The booklet (105 pages), based on field work carried out in the old city of Sana'a between November 2003 and February 2004 focuses on the responsibility of Yemeni men for their families. It is divided into two parts: the first (1-19) introduces the motivation and research methods, gives a summary of the results and the plan of the book (1-6). Subsequently, the author reviews the scholarly literature on masculinity in Muslim/Arab societies (7-14) and presents his methods in more detail (15-19). The second part (20-99) analyses local concepts of masculinity, family and gender roles on the basis of field data (20-42). Interviews followed by the author’s analysis demonstrate the life plans of Yemeni males focussing on aspects of marital status (42-58), the importance of work (59-72) and relationships with friends (73-94). The study closes with conclusions (95-99), the applied questionnaire (100) as well as a bibliography (101-105).

The title „Zuerst die Freunde, dann die Frau“ (“first the friends, then the wife”) is a quotation taken from a conversation with a Yemeni informant, who more precisely said: “Perhaps you [Europeans] have a girl friend, but you don’t have male friends. We first have male friends (the probable article of general determination in Arabic should better not be translated into German/English) and afterwards a wife.” (94). Contrary to the informant’s chronological meaning of “first”, the title without context, however, underlines and evokes the Western stereotype of value priority in gender relations in Muslim societies. At the end of the book (98-99) the author explains that he intended to convey two meanings: to show, that friends are made before marriage and that men spend much time with their friends, mainly chewing qat in the afternoon (76), a great deal more than with their wives. In addition, in combination with the subtitle “The Responsibility of Yemeni men for their families” the main title conveys to the reader that the book deals with a nuclear family of the Western type. However, the author himself emphasizes, that an important part of family relationships are generalized reciprocities between sons and parents (4, 97) and that his mostly unmarried informants (11 out of 15) turned his question about family responsibilities into a question of generations and not gender relations (18) so that finally he draws the conclusion that the ideal of seniority is often more binding than reciprocity between the sexes (57, 97).

The quintessence of Hitz’ research is that Yemeni men mainly understand their responsibilities towards their family (which for the most part are patrilocal families of several generations) in economic terms (3). This is directly related to gainful employment (3), which is achieved by the father’s or the friends’ help and mediation (4). From the beginning (dowry) the relationship between husband and wife is dominated by financial burdens on the husband’s side (3). While friendship among men is esteemed as a relationship free of those aspects that determine generation and gender relations.
relations, i.e. seniority and money (83, 85)—though the unimportance of the latter is mostly theoretical (84-7)—, social networks among male friends are the prerequisite of acquiring economic funds by means of fitāmīn wāw (wāw stands for Arabic wasāṭa, intermediary, p. 65, note 58). Therefore, friends do not disturb marital and family life but are, on the contrary, useful (4, 91, 93, 97, 98, 99).

One notices that the author had to fulfill a clearly outlined task: The study was prepared as a ‘licence work’ (an academic prerequisite at Swiss universities to doctoral studies) at Bern University and as such had to follow the formal requirements that restrict the size to 120 pages. It also has to demonstrate the author’s ability to deal with the relevant scientific literature and use the theoretical and methodological apparatus of social anthropology. Due to the prescribed preparation time of 6 months one regrets that the field work could not be longer which could have resulted in more interviews.

Usually licence works are not published—but the author understands his own study as a contribution to the otherwise neglected masculinity research in gender studies in Muslim-Arabic societies along profound and detailed studies in all fields of female space (2). Going beyond previous studies on masculinity that had mainly focused on the concepts of honour and shame (8-10), Hitz’ research is a valuable contribution and may be an incentive to further studies—perhaps preferably done by women, as they have access to the world of both sexes, as he remarks himself (2), in this extremely gender segregated society. Anyway, such kind of field research would have needed a longer preparation and long established contacts—he admits that he mainly spent his time in the streets, not in houses, though his original idea was to get an insight into families (1). His questionnaire (100) demonstrates these ambitions when he asks about the wives of his informants in a rather direct way.

Hitz himself recognizes the weak points of his study—due to the lack of time and therefore to the small number of informants to whom he had established a close relationship and who trusted him, most interviews did not exceed a normative discourse (2-3), so that he enlarged his interview topics with foci on the related subjects such as activities (ʿamal), employment (shughl) and friends. The chosen method quoted as Yanagisako and Collier’s (several mistakes in the bibliography entry) in theory (2-3, 15-7) also proved to be problematic in practice (17-8), especially as he had no access to family life. In fact, even a longer stay and contacts would not have solved all these problems, as it is the very same family structure that forbids deeper insight by a male from outside: women are called harīm (sacred, forbidden) and therefore put under taboo, of what he is of course aware (24). But also generation problems are not revealed even to friends as Hitz himself notices later (68).

The work reveals some formal mistakes and carelessness: Arabic (transliteration): sūq fiḍḍa instead of sūq al-fiḍḍa (1), maʿsūlīya instead of maʿālīya (31), yaṣṭagīl instead of yaṣṭagīl (67); German translation: fitna—“Aufruhr” (sediton) instead of “Versuchung, Verführung” (temptation) which fits better in that context (39); German terminology: I could not verify the word “Hymeraloperation” (i.e. hymen surgery) (10); quoting references: the author’s first name is quoted, even misspelled: Ottfried = Ot-