Thinking through Love in Africa

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A few years back, in a special issue of *Granta*, the Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina (2005) wrote a bitterly ironic essay entitled "How to Write about Africa." Wainaina explains that the author who writes about Africa and aspires to global circulation should always use words such as *darkness* or *safari* in the title, and that subtitles succeed if they include words like *Zanzibar, Masai, primordial*, or *tribal*. After further elaboration, he adds a list of what *not* to write about: "Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved)" (92).

Wainaina is right to mock the absence of representations of love in writing about Africa for Western and global audiences. By contrast, within the continent, popular discussions of love abound. African novelists from Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Ama Ata Aidoo have written poignant stories of African love, ones filled with heartbreak, suffering, and redemption. Love songs have been a staple of popular music across Francophone Africa for decades. English-language African newspapers and magazines have similarly long carried discussions of love, including advice columns. Today, in many African countries, it is hard not to notice the pervasive appeal of romantic movies or soap operas produced in Bombay or Hollywood, Brazil or Mexico. Moreover, from billboards sponsored by HIV/AIDS education and prevention campaigns to call-in radio talk shows, discussion of sexual intimacy, trust, and personal feelings seems to be everywhere. Yet despite
the sights and sounds of love in these varied African media, scholars have rarely addressed the topic. Like popular representations of Africa to which Wainaina so bitterly refers, historians and anthropologists have largely ignored love in Africa.

This volume examines how men and women have imagined and negotiated love—the sentiments of attachment and affiliation that bind people to one another—in sexual, predominantly heterosexual, relationships in colonial and postcolonial Africa. Such a project immediately raises thorny epistemological, methodological, and even political questions. To start with, why is there so little scholarship on love in Africa? This question is all the more curious given that there is a burgeoning body of work on love in other places (see below). Moreover, there is a significant Africanist literature on other emotions, namely, jealousy and anger (Douglas 1970; Harris 1978; Lambeek and Solway 2001; Durham 2002). So why not love in Africa? Is it because scholars' epistemological and analytic concerns have blinded them to love's presence? Or is it because Africans have had powerful attachments that they did not formulate in terms of "love"? Or is it some combination of the two?

These questions remind us that to study love is to address head on the problem of universality and difference. Is love a universal emotion either intrinsic to the human soul or rooted in our bodies' psychological, physiological, and biochemical structures? Or is it produced through specific historical processes and cultural formations? Methodologically, how does one know if the word that informants use to signal passion or affect really maps on to the same conceptual and emotional field as "love"? To use this word when one's informants use other idioms to describe intimate attachments runs the risk of creating an unwarranted impression of universality.  

Faced with these conundrums, we approach love as an analytic problem rather than a universal category. In so doing, we draw on anthropological and historical scholarship that explores how emotions are embedded in historically situated words, cultural practices, and material conditions that constitute certain kinds of subjects and enable particular kinds of relationships. Anthropologists working within a symbolic tradition have demonstrated how varying cultural symbols, practices, and lexicons enable different forms of feeling and emotional expression (Abu-Lughod 1986; Lutz 1988; Rosaldo 1980, 1984). Other anthropologists have elucidated the political economy of emotion—the way in which emotion is "a symbolic representation grounded in the basic material conditions" of people's lives (Rebhun 1999; Hirsch 2003; Gregg 2006). Historians, in turn, have drawn insight from these anthropological studies as well as cognitive psychology to chart significant changes in emotions over time (Reddy 2001; Stearns and Lewis 1998; Stearns and Stearns 1988; Stearns 1994; Lee 2007). Especially useful is Barbara Rosenwein's (2006, 2) study of "emotional communities" in medieval Europe. There she argues against grand narratives and for tracing the history of emotions through "relatively small increments of transformation and change."  

Building on these studies, this volume makes two broad contributions to the scholarship on love and intimacy in Africa and beyond.

First, we challenge social scientific and historical scholarship that has reduced African intimacy to sex. Discussion of emotion has long been absent
from Africanist scholarship on intimate relations. This absence, however, has become increasingly striking since the late 1980s with the explosion of analyses of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa. Whereas countless studies have analyzed how sexual behavior fuels the epidemic, few have explored how that behavior is embedded in emotional frameworks. Although the reduction of intimate relations to sex is problematic anywhere, this is especially the case for Africa because of the long history of Westerners deploying arguments of hypersexuality to dehumanize Africans and justify degrading policies. Studies that dissect African sexualities while ignoring affect contribute to Westerners’ persistent figuring of Africa as the “other” of European Enlightenment. This volume argues against that tendency by insisting that we cannot understand sex or intimacy without understanding ideologies of emotional attachment. We join a small but growing body of scholarship that seeks to better understand Africa’s HIV/AIDS epidemic by examining the entanglement of sexual behavior and affective relations (Ahberg 1994; Setel 1999; Parikh 2005; Mark Hunter 2002, 2005a; D. Smith 2001, 2006; Poulin 2007).

