"Masculinity, Money, and the Postponement of Parenthood in Nigeria"

Daniel Jordan Smith
Department of Anthropology
Brown University
Box 1921, 128 Hope Street
Providence, RI 02912
Tel: 1-401-863-7065

Email: daniel_j_smith@brown.edu

Abstract

In southeastern Nigeria, several interconnected processes of social change are combining to delay parenthood. Most of the literature examining the postponement of parenthood has paid primary attention to women. To address this gap, this paper foregrounds the changing social landscape of masculinity as a significant context within which to situate these demographic changes. At the core of Nigerian men's perceptions, decisions, and behaviors with regard to delaying fatherhood is a fundamental contradiction. The contradiction is that while the postponement of parenthood seems to be associated historically with positive social and economic indicators, when Nigerian men articulate their rationales for delaying fatherhood (and marriage) they commonly describe feelings of uncertainty connected to a sense of struggle and hardship. This paper connects men's anxieties about—and delays embarking on—marriage and parenthood to their experiences of economic uncertainty, and specifically to the perceived need for money as the foundation for successful reproduction.

Introduction

In southeastern Nigeria, as in much of Africa, several interconnected processes of social change are combining to delay parenthood. Political-economic factors such as the increasing importance of formal education for gainful employment, growing opportunities for women in the labor force, and the economic costs associated with raising children are leading people to marry at later ages and delay childbearing even once married. Social and cultural changes are contributing to the trend too, including new values valorizing "love" marriage, changing ideals about preferred family size, and evolving expectations about what adequate parenthood actually involves, with regard to both economic and emotional investment in children. Not surprisingly, most of the

demographic and social sciences literature examining fertility in general and the postponement of parenthood in particular has paid primary attention to women (Dodoo & Frost 2008; Mason 1987; Mills, Rindfuss, McDonald & Velde 2011). Overviews of fertility trends and the postponement of parenthood globally—and in scholarship focused on Africa—barely mention men at all (Bongaarts 2017; Bongaarts & Casterline 2013; Cleland 2010; Moultrie, Sayi, & Timæus 2012). Of the research that has addressed men, relatively little has focused on Africa (for exceptions see: DeRose & Ezeh 2005; Dodoo 1998; Frost & Dodoo 2009; Orobaton 2000; Townsend 2000). To address this gap, in this article, I foreground the changing social landscape of masculinity in southeastern Nigeria as a significant context within which to situate the postponement of parenthood. I argue that understanding changing masculinity is central to explaining the postponement of parenthood. Conversely, I show that examining the factors leading to later fatherhood in Nigeria today offers a window through which to analyze transformations in the expectations and experiences of manhood.

At the core of Nigerian men's perceptions, decisions, and behaviors with regard to delaying fatherhood is a fundamental contradiction, one that seems to be common in many settings—at least many African settings—of contemporary demographic transition. The contradiction is that the postponement of parenthood, and fertility decline more generally, seems to be associated historically with positive social and economic indicators—rising levels of education and income, higher literacy, improved female social status, greater urban exposure, etc. (Dyson 2010; Lesthaeghe 2014); and yet when Nigerian men articulate their rationales and experiences of delaying parenthood (and marriage) they commonly describe feelings of uncertainty connected to a sense of struggle and deprivation. Uncertainty as a feature of reproductive decisions and behaviors in contemporary Africa has been explored and theorized in

the demographic literature (Agadjanian 2005; Hayford & Agadjanian 2011; Trinitapoli and Yeatman 2018), including more recently with a specific focus on "livelihood uncertainty" (Garver 2018). However, most of this work has focused on women (e.g., Johnson-Hanks 2006).

Much of the attention to men has been with regard to stalled economic opportunities, depriving them of full manhood. Men's experiences of being "stuck" without viable futures has been described as "waithood" and associated with a range of contemporary social problems (Honwana 2013; Sommers 2012). Men's anxieties about marriage and parenthood and their association with economic hardship has been noted mostly by anthropologists and other qualitatively oriented social scientists, including in Niger (Masquelier 2005, 2013), Kenya and Tanzania (Silberschmidt 2001), Burkina Faso (Calves & Depledge 2007), and South Africa (Hunter 2010). In this article, I connect men's anxieties about—and delays embarking on—marriage and parenthood to their experiences of economic uncertainty, and specifically to the perceived need for money as the foundation for successful reproduction. I offer four case studies to examine, analyze, and explain the seeming paradox that improved social and economic conditions generally associated with postponement of parenthood are widely experienced by men in Nigeria as difficulty and hardship. Men's sense of economic struggle and the challenges they perceive to marriage and fatherhood are central to their experiences of and aspirations for masculinity. They are also important factors in the complex processes that explain the postponement of parenthood in Nigeria—and probably in much of Africa.

