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PROVIDING WOMEN, KEPT MEN:

Doing Masculinity in the wake of the African HIV/AIDS epidemic

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Abstract

This paper draws on ethnographic and interview based fieldwork to explore accounts of intimate relationships between widowed women and poor young men that emerged in the wake of economic crisis and a devastating HIV epidemic among the Luo ethnic group in Western Kenya. I show how the cooptation of widow inheritance practices in the wake of an overwhelming number of widows as well as economic crisis resulted in widows becoming providing women and poor young men becoming kept men. I illustrate how widows in this setting, by performing a set of practices central to what it meant to be a man in this society – pursuing and providing for their partners - were effectively doing masculinity. I will also show how young men, rather than being feminized by being kept, deployed other sets of practices to prove their masculinity and live in a manner congruent with cultural ideals. I argue that ultimately, women’s practice of masculinity in large part seemed to serve patriarchal ends. It not only facilitated the fulfillment of patriarchal expectations of femininity – to being inherited – but also served, in the end, to provide a material base for young men’s deployment of legitimizing and culturally valued sets of masculine practice.

“Socioeconomic change has left men with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities.”

Silberschmidt (2001:657)

INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on ethnographic and interview based fieldwork to explore accounts of relationships between widowed women and poor young men that emerged in the wake of economic crisis and a devastating HIV epidemic among the Luo ethnic group in Western Kenya. I show how the cooptation of widow inheritance practices in the wake of an overwhelming number of widows as well as economic crisis resulted in widows becoming providing women¹ and poor young men becoming kept men. I argue that widows in this setting, by performing a set of practices central to what it meant to be a man in this society – pursuing and providing for their partners - were effectively doing masculinity. I will also

¹Women in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa have been responsible for the bulk of provision of food for the family through subsistence farming and food gathering, among other things. My reference here and throughout the paper to women as “providing women” is referring specifically to their engaging in the kinds of provision considered the primary responsibility of men in this culture.

show how young men, rather than being feminized by being kept, deployed other sets of practices to prove their masculinity and live in a manner congruent with cultural ideals.

These arguments draw on literature that understands masculinity as a configuration of practices located within a historically situated and shifting system of gender relations, and recognizes that multiple configurations of masculinity are at work in a given social system (Connell 1995). Understanding gender as practice, or something that is done, rather than merely an identity or something that one is, enables a decoupling of masculinity from male bodies, and makes the idea of a doing of masculinity by women possible (West and Zimmerman 1987, Amadiume 1987, Oyěwùmí 1997, Lindsay and Miescher 2003, Pascoe 2005). By showing both women and men simultaneously performing masculinity in the same historically situated space, I understand thinking about multiple masculinities, as not just about relations among (those who identify as) men, but rather, relations among masculinities, which can be performed by men *or* women. However, I will show that women's practice of masculinity in large part seemed to serve patriarchal ends. It not only facilitated their fulfillment of patriarchal expectations of femininity – to being inherited – but also served, in the end, to provide a material base for young men's deployment of legitimizing and culturally valued sets of masculine practice.

Relationships between older women and young men are rarely the focus of scholarly attention. This is especially true in examinations of cross generational partnerships in literature on the African HIV pandemic (briefly discussed later in the paper), where the focus has been on those involving older men and young women. Indeed, the data for this paper comes from a larger study among the Luo who have had the worst HIV epidemic in Kenya. It was designed to explore young women's high HIV rates through examining young people's transitions to adulthood in the context of an ongoing HIV epidemic, with perspectives from youth, middle aged and elderly adults. As fieldwork progressed, however, respondents both within and outside of formal interview settings, would remark, often as an aside, on relationships between widowed women and young men. As I will show, these comments and discussions raise important questions about the effects of the HIV epidemic on shifting gender relations, and provide an opportunity to reflect on the implications of these relationships for thinking about masculinity and the persistence of patriarchal systems.

I first begin with a discussion of the crisis of youth masculinity in Africa, examining traditional and contemporary paths to manhood and adulthood, and the way current economies and population dynamics are disrupting these pathways across the continent and among the Luo specifically. Next, I discuss the HIV epidemic, its creation of widows, and practices of widow inheritance. I then describe the study setting, data and methods, before discussing the findings. I draw on field work data to focus on the dilemmas of widows who have become providing women, and the benefits experienced by youth who have become kept men. I examine the evolution of widow inheritance practices, as well as how young men have coopted them to forge new pathways to manhood. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these relationships for thinking about masculinity as performed by women and men.