Second, we argue that anthropologists need to pay greater attention to how contemporary discourses, sentiments, and practices of love are the product of complex historical processes and intersections. Sociocultural anthropologists, largely working in locales outside of Africa, have produced a sizeable literature on love in recent years. Some have argued for recognizing passionate love—defined as a strong sexual and emotional attraction to another person that often results in a neglect of more ordinary obligations—as a universal phenomenon (Giddens 1992; Jankowiak 1995; Yan 2003; Hatfield, Rapson, and Martel 2007; Jankowiak 2008). Others, more aligned with the aims of this volume, have explored how shifting kinship practices, gender ideologies, and political economies shape intimate attachments (Collier 1997; Kendall 1996; Rebhun 1999; Gillette 2000; Ahearn 2001; Adrian 2003; Hirsch 2003).

Two new edited volumes locate the economic and cultural politics of such intimate transformations in the context of transnationalism and globalization. Modern Loves (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006) examines how companionate marriage has recently become a global ideal and, in the process, has been variously localized in ways that disrupt older social formations and facilitate claims to modernity. Love and Globalization (Padilla et al. 2007) explores how increased flows of people, media, and commodities are reshaping local economies of love, how new phenomena like Internet romance and sexual tourism are commercializing love, and how the performance of love facilitates international migration (see also Constable 2003, 2005; Breneman 2004; Faier 2007; Ettus 2006). These volumes effectively illuminate the way in which new transnational discourses and economic formations reshape love and intimacy around the world. By showing how claims to love are often claims to modernity, they also suggest some of the cultural politics that are a part of these transformative processes. But they tend to ignore the longer history of the imperial and cross-regional movement of affective ideals and practices, unwittingly confining such movement to the contemporary period of globalization.

Scholars working in colonial/postcolonial and queer studies, by contrast, have demonstrated how since the nineteenth century, at least, ideologies of affect have been an integral part of the disciplinary regimes through which imperial and liberal governments have sought to regulate their subjects and citizens. These regimes have worked in part by marking certain intimate relations—namely, those premised on the heterosexual monogamous couple—as more valuable and, hence, more worthy of political recognition than others (Warner 1999; Berlant and Warner 2000; Berlant 2000; Povinelli 2006; Stoler 2006; Matsuda 2005; Rafael 2000; Stoler 2002). Afshaneh Najmabadi (2005), for example, has explored how in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran, the promotion of a European conception of marriage rooted in romantic love depended on the normalization of heterosexual mores and affective ideals. This volume extends such attention to the history and politics of imperial and cross-regional ideologies of love into colonial and postcolonial Africa. It also enriches such scholarship by considering the politics of inclusion and exclusion manifest within everyday practices and discourses of love.

Together, our chapters demonstrate that Africans have long remade local affective ideals and practices by engaging those from elsewhere. Some of these engagements involved Christian missionaries and European colonial regimes; others reveal the mark of Islam or the mid-twentieth-century arrival of South Asian films. Contemporary discourses and practices of love in Africa emerge from the entanglement of such influences with endogenous ideologies and economies of affection. The apparently recent proliferation of discourse about, and practices of, love in Africa and other postcolonial contexts needs to be understood in relation to this longer history, a history that draws on multiple, even competing, conceptions of attachment and affiliation.

Readers should not turn to this volume to find an account of Africa’s love “tradition.” Rather, what you will find are analyses of the heterogeneous ways that people in Africa have deployed ideologies of love to elabrate generational and cultural distinctions and claim political inclusion;
how they have reconfigured affective relations amid the profound political, economic, and social changes of the past century; and how they have engaged ideals of romantic love to reimagine gender relations. Before turning to these specific arguments, we must consider more closely the question of why love has not, for the most part, appeared in earlier Africanist scholarship.

The Problem of Love

Until recent decades, few scholars outside the fields of literature and psychology gave much thought to love in any context. In 1922, the German philosopher Georg Simmel (1984 [1921–22], 159) argued that although love was “one of the great formative categories of existence,” it had yet to receive serious and nonreductive theoretical consideration from a range of intellectual disciplines. Similarly, Ann Swidler (2001, 2) has argued that love has generally seemed “too personal,” “too mysterious,” and “too sacred” a subject for sociologists to tackle. Anthropology, the social science discipline with the longest and most substantive engagement in twentieth-century Africa, devoted considerable attention to kinship, courtship, and marriage but shunned examination or explicit theorization of love.

Anthropologists’ disinclination to consider love was due, in part, to the convergence of the epistemological foundations of their discipline with Euro-American folk theories of emotion. Western folk theories imply that emotions are psychobiological essences located within individuals (Lutz 1988). By contrast, anthropology has traditionally defined its subject matter as shared cultural practices and representations. This claim is particularly true for the British social anthropologists who dominated the formation of Anglophone African studies. These early anthropologists followed Emile Durkheim’s, and later A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s, assessment that only collective representations that exist beyond the individual are the appropriate domain of sociological and anthropological study. For instance, the index to Isaac Schapera’s Married Life in an African Tribe (1940), possibly the best-known volume on marriage and sex in Africa, does not include love as an entry. Insofar as anthropologists perceived emotions as a part of individual psychology and private experience, they considered love epiphenomenal to the proper subject of anthropological research.