The contradictions Nigerian men experience as they navigate marriage and parenthood in a rapidly changing society unfold in a complex arena of social action. As I will show, "decisions" about when to marry and when to bear children involve a tangle of actors and factors. A significant literature has already problematized simplistic rational choice models,

demonstrating that fertility decisions and outcomes involve more than individual preferences, including the influence of partners, kin, and broader social networks (das Gupta 1997; Ezeh 1993; Kimuna & Adamchak 2001; Kohler, Behrman & Watkins 2001; Takyi & Dodoo 2005). While men certainly do not make fertility decisions by themselves, the role of men in the social processes and decisions that lead to the postponement of parenthood remains under-examined and not fully understood.

Scholarship on fertility decision-making in Africa has frequently portrayed men as strongly pro-natal, emphasizing that male pressure on women to have more children advances a combination of masculine interests, including the importance of "wealth in people" and the preservation of patriarchal privileges associated with controlling female sexuality and perpetuating lineages (DeRose, Dodoo & Patil 2002; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe 2014). While there is no doubt that patriarchy and reproduction have been—and, in some ways, remain—deeply intertwined in many settings (Folbre 1983; Kandiyoti 1988), I argue that in Nigeria men's interests vis-à-vis the timing of marriage, parenthood, and overall fertility are changing significantly. The postponement of parenthood is tied to a shifting political-economic and cultural landscape. Men are navigating—and creating new configurations in—the dynamic interactions between economic realities and family making. All of this is deeply bound up with masculinity.

In today's Nigeria, generally men are economically better off than their fathers, who married earlier and had more children. Drawing on the case studies below, I show that younger men's perception of their need to postpone marriage and fatherhood as being caused by financial hardship is about more than a simple rise in expectations associated with better economic times. It is true that men feel they have less because they expect more. But what is going on is more

than rising expectations. The central theoretical argument developed below is that a complex and changing geometry of money and social reproduction in Nigeria is at the heart of both contemporary masculinity and men's belief that they must delay marriage and parenthood because of economic struggles. Men in contemporary southeastern Nigeria live in a world where money has become central to the performance of their most important relationships associated with social reproduction—those they perform as husbands and fathers. Further, in a society where money itself has ambivalent meanings and associations—it is positively associated with health, prestige, and power, but also negatively associated with individualism, selfish greed, and corruption—the fact that money has become elemental to even the most intimate and seemingly pro-social endeavors means that the most prized pursuits of manhood are fraught (Smith 2017). As such, the burdens of being a man are felt profoundly in the sphere of reproduction, as men contemplate—and increasingly postpone—marriage and fatherhood.

Setting, Methods, and Data

Drawing on more than two decades of ethnographic research in two communities (one urban and one semi-rural) in the Igbo-speaking region of southeastern Nigeria, this article uses longitudinal qualitative evidence to focus on the evolving meanings of masculinity, and on the ways that transformations in men's lives have affected their decisions about marriage and fatherhood. I utilize multiple sources of data, but mostly in-depth interviews conducted almost every year from 1995 to 2018 and regular participant observation over the same period. Beginning with my doctoral dissertation, I conducted 20 months of research from 1995 through 1997 in the semi-rural community of Ubakala, which was comprised of 11 villages and approximately 20,000 people. Ubakala is located on the outskirts of Umuahia, the capital of Abia State. Back then, my interest was in why Igbo people continued to want so many children (in

1996 the Total Fertility Rate in Nigeria was 6.22 (Index Mundi 2019)), even though by many conventional measures, things seemed ripe for a significant fertility transition. For that research, I interviewed over 200 hundred married couples (interviewing men and women separately), and I administered a survey of nearly 800 secondary school students and over 400 university students regarding their sexual and reproductive knowledge, practices, and future intentions. I also conducted a smaller number of in-depth interviews as well as extensive participant observation. In the mid-1990s, most married couples in the community had, or said they wished to have, between four and six children. Secondary and university students typically said they wanted to have "at least four" children.