The Crisis of Contemporary African Youth Masculinity

For many young African men in patrilineal societies, the primary practices associated with the attainment of manhood and adulthood were provision of land to a wife/wives for subsistence farming, establishing a household and siring children, as well as establishing authority through bridewealth based marriage over one or more women (e.g. Moore 1986, Barker and Ricardo 2005, Bingenheimer 2010, Wyrod 2007, 2008, Agadjanian 2002, Hunter 2002, Smith 2007, Cornwall 2002). The attainment of these goals underpinned the reproduction of patriarchal systems. In a typical illustration of this process, Setel (1996) describes Chagga men of northern Tanzania's transition to adulthood thus:

"In the nineteenth century, undergoing initiation, entering an age grade, establishing a new homestead, and concluding a *kihamba* [land] based bridewealth marriage were the key cultural institutions and processes through which Chagga men established adult status.... These social institutions surrounded the transition from youth to adulthood, shaped men's entry into reproductive life, and inculcated values of responsible manhood and adult citizenship within the stratified social schema of Chagga clans and chiefdoms." (Setel 1996:1170)

What these traditional patterns implied was not just authority that a man would have over women, but also over his sons until they established their own household on land given to them by their father. Among the Luo of Kenya, for example, a father determined when a young man had reached a sufficient age to build his own *simba* (bachelor hut), and assigned him land on which to do so. A young man also had to ask permission from his father to be allowed to find a woman to marry. The father along with male relatives provided bridewealth to the woman's relatives to contract the marriage, and the young man's *simba* would subsequently become his marital home (Whisson 1964; Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo 1989, Malo 1999; Achieng 2001, Shipton 2007).

The early postcolonial era provided an opportunity to circumvent these traditional routes to adulthood. Migration outside of their home area for work, as well as education which led to semi-skilled and white collar jobs enabled young men to earn money to set up their own independent households as well as finance their own marriages without relying on their male elders (Setel 1996; 1999; Agadjanian 2002; Livingston 2005; Lindsay and Miescher 2003; Mutongi 2007). This was especially salient among the Luo of Nyanza. By the second half of the twentieth century, between a quarter and half of young Luo men were migrating out of the province for work (Whisson 1964; Odinga 1967; DuPré 1968; Shipton 1989). Such large scale male labor migration and accompanying wages enabled young Luo men to contract their own marriages with their bride's relatives and afford to establish their own households (Whisson 1964; Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, Shipton 2007).

However, the stalled, declined or slow growth economies of the past two decades, coupled with a burgeoning African youth population, have had a number of consequences for young men that have caused a disruption to these contemporary practices demonstrating the attainment of adulthood and manhood. In Kenya, high fertility rates and falling infant mortality rates resulted in a large youth population. The rapid spread of mass education, however, was coupled with an economy that was not expanding at a rate that could

accommodate the graduates (Buchmann 1999). Substantial increase in educational access has thus been accompanied by growing disillusionment about employment prospects among youth and adults in many countries in Africa, with male youth unemployment rates reaching as high as 40–50 percent in settings such as South Africa, and more educated youth being especially affected (Setel 1996; 1999; Silberschmidt 2001; 2004; Barker and Ricardo 2005; Al-Samarrai and Bennell 2007; World Bank 2009). This may partly be because if youth reached high school, their aspirations stretched to the expectation of white collar jobs. As Eisemon and Schwille (1991:26) noted,

“parents do not send their children to school to become better farmers or to learn vernacular languages and practical skills that will suit them for rural life. They want an education for their children that affords them an opportunity for a much better life off the farm.”

As such, looking for wage employment involved a more protracted search than young men willing to go into self employment, agriculture or other manual labor.

Lack of jobs and subsequent income was particularly problematic because it limited young men's ability to maintain a girlfriend. Many felt there was “no romance without finance” (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005; Cornwall 2002; Ashforth 1999; Hunter 2002). A small and growing body of work suggests that some young men instead engaged in “transactional sex relationships” with older women or “sugar mummies” (Nyanzi et al 2001; 2004; Meekers and Calves 1997; Izugbara 2001; Owuamanam 1995; Cole 2005; Kuate-Defo 2004). These are non-marital, non-commercial sexual partnerships in which money and gifts are exchanged, but in which issues of love and trust are sometimes also considered at stake. The flow of gift giving is predominantly one way – with wealthier partners providing to secure partnerships with younger partners. A rather more extensive literature, however, suggests that the primary participants in these sorts of relationships are young women and older men (see Luke and Kurz 2002; Luke 2003; and Chatterji et al 2004 for literature reviews, see also Poulin 2007).

