both God and devil as an informant puts it, is at the center of the paradoxical nature of masculinity in contemporary Nigeria.

While Smith does cite other key literature on African masculinities, I would have liked more explicit and detailed comparisons with findings from other sub-Saharan contexts, especially in southern and East Africa. Also, the discussion of intimate partner violence felt somewhat cursory and perhaps misplaced in a chapter focused on masculinities gone awry. But these are minor quibbles with an outstanding book. As Smith stresses in the conclusion, there remains a problematic tendency to reduce social inequalities in African contexts to problems with African men or to a crisis of African masculinity. This book is an important reminder that in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, most men are preoccupied with being good husbands, fathers, sons, and citizens—a pursuit that the entanglement of money and masculinity often makes frustratingly elusive.

Robert Wyrod  
*University of Colorado Boulder*  
 Boulder, Colorado  
 robert.wyrod@colorado.edu

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**For more reading on this subject, see:**

- Adeboye, Olufunke. 2008. "Reading the Diary of Akinpelu Obisesan in Colonial Africa." *African Studies Review* 51 (2): 75–97. doi:10.1353/arw.0.0074.
- Barnes, Teresa. 1997. "'Am I A Man?': Gender and the Pass Laws in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-80." *African Studies Review* 40 (1): 59–81. doi:10.2307/525033.
- Kusimba, Sibel. 2018. "Money, Mobile Money and Rituals in Western Kenya: The Contingency Fund and the Thirteenth Cow." *African Studies Review* 61 (2): 158–82. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.145.