Nigeria's demographic transition continues to progress more slowly than hoped for by those who see lower fertility as a key to economic development—Nigeria's 2016 Total Fertility Rate was 5.8 (National Bureau of Statistics 2018)—but things have changed a bit more quickly in places like Ubakala, and in the city of Owerri, the capital of neighboring Imo State), where I lived for three years from 1989 until 1992 working for a public health project, and where I have also conducted several research projects over the past 25 years. In 2016, the Total Fertility Rate for both Abia and Imo States was 5.1 (National Bureau of Statistics 2018). My studies in Ubakala and Owerri have frequently focused on understanding population and health issues from a gendered perspective (Smith 2001, 2002, 2009), including projects on youth, rural-to-urban migration, and sexuality (Smith 2000, 2004a); on marriage and HIV (Smith 2006, 2007, 2008); and masculinity more generally (Smith 2014, 2017). In all of these projects, I conducted in-depth interviews with scores of men and women of various ages and across the full spectrum of socioeconomic strata. I have regularly interviewed many of the same men and women for over two decades. I have also followed families as they have evolved, children as they have

progressed through adolescence and become adults making their own families, and adults as they have aged and in many cases died. While getting married and having children remain among the most highly prized social goals in these communities, among the men I have followed, marriage is happening later than a generation ago, getting married is perceived as more difficult because it is so expensive, and young people are planning to have three or four children, not five or six. The postponement of parenthood is bound up with the changing contexts of marriage, family making, and fertility, which are in turn connected to larger social changes in which people's preferences and actions in the most intimate domains of domestic life are influenced by the perceptions and experiences in Nigeria's wider political economy. For men, when to marry, when to have children, and how many to have are among the most important and challenging questions of their lives. It is to this connection between masculinity and the postponement of parenthood that I now turn. Before presenting the four case studies, I first explain briefly some relevant features of masculinity in contemporary Nigeria and how they are connected to changes in the meanings and timing of marriage and fatherhood.

Masculinity in Nigeria

Over the past 25 years it has been common to begin any scholarship about masculinity with the claim that men have been understudied, at least explicitly as men (Gutmann 1997). Studies of African masculinity typically suggest that the dearth is even greater and the attention even more recent than in other parts of the world (Lindsay & Miescher 2003a; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005). While I believe this is accurate, I am not sure it is any longer possible to justify the study of African masculinity on the basis of an absence of previous scholarship. By now there is a considerable body of excellent research on African men, much of which I try to build on in this article (Hunter 2004, 2005, 2010; Morrell 1998, 2001a; Simpson 2009; Wyrod 2008,

2016). Rather than settling questions and issues related to manhood, this growth in good work on African men has only reinforced the important reasons to study masculinity.

Ever since R. W. Connell (1995) developed his hierarchy of masculinities—hegemonic, complicitous, marginalized, and subordinated—scholars have both mapped men into these categories and debated the whether the concept of hegemonic masculinity (the "culturally exalted" form of masculinity in a given context) accurately captures patterns of male beliefs and behavior and men's experiences (Beasley 2008; Groes-Green 2012). In southeastern Nigeria, and arguably in much of sub-Saharan Africa, certain features of a hegemonic masculinity are easily recognizable and widely shared. The fundamental elements of this masculine ideal involve being a husband, father, and head of household. Above all, these roles require men to be providers, responsible for the provision of food, shelter, and protection for their families, and—especially in the contemporary era—for their children's education. The notion that the socially accepted primary foundation of African manhood is the demonstrated capacity to provide for one's family has been documented in many African contexts (Hunter 2005, 2010; Lindsay & Miescher 2003b; Morrell 2001a, 2001b). For Nigeria, there is ample scholarship, both historical and contemporary, that has shown that the male position as provider is central to masculine identities and practices (Berry 1985; Cornwall 2002, 2003; Lindsay 2003).

As Hunter (2010) further demonstrates for South Africa, and others have shown elsewhere (Cornwall 2002, 2003; Simpson 2009), for men it is the continuing importance of their role as providers—for their wives and children, but also for other networks of kin and supporters if they aspire for wider power and prestige—that creates pressures as they navigate the intersecting worlds of production (including all domains in which they might make money) and social reproduction (including all arenas where marriage, fatherhood, and family-making are

either happening or potentially possible). Cornwall (2003) showed that in contemporary southwestern Nigeria nothing produced more anxiety for men than the specter of becoming (usually in women's words) "useless men": men without jobs or money; men who are unable to satisfy their women in love (or sex); men who fail at both production and social reproduction. The same is true where I work in southeastern Nigeria. While the meanings and practices of "provider love" (Hunter 2010) have evolved with societal transformation and with the rise of new ideals and practices of intimacy that promote greater gender equality, the expectation that competent masculinity depends on its successful performance is as true as ever.