Unfortunately, even as contemporary routes to adulthood are beginning to falter, young men have been increasingly unable to return to traditional pathways to manhood. Large numbers of youth are becoming landless, especially because of population growth, and limited land to split among sons (Setel 1996; Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis 2006). Thus even though many fathers have died prematurely from AIDS, there is little they have left for their sons to inherit. Having no land or limited land on which a wife could engage in subsistence farming or cattle from which to finance bridewealth greatly constrains young men's ability to set up independent households and marry. Thus remaining “perpetually poor, perpetually youth” as Cole (2005:892) noted of the young Malagasy men (jaombilo) she studied, they are left, as it were, in social limbo, unable to transition to adulthood (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo and Francis 2006). The fact that these dilemmas have been documented in several African countries suggests the structural nature of the problem faced by young men and their inability to fulfill their end of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti 1988). Indeed among many young Luo men I interviewed, these limitations in the ability to achieve manhood - as defined by this key configuration of masculinity whose legitimizing activities were to provide money to girlfriends, bridewealth to a woman's relatives, and a home and land for a wife - have made

being a young man a frustrating, and in some ways, debilitating experience. Many worked in itinerant or low paying jobs such as jobs in transportation (e.g. bicycle taxi work), or agriculture not always commensurate with their education, to make ends meet. In this paper, however, I focus on a strategy some young Luo men pursued, and how the HIV/AIDS epidemic reconfigured sexual, economic and domestic partnerships in ways that have provided opportunities for them to forge new pathways to manhood.

The African HIV/AIDS Epidemic and Widow Inheritance

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is now an indelible part of sub-Saharan Africa with 68 percent (22.5 million) of the world's HIV/AIDS victims and 72 percent of AIDS deaths (UNAIDS and WHO 2010). Thus far, a key social dynamic underlying the rapid spread and cycling of HIV across genders and generations has been cross-generational marital, extramarital and transactional sex relationships between older men and young African women. HIV rates have been particularly high among young women in their late teens and twenties, and older men in their late thirties and forties (Clark 2004, Laga et al 2001, UNAIDS and WHO 2005 and 2008). A major result of these relationships, given the limited availability of anti-retroviral medication to prolong the lives of people living with HIV/AIDS, has been particularly high mortality among older men and younger women. Consequently, the AIDS epidemic has produced large numbers of widows. Among the Luo, 1 in 6 women in their 30s and 1 in 5 women in their 40s were widowed. This extent of widowhood was partly the result of high rates of polygamy among Luo. About a third of Luo women (31%) and a fifth of Luo men (24%) over 30 years of age were involved in polygamous partnerships.² As such, older men who could afford multiple wives also left multiple widows on their death.

Many patrilineal African societies, including the Luo of Nyanza province, practiced and continue to practice widow inheritance (Potash 1986, Thomas 2008, Lugalla et al 2004, Oleke et al 2005, Cattell 2003, Shipton 2007). After the death of a husband, widow inheritance offered a "corporate safety net for widows and orphans" (Slater 1986:xvi). Among the Luo, a brother of the deceased husband or one of his other male relatives would inherit the widow. While widows were included in the decision making of who the inheritor was to be, the final decision was in the hands of male relatives of the deceased husband because they had paid bridewealth for her and therefore felt that she belonged to them and could not be inherited by a stranger or non-relative (Nyambedha et al 2003). There were a few benefits of this system for women. The principal one was that by remaining within the folds of her husband's lineage, a widow could remain on her deceased husband's land and retain his property, thus enabling her to support herself and her children. Additionally, especially in the absence of sons, any children resulting from the sexual partnership with the inheritor would be considered as belonging to the deceased, thus allowing his line to continue, and providing heirs to the deceased man's property. This was especially important because a widow would otherwise have no rights to her husband's land or property (Potash 1986, Cohen and Atieno-Odhiambo 1989, Nyambedha et al 2003, Shipton 2007). The inheritor was usually a married man who continued to live in his own home with his wife,

²My own analysis of the extent of widowhood among Luo women, and polygamy among resident men and women in Nyanza province where most Luo live using data from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2004.

while the widow continued to stay in her own home with her children. Her inheritor had no financial responsibility for her or her children, and she in turn did not have any obligations to cook or perform other domestic services for him (Potash 1986). Women rarely had the recourse of returning to their natal home because such a move was predicated on a return of bridewealth which her family could rarely afford.