Although this epistemological framing discouraged early anthropologists from examining love and other emotions, references to emotions and powerful attachments nonetheless crept into their accounts. Swiss missionary and scholar Henri Junod’s (1912) brief discussion of love amid a cataloguing of folktales from southern Africa is typical. First, he tersely pronounced that “love, as we understand it, plays but little part in Thonga life.” Then, after presenting two “love songs,” one composed by a young woman prohibited from marrying the partner of her choice and the other by a jilted young man, he warned: “It would be erroneous to think Native lovers . . . are not capable of deep and lasting affection” (2:190–91). With these remarks, Junod acknowledged that passion and affection could animate Thonga courtship and marriage, and exhibited confusion—a confusion shared by subsequent scholars—about how to convey to a Western audience that affective ties among Africans are present but different.

Anthropologists also did not explore love because their informants distrusted its influence or disregarded its significance. Monica Hunter, for example, wrote that even though most Pondo marriages were “of choice” and elopement was a common and old practice, elders disapproved of young men marrying their “sweethearts” as they feared that they would “already [be] tired of the girl[s]” when they began living together (Hunter 1936, 188–90, 32, cited in Thomas, this volume). Similarly, in later fieldwork among the Nyakyusa-Ngonde of Tanzania, Wilson (formerly Hunter) reported that although passionate extramarital affairs often precipitated divorce, people repeatedly stated that “with us love is small” and insisted that marriages were premised on cattle exchange not affect (Wilson 1977, 166, cited in Shadle 2006, xli n30). Such accounts suggest that although emotional and physical attraction commonly animated courtship and affairs, it was not valued as a solid foundation for marriage. They also suggest how informants’ cultural ideologies reinforced social anthropology’s epistemological predilection to focus on kinship and exchange rather than emotion.

Yet even on those occasions when Africans did evoke love, anthropologists did not explore its meanings. Nowhere is this avoidance more striking than in accounts of love “medicines” or “magic.” Such preparations entailed the combination and application of various animal, plant, and store-bought products to make a man or woman irresistibly attractive or guard a lover’s affection from interlopers. Anthropologists described love medicines as among the most common treatments sought from healers (Hellmann 1935; Hunter 1936; Hellmann 1948; Krié 1936b; Kenyatta 1938; Schapera 1940). These scholars documented the prevalence of such medicines because of their broader concern with theories of magic, ritual, and witchcraft. Yet none considered what such widespread usage suggested about local conceptions of passion. In so doing, they missed an opportunity to explore love as an omnipresent health concern, an occult force, and an involuntary state of being.
Just as British social anthropologists' failure to engage these insights was an artifact of their discipline's epistemological foundations and their informants' values, it was also a product of the history of the West's relationship to Africa. Throughout the era of the Atlantic slave trade, European representations of African "barbarity" depicted African men and women as libidinous and licentious (Jordan 1968; Morgan 2004). Slave owners in the United States positioned blacks as moral inferiors by portraying them as hypersexual and devoid of emotional depth. Thomas Jefferson (2002 [1785], 176–77), for one, wrote: "Love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation... In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection." Such racist accounts of black affect cast doubt on the fundamental humanity of Africans and their descendants. While evangelical abolitionists such as William Wilberforce rejected such ideas about the inherent inferiority of blacks, they argued that domestic life in Africa had been so corrupted by the slave trade that it could be righted only through the cultivation of Christian marriages and communities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). For most nineteenth-century missionaries, bridewealth exchange and polygyny demonstrated African women's "slave-like" status and the absence of deep sentiment within African courtship and marriage (Beecham 1841; Curtin 1964). By depicting lust as omnipresent and love as absent in Africa, thereby situating blacks as morally and spiritually inadequate, these European perspectives established a set of racialized polemics that would inform subsequent discussions and representations of black intimacy (Omolade 1983; Mama 1996; Hanchard 2000; Ratele 2004).

During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars sought to write against racist representations that portrayed African women as oversexed and exceptionally fertile. As second-wave feminists, they also aimed to challenge sexist ideologies that occluded women's agency and situated women solely in the domestic realm by emphasizing the important economic and political roles that women performed in African societies (Paulme 1963 [1960]; Boserup 1970; Wiper 1972; Hafkin and Bay 1976). For these reasons, they avoided examining the affective dimensions of social life. But feminists' focus on women's strategies for securing livelihoods soon brought them face-to-face with women's exchange of sex and other domestic services for material resources (Schuster 1979; Obbo 1980; Robertson and Berger 1986; White 1990). While such scholars documented the dense persistent intersection of sex and material resources, they did not explore how sentiment also inhabited such exchanges.