In Nigeria, men's intimate lives with women are a particularly revealing window onto wider social dynamics because, as Cornwall observes: "The reconfiguration of male identities among changing work opportunities, movements across different spaces and places, and an ever more complex palate of cultural referents is thrown into sharp relief within heterosexual relationships" (2003, 232). But as Anthony Simpson (2009) points out for the men he studied in Zambia, it is male peers who are often men's most important audience. It is among male peers that the fragility and insecurities of masculinity are frequently most palpable and are felt most acutely (Simpson 2009, 8-9). In southeastern Nigeria, the performance of masculinity is at least as much, if not more, for other men as it is for women. As will be illustrated in the case studies, the pressure men feel to marry and have children, their assessments about how much money they need to fulfill expectations related to being husbands and fathers, and the anxiety and ambivalence they feel even as they pursue their most cherished masculine goals are generated as men navigate their relationships with women, with kin, and with their male peers.

Manhood through Marriage and Fatherhood

The preeminent Africanist anthropologist Meyer Fortes noted long ago that it is "parenthood that is the primary value associated with the idea of family in West Africa" (1978, 121). "Parenthood," Fortes said, "is regarded as a *sine qua non* for the attainment of the full development of the complete person to which all aspire" (1978, 125). In southeastern Nigeria, even with all the changes in marriage, fertility, and kinship—some of which might lead one to expect that the social importance of parenthood would diminish—Fortes' observation is as true now as ever. Indeed, one might reasonably argue that marriage and parenthood are more valued than ever, in part because they are perceived as increasingly difficult and costly to achieve.

Further, in southeastern Nigeria marriage remains the only socially approved arena in which to be a parent. While marriage rates are waning in some parts of Africa, including some dramatic declines in parts of southern Africa (Hosegood, McGrath, & Moultrie 2009; Preston-Whyte 1993), this is not the case in Igbo-speaking southeastern Nigeria, where the expectation to marry is almost universal, the overwhelming majority of adults marry, and most children are born to married couples. The four cases below further exemplify how men experience the social pressure to marry as linked with compulsory paternity, how fatherhood is a marker of competent masculinity, how men experience efforts to meet their social obligations as burdensome, and how some men are beginning to question society's expectations, even as they feel compelled to live up to them.

The Case Studies

The four case studies below represent much larger patterns I have observed and documented in Igbo-speaking southeastern Nigeria through surveys, in-depth interviews, and long-term participant observation conducted in the projects described briefly above. Although

neither these cases nor the situation in southeastern Nigeria is fully representative of the country as whole, they do reflect wider changes underway nationally, as urbanization, formal education, and other social transformations create greater expectations for middle-class lifestyles. In all cases I use pseudonyms. The first case focuses on a rural man who has lived his whole life in a village. His preferences and behaviors regarding marriage and parenthood are more traditional, though even he acknowledges the forces propelling change as he observes his sons becoming men. The second case considers a man whose life as a rural-to-urban migrant straddles the city and the village, arguably the pattern that is most common now in southeastern Nigeria, as in much of Africa (De Brauw, Mueller, & Lee 2014; Geschiere & Gugler 1998; Gugler 2002; Mberu 2005). Such men are at the center of changes in masculinity and demography that are unfolding across southeastern Nigeria and more widely. The final two cases focus on men whose aspirations and practices represent the most significant departures from the traditional patterns in which men's role as fathers reinforced a patriarchal social system, and wherein marriage and fatherhood were unquestioned (and unquestionable) pillars of successful masculinity. One case documents an urban man with relatively little connection to rural life, exemplifying changes in masculine approaches to marriage and parenthood in their most extreme, but increasingly common, form. The final case is man who explicitly questions assumptions about the importance of parenthood, albeit in a context in which he is facing intense pressure to marry and make a family. These four cases enable me to show how masculinity is central in demographic processes and specifically how the fast-changing, complex geometry of money and social reproduction is at the core of men's evolving interests in the timing of marriage and parenthood—dynamics that are at once social, political, economic, and affective.