Many women complied with widow inheritance practices because of the immense social pressure to conform. Numerous taboos and sanctions were enforced in the event that a woman refused to be inherited. She would eventually become an outcast in her community, and could be dispossessed from the land. If her house fell apart, no one would rebuild it for her.³ A woman needed to have been inherited to be allowed to plant in her own farm, she was not allowed to enter certain households, her sons could not marry if their mother was not inherited, and any deaths of her children would be attributed to her refusal to be inherited (see also Luginaah et al 2005).⁴

The HIV/AIDS epidemic, however, was radically changing the practice of widow inheritance primarily because the volume of widows was beginning to overwhelm traditional systems. A tragic consequence of the practice was the death of one brother after another as HIV spread throughout the family. Consequently, some wives were starting to refuse to share their husbands with widows who were being inherited. Widows were thus left with continuing social pressure to be inherited, but limited men from their husband's lineage available or willing to inherit them. New, and to some, unsettling solutions were emerging to deal with the problem of what widows were to do, to borrow Oleke et al (2005)'s phrase "when the obvious brother is not there." In the accounts to follow, I will show how inheritor and transactional sex relationships between widows and young men resolved the social and economic challenges they both faced.⁵ I first describe the study setting, data and methods before presenting the findings.

STUDY SETTING, DATA and METHODS

I conducted ethnographic interview based fieldwork over a seven month period (December 2005-March 2006, June-August 2006) in Nyanza province, Kenya where the Luo, Kenya's third largest ethnic group, are primarily based. Nyanza's capital city, Kisumu, lies at the intersection of trans-African highways to north, west and southern parts of Africa, and links landlocked countries such as Uganda with goods driven up from the Kenyan coast along the Indian Ocean. Additionally, Kisumu hosts ports along Lake Victoria, Africa's largest fresh water lake, the source of the River Nile, linking to Uganda and Tanzania. Despite Nyanza's key transit position, and the large volumes of trade that pass through it, many of its inhabitants are poor. District development plans noted absolute poverty rates (percent of

³Because many houses in rural areas are built of mud, cow dung and thatched grass roofs, they are not permanent and are in constant need of repair. However, the work is labor intensive and was often seen to require male assistance.

⁴Widows who resisted inheritance often turned to NGOs or local churches to help them deal with the consequences. For example churches could provide widows with labor to rebuild or repair their house and NGOs provided widows in some areas with material support. However, these options were not available for many widows as they were not evenly distributed across the province. See also Shipton 2007

⁵My analysis focuses on the instrumental and material dimensions of these relationships (rather than affective dimensions) as these are what were discussed in interviews.

population living on less than \$1 a day) ranging from 53 percent to 69 percent (Republic of Kenya n.d.). Luo residents lived in homes situated around Lake Victoria, as well as its' surrounding plains and highlands. While labor migration out of the province was high, remaining residents were often involved in the fishing and sugar industries, rice farming and brick making. Additionally, many women were involved in road-side selling of vegetables and other goods to make ends meet. The Luo ethnic group has experienced the worst HIV epidemic in Kenya. While in Kenya as a whole, 8 percent of women and 4.3 percent of men are HIV positive, 1 in 5 Luo women (22.8 percent) and 1 in 6 Luo men (17.1 percent) are HIV positive (KDHS 2010). These are and have been the highest ethnic group HIV rates in Kenya for more than a decade (KDHS 2004, Iliffe 2006, KDHS 2010).

Fieldwork was focused in four Nyanza province districts bordering Lake Victoria: Bondo (north), Kisumu (central, and includes the capital city), Nyando (central) and Homa Bay (south). They were selected to provide geographic diversity, while remaining in what is known as Luo-Nyanza.⁶ The study included semi-structured one-time individual (47) and focus group (27) interviews involving a total of 185 people aged 15–94 yrs of whom 64 were men and 121 were women. From within the districts, interview sites were sampled in the following ways: 15 secondary and vocational schools were randomly selected from the Kenya Education Directory, an annually updated complete listing of all the schools in Kenya. Schools were a combination of provincial (primarily boarding, drawing students from the entire province) and district (boarding and day, drawing mainly students from the surrounding district) schools. I interviewed students across all grades. Community interviews were conducted in homes immediately surrounding the randomly selected schools to capture young people who were not in school, and adults. Additionally, respondents were recruited from community settings such as market places, villages, hospitals, community centers, fish landing beaches, and during social events where locals were gathered. This approach allowed for data gathering from a combination of formal and non-institutionalized settings. To supplement these interviews, I also conducted 20 key informant interviews among teachers, district and government officials, local researchers, non-governmental organization (NGO) officials, and community members. Interviews were conducted in English and Swahili (the national languages) which, as a Kenyan native, I was fluent in, as well as dhoLuo, the local ethnic group language, which I learnt during the course of fieldwork. Translation assistance was provided by a Luo research assistant where needed. The data for the study also includes regularly written field notes from interviews, informal conversations and observations gathered from my experiences among the Luo, to document aspects of the culture and people's everyday lives not captured by formal taped interviews. The study protocol was approved by the author's institutional review board, the Ministry of Education, Republic of Kenya, and the Nyanza district and school officials overseeing the various sites of study.