Other intertwined epistemological and political issues discouraged historians of Africa from following the lead of Europeanist colleagues who during the 1960s and 1970s made love into the subject of historical inquiry. As part of a broader effort by social historians to expand the discipline's thematic concerns to the family and everyday life, some Europeanists started to chart a history of emotion. Philip Ariès (1962), Edward Shorter (1975), and Lawrence Stone (1979) argued that the "increasing sentimentalization" of family life originated in northern Europe during the eighteenth century as the result of rising prosperity and life expectancy. This historiography linked love to modernization, a concept that Africanist scholars found increasingly suspect by the mid-1970s, as we detail below. The Eurocentrism of this early historical scholarship on love likely discouraged Africanist historians from embracing the topic. No doubt, intimate attachments also seemed irrelevant to the concerns that motivated most historians of Africa: reconstructing usable pasts for newly independent nations and analyzing the causes of economic underdevelopment (Cohen 1985).

Since the early 1990s, the influence of sexuality and queer studies has combined with the urgencies of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to focus much Africanist scholarly attention on sex. Historians of women and gender have engaged some of Michel Foucault's (1978, 1985) insights to demonstrate how the regulation of reproduction and sexuality were integral to colonial and postcolonial rule in Africa (Summers 1991; Vaughan 1991; Jeater 1993; Hunt 1999; L. Thomas 2003; Klausen 2004; Shadle 2006). Other scholars have documented the diversity of sexual identities and their politics in contemporary Africa (Achmat 1993; Epprecht 2004; Hoad, Martin, and Reid 2005; Moodie 1988; Morgan and Wieringa 2005; Murray and Roscoe 1998). At the same time, a plethora of studies have sought to understand the social underpinnings of AIDS.

Most anthropological research on AIDS and sexuality has deliberately eschewed broad cultural generalizations, fearing that such analyses simultaneously blame the victims and dehistoricize the causes of the epidemic. Instead, scholars have demonstrated how pervasive poverty and other forms of structural violence shape sexual practices (Schoepf 1992, 1995; Parker 2001; Arnfred, ed. 2004; Haram 2004; Mark Hunter 2007). Some scholars have used the concept of "transactional sex" to emphasize the centrality of material exchanges to everyday sexual relations and to avoid conflating varied forms of African intimacy with "prostitution" and its stigmatizing connotations (Mark Hunter 2002; Cole 2004; Wojcicki 2002; Zaldudondo 1991). Such materialist approaches rightly elucidate how poverty and insecurity
facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, by highlighting the economic dimensions of these exchanges, such accounts once again background the role of emotions in intimacy.

Modernization and Love

There is, however, one body of Africanist scholarship that did make love the object of analysis. During the 1950s to 1970s, both Anglophone and Francophone sociologists, political scientists, and even some psychologists joined anthropologists in assessing whether urbanization and rapid social change were causing African societies to become more like Western industrialized nations, as modernization theory predicted. These social scientists sought to determine whether economic development was moving African societies from a communal, kin-based ethos to an individualistic one (Cooper and Packard 1997). Similarly, policymakers, interested in everything from stabilizing labor forces to lowering population growth rates (F. Cooper 1996; Lindsay 2003; Sharpless 1997; Watkins 2000), took the existence of the nuclear family, founded on a couple’s mutual attraction rather than the demands of wider kin groups, as an important indicator that modernization was actually taking place. As a result of these concerns, several scholars sought to understand the nature of African intimate relations, including the possible presence of romantic love.

Of particular interest was whether passion and individual choice served as a basis for spouse selection and marriage. Writing about marriage among Kinshasa schoolteachers—professionals often deemed the vanguard of modernity in Africa—Guy Bernard (1968) observed many cases where love or love at first sight (coup de foudre) dictated who married whom. One Mongo informant reported the following story of how he met his wife. He had just finished his teaching diploma and was in a store to buy provisions for the celebratory party when he saw a young woman from his region who had come to buy thread: “I was so attracted to this girl that it was impossible for me to stay where I was. I went closer to her and at the moment our eyes met, I could read on her face a joy that couldn’t be faked (a smile mixed with shame). At that moment, I revealed my desires to the girl, and she agreed...” (cited in Bernard 1968, 47; our translation). The young man invited her to get a drink at a café, where he proposed marriage. Bernard (1968, 46) concluded that while “a certain sympathy, that allows for the potential growth of love” is necessary, even among schoolteachers love does not always precede marriage. Similarly, Kenneth Little (1973, 133) cited a 1965 study of school leavers in Elizabethville (Congo) in which men said that love was important in the choice of a spouse, but they imagined it as a kind of sympathy that eventually developed into reciprocal affection. These accounts suggest that love had finally become a topic of discussion for both Africans and their ethnographers.