Changing Livelihoods, Masculinity, and Fertility in Rural Southeastern Nigeria

Case Study 1

Ikechukwu is a farmer. So were his father and his grandfather. Before Ikechukwu's generation, the vast majority of men in Ubakala were farmers. Until a few decades ago, men (and women) cultivated many crops, but yam was king. A man's wealth was measured by the size of his yam barn, which was the result of the extent and productivity of his farm (Korieh 2007). But to have a large and successful farm, a man needed labor. Yam farms—and other agricultural endeavors—occasionally needed many hands. While a man could sometimes mobilize neighbors and extended kin for help, having enough children (and sometimes several wives) to contribute to farm labor was the most important guarantee of having enough people. In this sense, as has been well documented in the African Studies literature, the need for "wealth in people" undergirded the political economy, not only to enable household farming, but also as a means to creating and reproducing political alliances and security (Berry 2000; Bledsoe 1980; Guyer 1993, 1995). For men in rural southeastern Nigeria, the value of having many children was in fact over-determined, buttressed not only by economic and political benefits, but also by a cultural-symbolic apparatus that rewarded marriage, high fertility, and wealth in people (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994; Smith 2004b; Uchendu 1965).

But by the time Ikechukwu was born in 1970 things had already begun to change. When I first interviewed him in 1996 he had just married and reported that he hoped to have four or five children. By the last time I interviewed him in 2012, he and his wife had four children ranging in age from five to 15, and he was adamant that they would have no more. When I asked him why he decided to stop at four he said: "Even these four are difficult to cater for. School fees are very expensive and my children hope to attend university, which is even more dear. And none of my

sons wants to be a farmer like me. I can't blame them. I am poor. They don't want to be poor. So they are trying to get an education, and they plan to migrate to a city and find a good job or establish a successful business. I tell my sons they must have something doing [meaning have a viable means of earning income] before they marry and have their own children. These days, Nigeria is very difficult. It is not easy for a man to marry and provide for his children."

Ikechukwu did not himself postpone parenthood in any significant way. As a rural farmer, he married at 25 and had his first child at 26, fitting on older pattern. But by the time his own sons were growing up he could feel and articulate the economic pressures that will likely push them to postpone parenthood. He frequently alluded to the high cost of getting married and raising children, something that will appear again in the other cases. Ikechukwu's kids had much better access to education, more resources, and probably better future economic prospects than he did at their ages, and yet the predominant perception was one of struggle. As we will see again more directly in the next two cases, men's interpretation of the rationale for postponing marriage and parenthood is tied to a sense of struggle and inadequate finances, even though by some objective measures they are better off than the last generation, which had children earlier and in greater numbers in part as a means to ensure economic security.

Sons Abroad: Rural-Urban Migration and the Postponement of Parenthood

Case Study 2

Kelechi was born in Ubakala in 1978. Like most Nigerians of his generation, as he progressed through school his ambitions to move away from the village and establish a successful, modern life in the city grew stronger the older he got. When he graduated from secondary school and it became clear that he had no prospect of attending university—he hadn't been admitted and even if he had his parents could not possibly pay the fees—Kelechi migrated

to Lagos, Nigeria's megacity. There, he lived with some relatives on his mother's side for a few months until he found a menial job and eventually rented a room of his own. He continued to work various temporary jobs, eventually working with a carpenter as an apprentice for several years. The Igbo ethnic group has a long tradition of apprenticeship, through which a younger person learns from and serves an established artisan or business person until he has the requisite skills, at which point he starts out on his own (Meagher 2010; Silverstein 1984). At least normatively, the mentor provides some of the initial capital as a kind of payback for the years of service. By the time Kelechi set out on his own he was 32 years old, and though he resented the amount his master gave him to start up his own business, he made a go of it.

Like most Igbo men and women who migrate away from their natal villages, Kelechi kept close ties with his kin and community in Ubakala (Chukwuezi 2001). He typically visited at least once a year, often at Christmastime. With the advent of cell phone service in the early 2000s, he regularly phoned his aging parents. He would have liked to visit home more often, he said, but did not do so for two interconnected reasons: 1) he lacked money, making it feel shameful to visit without enough to give to his parents and relatives, much less show off to his natal community that he was a successful migrant, and 2) his mother constantly harassed him about getting married. In her mind (and in some sense her view represented the social pressure to marry more generally), once he passed the age of 30 it was time to marry and have children.