⁶At the time, there were 12 administrative districts in Nyanza province, however 4 of them (Central Kisii, Gucha, Kuria and Kisii North) were dominated by other ethnic groups (the Maasai, Kisii and Luhya). Research in districts where those ethnic groups were dominant would have resulted in interviewing Luos who were likely to have assimilated to the lifestyles and traditions of other ethnic groups. 8 districts were predominantly Luo districts (Nyando, Bondo, Suba, Siaya, Rachuonyo, Migori, Kisumu and Homa Bay – see also KDHS 2004). My fieldwork was in 4 of these districts.

I asked respondents about general issues facing the province (an ice breaker question initiating interviews), questions relating to young people's transitions to adulthood (relationship formation including dating and marriage, education, employment and financial access), and questions about whether they felt HIV/AIDS was a problem in their community and why. Among older respondents, I also asked about their own transitions to adulthood, and what they felt had changed. Along with two Luo research assistants, I transcribed and where needed translated into English, taped interviews. I subsequently conducted all coding and analyses of field notes and interview transcripts. This was done through multiple readings of the material, both chronologically and by gender/age groupings, followed by thematic coding and organization of the material based on transition domains (residence, relationships, education, employment, money and financial access), as well as widows, widow inheritance, and widow-young men relationships.

PROVIDING WOMEN: The evolution of widow inheritance

“When your husband dies and you are not inherited, you are like a taboo woman, and so nobody will give you something even if your house is leaking. Nobody can do anything for you. They don't want to touch that house unless they re-marry you. So sometimes if you are poor [and] your house is falling apart, they cannot do it for you. And they say they have to remarry you, otherwise in future, no one will help you. You will have to accept so that you are helped. So this is where custom comes in. You don't want to do it. You don't feel like doing it. But here poverty comes in. [If] you were rich, you could do it by yourself by simply leaving [hiring] people to do it for you. But you have nothing to do because you have no money and so you will rely on your brother-in-law to do it for you.”

The above excerpt from a middle-aged woman in a focus group interview at the beginning of the study was a typical complaint from Luo widows encountered during fieldwork. Widows, especially in rural areas, faced continual pressure from family and community members to be inherited, and often succumbed to it, despite their profound reluctance. For many, the extent to which they were able to resist was related to their wealth. (I discuss wealthy widows later in the paper). However, in this context where the majority of widows were poor, as noted earlier, most lived below the poverty line, few women felt they were in a position to resist.

As fieldwork progressed, it became clear that critical changes were occurring to the practice of widow inheritance with reluctance of brothers' in-law to inherit them, and continued social pressure to be inherited. Widows were increasingly choosing younger unmarried men to inherit them, and young men were moving in to live with them. This represented a dramatic break with tradition in that first, the widow rather than her husband's male relatives was choosing the inheritor, and second, the young man did not maintain his own separate residence. One middle aged female respondent explained:

“it is like the woman is the one who has married. Because the first man paid dowry [bridewealth], came to look for you and paid dowry, you wedded, isn't that your husband? But this one, you went to look for him because you want a man in this house. So you have to provide for him. You are the one now marrying him actually.

You are the one marrying him. And there are such that if you don't do what he wants, he disappears because he doesn't have love for you. He came for enjoyment... [to] eat and bathe and then lust." (my emphasis)

Widows referred to these inheritor relationships as "marriage" and the relatedness of the young man to their deceased husband was not brought up as important during interviews. They used the term "marriage" because like marriage, the young man stayed in the widow's household. (In traditional inheritance the inheritor stayed in his own household with his own wife). Additionally, like marriage, widows engaged in traditional feminine roles such as cooking and caring for the men. What was striking, however, was that widows were also engaging in traditionally masculine practices by looking for the man and bringing him into her house on her land which she was providing as a husband normally would. A widow's taking on the masculine roles of pursuing and bringing home a partner compelled her to also take on the concomitant role of provider – the final piece of what was a traditional configuration of masculine practice.