As a result of these findings, many scholars concluded that African societies were transitional—somewhere between older patterns of African kinship and marriage and those expected to emerge with modernization. Instead of finding nuclear families, ethnographer after ethnographer studying urban areas ranging from the Copperbelt to Kampala to Kinshasa discovered that divorce was frequent and relationships between men and women took a variety of different forms. These ranged from short-term exchanges of sex for money, to temporary unions, to enduring marriages (Powdernaker 1962; Southall and Gutkind 1957; Longmore 1959; Mair 1969 [1953]; Little 1973). Given these patterns of social organization that diverged considerably from a stable nuclear family, several scholars queried whether love in African intimate relationships implied the same kind of emotional bond as it did among Europeans.

In an analysis of letters written to an advice column of a Ghanaian newspaper during 1955, the psychologist Gustav Jahoda noted that many letters posed questions about how to recognize love and know that it was real. As examples of the basic question “Does she really love me?” Jahoda (1959, 183) found the following:

I wonder if she is really in love with me. Please, how can I know that she has fallen for me?
Is she a true lover?
How can I be sure she will love me more than ever?
Is this love really from Heaven?

Other studies similarly suggested that many urban Africans felt both eagerness and uncertainty with regards to love—implying that it was a new emotion, particularly in relation to marriage. For example, in her study of leisure activities in Kinshasa, Suzanne Comhare-Sylvain noted that while she was not surprised that young women preferred films that featured love stories (les films d’amour)—because “all the young girls of the world dream of love” (1968, 91)—she was struck that girls themselves explained this preference by stating their desire to “learn about love” (pour savoir quelques points de l’amour) or to “better adapt themselves to love” (mieux s’adapter à l’amour) or to “better understand how to realize love” (pour contempler la réalisation de l’amour). And in his study of engagement practices among teachers in Kinshasa, Bernard (1968, 153) judged that although couples exchanged love
letters and used French words of endearment, they did so more to “make others believe the existence of a modern form of passionate love, which permits them to hide from themselves the lack of any true form of communication” (our translation). Taken together, this literature argued—often paternalistically—that Africans had not fully assimilated the practices and sentiments associated with romantic love.

In an analysis of Onitsha market pamphlets, literary scholar Emmanuel Obiechina (1972) echoed much of this social scientific perspective on love in Africa. According to Obiechina, the Onitsha literature, which originated in Nigeria after World War II, promoted an ideal of romantic love derived from Christianity, the English literature taught at West African schools, and popular romance novels imported from Britain. The novelty of the Western ideal of romantic love, Obiechina argued, lay in its privileging of individual desire: “In pre-colonial Africa, romantic love, whether as an autonomous experience or as a stepping stone to marriage, was played down and subordinated to familial and community interests” (34).

But rather than celebrating the pamphlets’ emphasis on romantic love, he evoked prior cultural suspicions of love as a basis for marriage in order to criticize it. Obiechina derided pamphlet authors’ obsession with romantic love as “somewhat ridiculous” and in need of “serious reconsideration,” believing it was out of step with West African affective values that stressed group over individual relations and idealized “complementarity” rather than “fusion” within marriage (71). Like other scholars who engaged modernization categories but concluded that African societies had not transitioned from a communal to individualistic ethos, Obiechina argued that radically different perspectives on intimacy were at play in postcolonial Africa.

These studies suggest that by the 1950s love had become a commonplace subject of social commentary and scholarly analysis in Africa. They also suggest the perils of studying love. Love became a subject of analysis because modernization theory proposed that nuclear families based on strong bonds between couples rather than kin groups were foundational to the creation of industrial society. But when modernization theory’s predictions of economic development failed to be fulfilled in much of Africa, increasing numbers of scholars questioned the theoretical framework itself. While some scholars criticize modernization theory for ignoring the way First World economic superiority relied on plundering Third World countries for resources and labor (Rodney 1972; Palmer and Parsons 1977; Bundy 1979), others highlighted the way modernization theory implicitly located the subjects of anthropological study in a prior period of time, much as evolutionary thinking had done during the nineteenth century (Fabian 1983). Still others argued that the unilinear teleology of modernization failed to account for the reality of African experience that entailed many small-scale strategic adaptations to fluctuating social-economic conditions (Ferguson 1999).

Such denunciations discouraged subsequent scholars from developing the insights offered by the likes of Bernard, Little, Jahoda, Comhaire-Sylvain, and Obiechina. To suggest that Africans were trying to adopt new practices of love, but never getting it quite right, seemed to smack of ethnocentrism and an old colonial fear that Africans were somehow “not quite/not white” (Bhabha 1994, 131). Alternatively, to suggest, as Obiechina did, that in Africa love was valued differently ran the risk of aligning oneself with racist suppositions, like those espoused by Thomas Jefferson, that portrayed Africans as incapable of deep attachment. Subsequent Africanist anthropologists and historians largely responded to these intellectual and political challenges by avoiding the problem of love altogether.