From Kelechi's point of view, it was his financial situation that kept him from marrying. There would be the cost of bridewealth (southeastern Nigeria has a reputation for the highest bridewealth requirements in the country), but also the cost of the weddings. I use weddings in plural because these days in Igboland it is expected that there be two weddings: a traditional ceremony and a Christian (or, as Nigerians often say, "white") wedding. Even for a relatively

poor man, the costs can run into the equivalent of many thousands of dollars—money Kelechi didn't have. And when he came to visit Ubakala, his mother would intensify the pressure, even inviting women to come visit. Like most young men in Nigeria these days, Kelechi intended to choose his own wife. He very much wanted to marry, but in addition to the costs of getting married itself, the economic burden of providing for a family weighed on him. "How can I marry?" he said, "I don't even have the money for the weddings, much less what I need to take care of a family in Lagos."

Eventually, at the age of 37, Kelechi did marry. His wife, Chinyere, was 32 when they married, also considered quite old for matrimony for a woman by Igbo standards. To everyone's delight, Chinyere gave birth to a baby boy within a year of the marriage. Both Chinyere and Kelechi say they would have a maximum of three children. When I asked why three, they said that it was in order to be able to "cater for them properly," a phrase that when probed alluded to the expense and importance of education, the high cost of living, especially in Lagos, and the changing expectations about how much one should provide for children, not only with regard to education, but also in terms of commodity consumption. Neither Kelechi nor Chinyere mentioned their age at marriage as a factor in their fertility plans, but this may have influenced things as well. As this brief recounting of Kelechi's case has shown, the same circumstances and perceptions that lead to the postponement of marriage and parenthood also partly explain changing (lower) fertility preferences, and vice-versa.

New Men: Changing Gender Relations and Challenging Traditional Values

Case Study 3

Dozie was born in Owerri, the capital of Imo State, in 1977. His parents had migrated there from their nearby village because Dozie's father secured a job as a civil servant. Dozie

sometimes visited his father's natal village, but he always lived in the city. Relative to Ikechukwu and Kelechi, Dozie had a privileged upbringing, culminating in a university degree. He now lives something like a middleclass lifestyle, owning an internet café even as he also has a job providing computer technology support for an internationally funded local NGO. Dozie married at 32, earlier than Kelechi, but didn't have his first child until he was almost 37. Although economic wherewithal was also part of Dozie's narrative to explain the postponement of parenthood, the details are quite different and they point to another strand in the evolving relationship between masculinity, marriage, and fertility in southeastern Nigeria.

Dozie's wife, Nnenna, was only 22 when they married, and at the time she was still in university. Dozie explained the five-year postponement before they had their first child—an extremely long period by local standards—in terms of the need to allow his wife to complete her education and start her own career before they started a family. Ultimately, Nnenna also finished her master's degree and was appointed a lecturer at Imo State University before she became pregnant with their first child. Dozie explained the decision this way: "We wanted Nnenna to finish university and have something doing before her first issue [issue being a Nigerianism for offspring]. I want my wife to have a career too. In today's Nigeria two incomes are necessary to make ends meet, but an educated woman also makes a better mother." In other conversations with Dozie it was apparent that he straddled multiple views and worlds when it came to issues like patriarchy and gender equality, in some ways mirroring the Pentecostal church to which he and his wife belonged, which at once called for marriage to be an equitable partnership and for both men and women to pursue prosperity, yet at the same time emphasized a man's role as head of the family. Like Kelechi—and so many young men in southeastern Nigeria postponing parenthood—Dozie also planned to have only three children, once again highlighting the

intertwining social determinants of age at marriage, the postponement of parenthood, and overall fertility.

Marriage and parenthood remain the most imperative and taken-for-granted dimensions of achieving social adulthood in southeastern Nigeria. While the main reason most men delay the transition to marriage and fatherhood is a worry about the economic burdens entailed rather than because of reluctance to marry and have children in and of itself, I have recently begun to hear a few unmarried Igbo men question the very institutions of marriage and parenthood. Although such sentiments remain the exception, they suggest that the costs of marriage and fatherhood have grown so great that they have enabled previously unthinkable contemplation about alternatives. At the very least, such feelings are indicative of the anxieties men feel about the most vital aspects of the performance of masculinity.

Case Study 4

During a 2012 visit to Nigeria I had a long discussion with a young researcher at a local university in Umuahia. Chiwendu was thirty-six years old, and notably past the normative age for men to marry in southeastern Nigeria. I had noticed Chiwendu spending a lot of time with one particular young woman, and I asked him about the relationship.