Another middle aged respondent described her aunt's predicament:

"I love my aunt. My aunt's husband died, [she is] an old woman now. She visits me here and I always feel that my aunt is starving. I give her the proper food to eat and even take her to hospital. But my brother called me recently and told me that if you visit her at home, she cooks for some man. Ei! An old woman, you are still bringing a man into your [house], my aunt, what do you want? That I want him to dig for me. And she is the one feeding the man. And this is a young man. So actually with the money I send for her, she feeds this man, so that the man cannot go away...you go and borrow to give him, otherwise he will leave you."

As we can see, an interesting circulation was occurring where a woman was sending money to support her older female relative who in turn used that money to keep her younger man by providing for him, so that he would not leave her. While both women were engaging in provision, it was the aunt's provision in the household, functioning in the masculine provider role for a young "husband" in her house that was shocking for the respondent. Men were supposed to provide a house for women, not the other way round. This point can be further emphasized in examining the gendered language around particular roles. In the dhoLuo language, men marry, and women are married. Indeed to cook and to get married/be married are the same word. "Akinyi has gone to cook for Daniel" (Akinyi odhi tedo ne Daniel) means that Daniel married Akinyi. It is linguistically incorrect to say the opposite – i.e. one cannot say Daniel has gone to cook for Akinyi (Daniel odhi tedo ne Akinyi). Thus, as shown in the above quote, a woman simultaneously performing the feminized practice of "cooking for" and the masculinized practice of "feeding" (providing for) her male partner was problematic. This was part of the improperness of the practice that respondents were trying to convey in their statements.

As also highlighted in both quotes, men's motivations were clear to widows – they would stay with them as long as they were providing. Once the provision ended, the men would leave and sometimes move on to another widow. Many widows resented this evolution of widow inheritance because keeping a man was a costly exercise, and particularly so because

an economy seemed to be at work. The fear of a young man leaving was because the large number of widows had essentially made it a sellers' market for young men. There was a sense among respondents that richer widows were in a stronger position than poorer ones. They felt that young men made this distinction, preferring homes that were wealthy and that would yield them a good and comfortable life, while turning down poorer widows. This is illustrated, for example, in the following excerpt from a focus group among widows.

R1: Even here we can see some women who are widows and are rich, they are okay. If she wants somebody to move with, she will choose a man of her choice because she has money. She can make a choice. But if you don't have, how can you choose while you are starving?

R2: He can't even accept you.

R3: He can't. Actually the poor they don't want. They don't want. They want to come because they know at the back of their minds, they know that these things are there. They know that they are facing death and so they want to enjoy themselves. Nice food, you have to feed them, you have to treat them like kids.

I: Who?

R3: These people who come to inherit. You treat them better than your own husband.

R4: He sits like a log of wood but you feed them, gives you another burden.

As the interview excerpt illustrates, poorer widows were decidedly less fortunate than rich widows. Interviews often revealed the lengths that poorer widows would go to, giving their inheritors the best food, while splitting what was left with their children, in order to keep a man in the house for as long as possible. A key informant working in community health, for example described the plight of widows in her community noting,

Another issue with the women who are widows is that they are having problems with the inheritors because when the inheritor comes they don't want to eat vegetables. They like to eat special food like meat, fish, eggs, things like that. So you find that this lady who is a widow, her children will be eating vegetables, but she will strive to give this man whatever he wants.

In lakeside communities, widows described going to fish landing beaches to engage in transactional partnerships with fishermen to get financial support to cater for their families.

The focus group excerpt above also suggests, however, that the richest widows had the most options. The data suggests that the few widows who were independently wealthy, making their own money from lucrative businesses or high salary jobs (and therefore outside the purview of their deceased husband's relatives) were the most able to opt out of inheritance and engage instead in transactional relationships with young men out of choice. Accounts of these widows emerged in the course of interviews among men.

KEPT MEN: Recuperating Masculinity

Several middle aged and older men pointed out young men's pursuit of relationships with older women in the course of fieldwork. For example, in response to a question on changes among the Luo from the past, one older male respondent in his eighties replied,

"Education is expensive. After that expensive education there are no jobs. So the children who are educated have lost their way [and] get into different things. We have problems because they are back with us in the house. They come to disturb us parents. You had educated him or her. You have no money. [So] when they can't support themselves, they get into drugs. From drugs they go after women who are wealthy. An old but rich woman can take your son who is 18 years old [and] live with him as her husband."

Similarly, a middle aged district official and a retired older educational official independently described the experience of attending funerals of a prominent contemporary who had likely died of AIDS. Both noted that young men were fighting in the back room over who would inherit the widow. In one case, the chief in attendance went to the back and ordered that the men be arrested; so physical, and presumably disruptive, was the fighting. As my field notes describe, the older man recounted, "they [the young men] were like 'this time she is mine, you are always taking them.'"