**The Past and Presence of Love in Africa**

Yet talk of love in Africa did not disappear. If anything, amid the elaboration of HIV/AIDS education and prevention campaigns and the proliferation of call-in radio talk shows, TV soap operas, and romantic films, it has become even more visible and audible since the 1970s. In the remainder of this introduction, we draw insight from this volume’s chapters to make three specific arguments about love in Africa. First, love is a crucial idiom through which people in Africa have debated generational and cultural distinctions and made political claims to inclusion, often by engaging new forms of media. Second, Africans have long forged intimate attachments through exchange relationships. They have also long grappled with the ways in which monetization strains this practice, a strain that has become increasingly visible in recent years. And third, although women in Africa have often embraced romantic love as a strategy for establishing more egalitarian gender relations, it is a strategy that has met with uneven success.

**LOVE AND MEDIA: DEMARCATING DIFFERENCE AND CLAIMING INCLUSION**

In her eloquent memoir of growing up the daughter of a Scottish mother and Sierra Leonean father, Aminatta Forna (2002, 129) offers the following
account of the affective sensibilities that shaped her parents' eight-year marriage:

Our mother was the first person in her family to marry a foreigner. Our father was the first person in his to marry for love. When the passion leached out of their union and left a colourless husk, he offered her something else. An African marriage, my mother pronounced with scorn, where the men and women do their own thing. She could not accept such a compromise, for she was a European woman who desired nothing less than to be loved and cherished.

By narrating her parents' marriage this way, Forna casts differences in love in particularly sharp terms. Forna's father distinguished himself from his parents and ancestors by marrying "for love." Her mother affirmed her European-ness by rejecting a marriage rooted in complementary spheres of action rather than passion and emotional fulfillment. While Forna continues on to explain that the collapse of her parents' marriage was likely less rooted in conflicting conceptions of love than in its inauspicious beginning—a premartial pregnancy—her mother insisted on representing the marriage as one precipitated by true love that also dissolved because of her commitment to this ideal. Like Forna's discussion, many of the essays in this volume illustrate how people have often constructed differences across generations, and between Africa and the West, through love.

Young people's claim that intimate passion differentiates them from their elders has a very long history in Africa, as elsewhere. Early colonial ethnographers such as Junod collected stories and songs of unrequited love or elopements. In contexts where people recognized the existence of passionate attraction—whether as part of youthful courtship or the product of love medicines—but regarded it as an unstable foundation for marriage, it was a perennial source of intergenerational tension. But people who embraced or defended the power of passion in their youth may have become more suspicious of it as they aged and gained influence within a social order that could potentially be destabilized by ungoverned feelings. Kearsley Stewart's comparison (2001) of the reproductive and sexual histories of grandmothers and their daughters in Uganda is a useful reminder that people's attitudes toward youthful intimacy often change as they age and that researchers should not take informants' narratives of drastic behavioral change across generations at face value. Stewart found that while "common sense" held that today's youth were beginning sexual relations at younger ages, demographic evidence revealed that the age of sexual debut had not changed much since the 1960s. Throughout this volume, we seek to approach claims that a specific

**FIGURE 0.3** Soulmates column from *Saturday Magazine*, May 2008. Personal ads are a regular feature in the *Saturday Magazine*, a popular Kenyan newspaper supplement that examines lifestyle issues (see chapter 7). The authors of such ads routinely disclose their HIV status and list qualities that they desire in their "soulmate," including a loving and caring personality, financial stability, trustworthiness, and faith in God. *Photo source: Saturday Magazine.*
debates about love that appeared in the black South African newspaper *Bantu World*. She demonstrates that while these anthropologists sought to document the transformation of African courtship and marriage by modern influences—including labor migrancy, the cash economy, urbanization, and mission Christianity—*Bantu World* writers sought to advise Christian readers on how to forge respectable heterosexual relations amid those transformations. The mission-educated African men and women who wrote in *Bantu World* elaborated a conception of “true love” that combined Victorian values with southern African mores to prioritize choice in courtship, emphasize a spiritual and singular connection between husband and wife, and idealize female self-sacrifice in marriage. For this aspiring black elite, discourses and practices of true love were part of broader efforts to claim “civilized” status and respectability amid the harsh racism of interwar South Africa.

In subsequent decades, discussions of how to recognize and manage true love, romantic love, and modern love proliferated in the advice columns of African newspapers and magazines and in pamphlet literature. As Jahoda (1959) and Obiechina (1972) examined in their studies of the West African press and Onitsha market literature, such discussions engaged conceptions of love promoted by mission Christianity and English fiction to contrast the affective ideals and courtship practices of school-educated young people with those of previous generations and less literate compatriots. In contrast to the love talk found in *Bantu World* during the 1930s, postcolonial and apartheid-era discussions were often characterized by less Christian moralizing. They were also far more explicit about sexual matters. Kenda Mutongi, in this volume, analyzes the popular English-language magazine *Drum* to reveal how during the 1960s and 1970s young people across much of Africa wrote to its “Dear Dolly” advice column to air grievances and gain counsel about heterosexual and homosexual intimacy. Former male readers of the column recounted to Mutongi how “Dear Dolly” letters often served as catalysts for conversations about how “modern men” should or should not behave. The column's didactic influences ranged from “Dolly's” self-assured responses—particularly strident when it came to same-sex relations—to readers borrowing the sentimental English words and phrases found in the column for their own love letters. For young readers across Africa, Mutongi demonstrates, “Dear Dolly” provided a sentimental education.