He narrated a long story about how they met and how the relationship evolved, culminating in him telling me that he would likely marry her. He lamented how much pressure he was under—from his parents, but also, it seemed, from society at large—to get married. "Everyone is looking at me somehow," he said. "In our society, no one takes you seriously unless you are married and have children. You cannot speak up. Your opinion is dismissed. I am tired of being looked at as small boy." Most interestingly, as Chiwendu narrated his experience regarding the social pressure to marry and have children, he said: "If it weren't required by

society I don't need it. What do I need marriage and children for? All that trouble. I'm OK like this. But I have no choice. I will marry and have a couple of kids and that's it." He went to elaborate further, emphasizing that he had only just begun to save enough money to contemplate buying a car, but that if he had to finance a wedding, a car would have to be postponed indefinitely.

Like for many young men I knew, for Chiwendu the money needed to marry was a source of serious anxiety. But unlike most men, he went further and questioned the necessity of marriage and fatherhood in the first place. I suspect Chiwendu's negative attitude about marriage and parenthood was partly a result of the stress from the immediate pressure he was feeling from his family and peers. But it is extremely unusual in southeastern Nigeria for people to voice any dissent regarding the ubiquitous expectation that a full and proper life requires marriage and parenthood. That said, the notion Chiwendu expressed—that there might be any alternative to marrying and having children—is itself evidence of the influence of incipient social changes. And yet the fact that men like Kelechi and Chiwendu, who married late and who articulated the burdens of marriage and fatherhood, ultimately decided to follow convention attests to just how powerful these norms and institutions remain, even in the face of significant challenges.

Discussion

In southeastern Nigeria, marrying and having children are still social imperatives. For Nigerian men, being a husband and a father remain pillars of masculinity. But as the cases above illustrate, changes are afoot. Parenthood is being postponed to an extent that was unthinkable a generation ago. Not only are men and women marrying later and having fewer children; as I have also tried to show, from men's perspectives, the postponement of marriage and parenthood is tied to the challenges of modern masculinity. In particular, men face intense anxieties and

ambivalence as they experience the elevation of money as the main means by which they must prove their social class, their capacity to be caring husbands and responsible fathers, and their worthiness as men.

In this final section I discuss and analyze some crosscutting themes that emerge from the above case studies, thinking about changing masculinity as a prism through which to understand and explain the demographic trend of the postponement of parenthood, but also using men's narratives about the postponement of marriage and fatherhood as a vehicle to examine and understand the changings expectations, meanings, and experiences of masculinity in southeastern Nigeria. Both masculinity itself and the postponement of parenthood are bound up with the perception of the paramount importance of money for reproduction—whether that is the expenses associated with marrying and having children or with wider processes of social reproduction that include proving (and improving) one's class and status. But before pursuing this line of analysis, let me provide a brief account of how women—and men's relationships with women—fit into this overall story of social and demographic change.

With regard to the social forces driving the postponement of parenthood, in many ways, women are subject to the same political-economic and cultural changes that explain the delays in marriage and childbearing as men are. Indeed, the spread and growing importance of formal education, the rise in opportunities for employment, particularly in urban areas, and cultural shifts that give individual actors greater choice about when and whom to marry, not to mention changes in conceptions of ideal family size and the wider availability of modern contraceptives; all of these have created a situation where women can (one might even say women are empowered to) postpone parenthood. Given that traditional practices of marriage and parenthood were closely tied patriarchal privilege, one might reasonably argue that women have even greater

incentive than men to embrace postponement in the age at marriage and first birth—because it gives them more time to go to school and establish a career, and because it is associated with greater agency over reproduction. Although I think there is considerable truth in this view and I have always found Nigerian women to be less anxious about gender-related social change than Nigerian men, in this article I have tried to show that men also have interests (albeit often anxiety-laden and ambivalent) in postponing marriage and parenthood.

Further, in southeastern Nigeria, men's and women's interests regarding reproduction align at least as much as—and I would argue even more than—they are opposed. For women, like men, full personhood remains deeply tied to being married and becoming a parent. Nigerian women are active agents in efforts to find husbands and bear and rear children, even as they also see benefits in postponing things longer than their mothers did. Contemporary femininity in Nigeria now almost universally includes aspirations for education and employment, and, for many women, it also includes hopes for greater gender equality. But like for men, none of these aspirations and changes has done very much to dilute the primacy of marriage and parenthood as social imperatives and pillars of proper gendered identities and full adulthood. Similar to men, one will occasionally hear an unusual Nigerian woman question reproductive norms, but most women embrace them thoroughly.