The accounts were startling not just to my respondents – men remarking on these puzzling and worrying developments among their juniors - but also to me. Why would young men in their prime be pursuing rich older women⁷ or fighting over a potentially HIV positive widow?

Fieldwork suggested a number of ways in which young men benefited from inheritor relationships with widows. First, by co-opting tradition young men were able to turn continued social pressure on widows to be inherited into commercial advantage. Okeyo and Allen (1994) and Ayikukwei et al (2008) document the rise of local commercial industries around widow inheritance and other sex-related rites such as sexual cleansing (to rid the widow of her husband's ghost) among the Luo over the past decade and a half. With fewer older men to go around, reluctance of wives to share their husbands with widows, and large numbers of widows, families were starting to pay men (called *joter*) to inherit widows and perform these rites. Money gained from this payment, in addition to money the widow used to provide for the man enabled young men to attain the Luo ideal of enjoying the good life "*hero raha*." Because the widow was now responsible for feeding, clothing and caring for her inheritor, a young man in such a relationship, especially if the widow or her deceased husband had been rich, could enjoy the "high life" and gain resources he otherwise would not have had access to, with little or no obligations that a traditional husband would have. As the interview excerpts from the widows highlighted, he could "eat, bathe and lust", "sit

⁷It is worth noting here that while among widows there were clear disparities in wealth, from a young man's point of view, the appropriate comparison may have been between their parental household and the widow's household. i.e. someone coming from a poor household with unreliable meals would consider a household with regular meals a step up even if the widow considered herself poor. She was comparatively wealthier than the household he was coming from. The wealthiest women mentioned by young men were those who were independently wealthy, and these relationships were most likely to be transactional as opposed to inheritor relationships.

like a log” and experience better treatment than a husband as women worked hard to satisfy their man so that he would not leave them for another widow. This experience provided young men with a stark contrast to their original home, where as the older man above noted, their parents were unable to provide for them and where parents felt they were “disturbing” them. They could essentially “marry up” from their parental home. This explained the attraction to richer widows, who in this poor setting were fewer in number than poor widows, and why they were worth fighting for.

The same financial and material benefits extended to young men in transactional relationships with rich women who wanted “to dress well, drink, and here is a sugar mummy.” In an interview among young fishermen, they noted that rich widowed fisherwomen, who used to buy fish in bulk from fishermen and then transport and sell it in other parts of the country, would often pursue them, and invite them into their homes to keep them. One noted, “You have been offered a soda, you have been welcomed into a house, nice food has been cooked for you and you have been offered a place to sleep and you find things start happening.” The high male mortality rates in fishing communities they travelled to had changed the gender norms around relationships. “It is now opposite – that ladies go for men, but men don’t go for ladies...so you find that especially with the young men, most of them are lost. They don’t even come home.” The fisherman went on to note that this had happened to him personally. While for itinerantly employed young fishermen, these relationships provided access to this “high life” above and beyond their basic needs, for other young men who were unemployed, these relationships helped them deal with the more immediate problem of poverty. For example, in a focus group interview among out of school youth, a young man noted:

What I can say is that AIDS is a big problem in this area because there are no jobs and many people are idle because there are no jobs... You find that you will be having an idle mind. So...for me I see that why we are getting AIDS is, like right now for me, I try to look for work and don’t find it. So I go and find an old lady with a Pajero [SUV], with money. And maybe she is willing to give me monthly allowances. So I will be like a husband to her. And maybe she is giving me allowances but she is infected [with HIV]. I don’t go to her because she is beautiful and I admire her but because of hunger.

In the context of widespread poverty where most people, as noted earlier, lived on less than a dollar a day, older women’s money provided financial support in the face of lack of jobs and subsequent income.

Finally, young men involved in inheritor and transactional relationships with older women were able to use the monetary benefits to engage in at least one of the “legitimizing activities” commonly associated with manhood; being able to provide for women. The amount of money young men earned from being a commercial cleanser or inheritor was enough to pay bridewealth and contract their own marriage (Aiyukwei et al 2008; See also Potash 1986). Widows thus provided a means for young men to gain resources needed to provide for a wife and set up their own household. Among the young men who had transactional relationships with fisherwomen, the migrant nature of their older partners’ jobs

to sell fish elsewhere provided opportunities for transactional relationships with younger women. As one fisherman described,

“When they get young men like us, she will give them all the money to carry... these ladies have money. From Mombasa [coastal Kenyan city], she will buy for you some clothes, shoes, your lifestyle really changes. So during the time she is in Mombasa, you look for a young lady and bring her close. So you spend this money with this young lady while she is away. When she comes back, now you kind of tell this young lady to hold on.”