Recent scholarship has, in fact, identified readers' and audiences' didactic engagement of new cultural forms and media as a prominent feature of African popular culture. Stephanie Newell (2002) has argued that in much of Africa, popular fiction and especially romances serve as educational texts. She offers the example of Ghanaian readers who “take up the conjugal mod-

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In her chapter, Lynn M. Thomas juxtaposes white South African anthropologists' discussions of sex during the 1930s to contemporaneous
els” offered in romances and reference “familiar character types in order to prove their opinions about the opposite sex” (2000, 2–3). Similarly, Jane Bryce (1997, 122) argues that the popularity of romantic fiction in Africa should not be explained as mimicry or escapism but rather examined as a “testing ground for new ideas, new permutations and new constructions of gendered identity” (see also Nuttall 1994; Larkin 1997; Bastian 2002; Olaussen 2002; Odhiambo 2003). African popular culture, according to Karin Barber (1997a, 2000), is largely defined by its capacity to rework imported genres for the purpose of moral instruction and, in the process, to muddy distinctions between the modern and the traditional.

Yet because public discussions of love in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Africa have often pivoted around technologies and media imported from elsewhere, difference has remained a prominent concern. New technologies and media have featured so centrally in debates about love because they graphically convey varying visions of intimacy and provide new venues in which those visions can be tested and enacted. For instance, the introduction of literacy in many parts of Africa through colonial mission schools exposed students to romantic themes in classical European literature and enabled them to access more popular genres. Moreover, it provided them with new ways to express desire and new forums in which to discuss its virtues and dangers (Barber 2006). Many young people readily embraced love letters as tools for establishing and sustaining romantic relations. Schoolteachers and parents, in turn, often deemed the furtive circulation and impassioned appeals of love letters as exerting a corrupting influence on youth (Breckenridge 2000, 2006; Parikh 2004; L. Thomas 2006).

Films too have offered varying visions of intimacy. In colonial Africa, government officials often censored romantic and sexually explicit films, fearing that they would incite licentious behavior and give black men the wrong impression of white women (Gutsche 1972; J. Burns 2002). While eschewing the racist logic of colonial censorship, African men and elders also voiced concerns about the influence of film. As early as the mid-1950s, debates raged on East African radio programs and in newspapers over whether romantic films were “harmful to women” and detrimental to the “sacred institution of marriage” (Strobel 1979, 120–21). Such debates frequently portrayed modern technologies and media from the West as endangering traditional African morality.

Yet, the most popular films have not always come from the West. In particular, Muslim viewers seem to find much in Hindi romance films that echo their own concerns about sexuality and intimacy; today, TV viewers across Africa watch Nigerian or “Nollywood” productions with similar interest. Laura Fair’s chapter in this volume examines how people on the Zanzibari coast in the 1990s remembered the impact of the Bollywood blockbuster hit Awaran on their visions of love and romance in late 1950s and 1960s. She persuasively argues that for these Zanzibaris, films that came from Bollywood resonated much more with local concerns about extended family interests versus individual desires than those from Hollywood (Larkin 1997; Fuglesang 1994; Fair 2004). Moreover, while the films provided vivid text and images through which to imagine the tensions between familial and individual preferences, wealth and poverty, the physical spaces of the cinema also proved important. Fair’s informants described how movie attendance provided a sanctioned space for couples who could not otherwise spend time alone. In the darkened theater, couples could glance longingly at each other, sit close by, and, for the more daring, arrange trysts. Afterwards, film plots provided fodder for discussion (cf. Obiechina 1972). Whether imported from the East or West, foreign media have shaped how many Africans, especially young Africans, envision intimacy in their lives and how they distinguish themselves from their parents’ generation.