Women are also implicated in the rise of money as the means, but also the worrisome obstacle, to successful marriage and reproduction. Women want the comforts and the prestige that money confers just as much as men do. Indeed, as I explained above, and as my interlocutors in the case studies also articulated, one of the reasons men feel so much pressure to have "enough money" before they marry and make a family is to fulfill the expectations of women. Money is so important to men as they anticipate marriage and fatherhood not only because it

really does cost a lot to pay for weddings, transfer bridewealth, and educate children, but also because men are trying to measure up to what women want. Both men and women participate in a cultural gender regime in which men are expected to be the primary providers, so while everyone wants money, the pressure is mostly on men to find it.

Returning specifically masculinity, as the case studies show, when men explain the reasons for postponing marriage and parenthood, they chalk up the delay to the challenges of earning and saving enough money. This perception that marriage and fatherhood are expensive—in men's minds more expensive than ever—has a foundation in reality. In southeastern Nigeria wedding performances are like an arms race, where people spend more and more to keep up with their peers, everyone laments the situation, and yet no one dares to unilaterally disarm. Bridewealth (the gifts that a man and his family transfer to the women's family as part of the marriage arrangements) is high, and increasingly includes costly modern commodities such as refrigerators or motorbikes. And of course, raising children is more expensive than ever, especially as every parent aspires to educate their offspring to the highest level possible. The actual costs are perhaps exceeded only by the way that society ties the successful performance of masculinity to the ways that men spend money on their weddings, their wives, and their children. In other words, it is not only men's reproductive goals that are stake, but their very reputations as men.

All of this helps resolve the apparent paradox that I raised in the introduction, which is that men experience the reasons for the postponement parenthood as rooted in economic struggle, even though in the aggregate, later age at marriage, later parenthood, and lower overall fertility seem to be correlated with better economic circumstances. I have argued that while part of what is going on is that rising expectations have outstripped economic improvements in

southeastern Nigeria, the story is more complicated. It is not simply that men don't have as much money as they need—or wish for—though that is certainly true. In addition, it is the very need for money, and the fact that men are constantly being judged by their women partners, by their kin, by their male peers, and by society at large based on performances of masculinity that depend above all on having money. Thus, much of the anxiety that men experience and express as they postpone marriage and fatherhood—and as they experience better times as harder times—must be understood in the context wherein money is problematically the measure of manhood, even in the intimate and highly valued sphere of reproduction.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the relationship between masculinity and the postponement of parenthood in southeastern Nigeria. Changing economic and social conditions, including urbanization, higher levels of formal education, and rising expectations for consumption are intertwined with evolving ideals of intimacy and gendered relations. All of these are reshaping ideas and practices of masculinity, which in turn play out in men's preferences and behaviors with regard to marriage and fatherhood. Staying constant is the centrality of marriage and fatherhood as pillars of manhood; changing is the primacy of money for men to achieve these masculine goals. While one might be tempted to see the postponement of parenthood as driven by the desire for fewer, high-quality children, as has been posited in economic demography, for the men I studied in Nigeria delaying marriage and fatherhood was perceived to be the result of financial challenges rather than as a conscious change in fertility strategy. That said, distinguishing the economic, social, and demographic dimensions of masculine behavior is more the analyst's preoccupation than that of Nigerian men. My interlocutors would readily acknowledge that all of these aspects of their lives are inextricably

intertwined. I have highlighted men and masculinity, not to diminish the role of women, but to address what seems to be a relative gap in the literature on the postponement of parenthood in general and in Africa in particular.

In addition to showing that men in southeastern Nigeria are active agents in the social processes leading to the postponement of parenthood, perhaps my most interesting finding is the fact that the social changes spurring delayed childbirth are associated among men with struggle and hardship. While the possibility that economic crisis might lead to fertility declines (and by extension to postponement of marriage and parenthood) has been noted in the literature on Africa (Eloundou-Enyegue, Stokes & Cornwell 2000), the situation I have described in Nigeria is not the result of an economic crisis. In fact, this perception of hardship obtains even as the social and economic indicators that correlate with later age at marriage and lower fertility point to improvements in the aggregate. Such a finding highlights the importance of changing expectations in how people view their circumstances and explain their decisions and behavior. More broadly, this focus on masculinity suggests that understanding the postponement of parenthood is interesting not only in its own right, but also for what it reveals about other aspects of social life and social change. I have frequently heard Nigerian men say that "money makes a man," but also that "money is God and money is the devil." Men's ambivalence about the nexus of money and masculinity permeates every arena of their lives. This ambivalence and the sense of struggle that accompanies it is central to why men postpone parenthood.

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