In this way, he could have a concurrent relationship with an older fisherwoman and one or more younger girlfriends in the community. School girls interviewed would often mention fishermen as attractive and ideal boyfriends because they had money. In this case, young men were able to use their widowed female partner's money as a material base from which to perform a providing masculinity with younger girlfriends.

However this expression came with particular costs both in their risk for acquiring HIV, as well as passing it on. The danger of young's men's concurrent relationships with widows and younger partners was highlighted in an interview with young out of school women, where an HIV positive respondent described how she thought she got infected. She said:

R: With me I think I got it from my boyfriend. Because he was unfaithful. He used to have many girlfriends and some women whose husbands had died.

I: So he had relationships with widows?

R: Yes

I: So he used to like inherit?

R: Yes

...

I: And how old was he?

R: He was 25.

I: And you?

R: I was 16.

I: And how did you find out yourself [that you were positive]?

R: The way I saw him, with the mothers he used to go with, he is sick.”

It was at this point that she decided to go for an HIV test and discovered her positive status. In light of continued high HIV rates and AIDS related widowhood in this setting, if these trends are demographically significant, young men, previously considered “safe” compared

to young women, might now be “facing death” as they put themselves at risk of contracting HIV from the widows who are keeping them.

DISCUSSION

Economic crisis and the HIV epidemic created significant dilemmas for Luo young men and widows. For young men, unemployment and constrained access to money limited their ability to achieve manhood as defined by provision of money to girlfriends, bridewealth, a home and land for a wife. Widows faced intense social pressure to be inherited but had limited willing partners from their husband’s lineage to inherit them. For some, relationships between widowed women and poor young men were creative solutions to the challenges that both faced. These solutions have important implications for thinking about what it means to do masculinity and the persistence of patriarchal systems.

In examining the configurations of practices Luo widows and young men engaged in, I have argued that both groups were doing masculinity. Widows, by pursuing and providing for their male partners were performing what had historically been a key masculine configuration of practice in this culture. The richest widows who were independently wealthy were able to exercise financial and relational autonomy by initiating and engaging in relationships with younger men on whom they could lavish money. Their relative wealth allowed them to opt out of and resist the pressure to be inherited, and engage in transactional relationships with younger men out of choice. However, in this poor setting, many widows were not independently wealthy and subsequently experienced their masculine practice as burdensome and stressful, as they struggled to provide for and hang on to their partners. Young men had found a way out of remaining perpetual “youth” by engaging in relationships with providing widowed women. The relationships enabled them to move out of their parental home, enjoy the good life, have respite from poverty, pursue romance without laboring for the attendant finance and, for some, accumulate the resources to go on to contract a marriage and set up their own independent household. In addition, young men in these relationships were referred to using masculine terminology such as “husbands” as opposed to the feminizing term “wives” despite the unconventional and disturbing manner in which they had achieved this status.

Masculinity, then, was no longer in crisis. Indeed, among these Luo young men, it seemed as if rather than sacrificing their manhood by being kept by providing women, they were instead able to better achieve it. They were able to utilize economic crisis and the social changes wrought by the HIV epidemic to craft a configuration of masculine practice that culturally marked and legitimized them *as men* in ways that affirmed and maintained rather than destabilized their culture’s patriarchal ideology. Providing women, in turn, were in complex ways propping up patriarchal systems and ways of doing manhood. Widows, rich and poor provided young men with resources which some used to marry or pursue romance with younger women. Further, for many of these widows, the HIV epidemic did not provide a way to opt out of widow inheritance altogether, but rather a new way to perpetuate it. By taking on young men as inheritors, they were using an unconventional method to meet social demands, but unfortunately also ultimately preserving the practice of a system that ultimately burdened them. Indeed for many widows, young men had the upper hand. Young

men's leverage was enabled by the high supply of widows, and their ability to coopt the cultural pressure on widows to be inherited. This leverage enabled them to choose better resourced widows to inherit and decide how long they were going to stay. The system left the poorest widows worst off, having to borrow money and struggle to entice young men, with their choice of widows, to stay. Women's practices and young men's benefits reproduced and perpetuated this patriarchal system, with striking results. In this case, arguably, women's masculine practices enabled patriarchal expectations for femininity - to be inherited, and to be provided for by men - to be restored for the next generation of women, and provided the material resources for young men to fulfill their end of the patriarchal bargain.

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