Since the 1970s, media’s role in providing sentimental educations and encouraging public discussion of love has persisted, if not intensified, with the rise and spread of audiocassettes, videos, the Internet, DVDs, cell phones, and satellite television. Two of the chapters in this volume engage the growing literature on the global circulation and local appropriation of these new media (Spitnik 1993; Appadurai 1996; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002) to explore how young people in Niger and Kenya have reimagined intimate relationships and what it means to be modern. Drawing on fieldwork in a provincial town in Niger, Adeline Masquelier examines how young people use the Mexican telenovela Rubí to make sense of changing conceptions of intimacy and courtship. In recent years, youth in Niger—often reported as the poorest country in Africa—have been increasingly caught between their desires to consume foreign commodities, on the one hand, and their inability to obtain the income to purchase those commodities, on the other. Living amid heightened consumerism and overwhelming poverty, youth argue that Rubí offers a fresh way to interpret their daily dilemmas. Set in Mexico City and later New York, Rubí follows the escapades of the relentless and ultimately lovelorn Rubí, a young woman who escapes poverty by marrying well but ultimately betrays all who surround her and ends up alone. Nigerien youth who watch the serial mine it for lessons about how to negotiate the growing tension between love and money. Masquelier concludes that far from providing these youth with an escape from reality, this Mexican telenovela, in fact, allows them to creatively transcend the limitations of the present by helping to imagine and enact alternative futures.
Although discussing a very different class of people—urban professionals—Rachel Spronk similarly argues that media provide young people in Nairobi with the tools to envision and forge new kinds of intimate relations. In Kenya during the 1990s, the liberalization of media as part of structural adjustment policies combined with the expansion of HIV/AIDS education and prevention campaigns to turn sex and love into prominent subjects of cultural representation and public discussion. Spronk explores how Western romantic films, locally produced magazines, and church counseling classes offer versions of love that range from “happily-ever-after” narratives to therapeutic discourses that emphasize emotional intimacy and mutual sexual pleasure and trust. In considering these various love scripts, young professionals portray the relations they desire as quite distinct from those of their parents’ generation. Recognizing that other Kenyans often dismiss their practices—such as celebrating Valentine’s Day—as “Western” and “un-African,” some describe their own situation as an “identity crisis”: “We are confronted daily in Nairobi with the fact that we are NOT the average Kenyan. . . . We fear that we are not part of it, but at the same time we hope that we are not part of it.” This statement together with Spronk’s analysis conveys young professionals’ ambitions and ambivalences as they seek to forge intimate relations that are simultaneously cosmopolitan and African.

Read together, these chapters suggest how successive generations of African audiences have used diverse forms of media to imagine new ways of loving and to craft political claims to inclusion. Through the idiom of love, Africans have formulated and reformulated distinctions between the “traditional” and the “modern,” “Africa” and the “West,” and negotiated shifting economies of intimacy.

CONUNDRUMS OF LOVE AND MONEY

In her chapter, Jennifer Cole recounts the story narrated to her by a young Malagasy man, Dez, who, when asked about love, launched into an account about meeting his true love in a clothing stall at the marketplace. In an effort to earn the young woman’s affection, Dez buys her the dress she admires. When she appears for a rendezvous wearing the dress he has bought her, he remarks, “My heart was beating like an earthquake when I saw her. I thought she looked like an angel.” He went on to say that one day, if nothing prevented him, he would marry her. Dez’s story suggests an interpretation of fitavina—the Malagasy word often translated as “love”—in which affect and exchange are entangled rather than opposed. In arguing for material provision and emotional attachment as mutually constitutive, this volume joins recent Africanist efforts to complicate models of intimacy by emphasizing the power of material exchanges not just to reflect but to produce emotionally charged relationships (Cornwall 2002; Helle-Valle 2004). We also consider how increasing inequality and heightened monetization of social relations in much of Africa has strained the co-constitution of affect and exchange, introducing the more familiar opposition of love versus money and many of its attendant problems.

Although Western ideology and common sense often oppose emotional attachments and economic interests, much scholarship makes clear that they are entangled at the level of practice. Western folk theory implies that love is the emotion that makes us the most altruistic and the least selfish, while money is supposed to signal self-interest and impersonal ties. Yet, as Viviana Zelizer (2005, 32) has argued, far from being opposed, intimacy and exchange in the United States and elsewhere lead “connected lives”: People continually assess how different intimate relations entail different monied duties and material expectations and rights. Eva Illouz (1997, 11) similarly breaks down the opposition between economy and emotion by arguing that in the United States, romantic love embodies late capitalism’s core contradictions “between the sphere of consumption and the sphere of production, between a postmodern disorder and the still-powerful work discipline of the Protestant ethic, between the classless utopia of affluence and the dynamic of ‘distinction.’” Romantic love, according to Illouz, asserts the primacy of individual choice over and against the needs of the group, and yet, through the commodities that individuals use to express their sentiments, also reinstates class-based distinctions.

While Zelizer’s and Illouz’s insights about the entanglement of material provision and emotional intimacy center on U.S. cultures of intimacy, others have examined the political economy of love in less affluent locales. These studies show that what love means, how love is expressed, and what constitutes the purpose of marriage vary according to social class and particular economic circumstances. Jennifer Hirsch (2003, 82) documents how social and economic changes that have taken place in the context of transnational migration from Mexico to the United States encourage ideals of companionate marriage. She gives an example of how a young girl’s ability to watch a television show that promotes new ideas of intimacy relies not only on the remittances sent home by migrants to pay for televisions and working electricity, but also on the availability of leisure time when girls are home alone rather than with their mothers grinding corn to make tortillas. While Hirsch points to the importance of the wider political economy, Linda Rebuhn’s ethnography of working-class communities in northeast Brazil (1999) focuses more squarely on the complex influences of money within
intimate relationships. As she observes, “To survive in this confusing milieu, women must exploit their love to build necessary friendship networks and supplement their meager incomes” (86).

Historically, many Africans formed marriages through the exchange of bridewealth—a practice in which the groom’s family typically gives cattle and other material objects to the bride’s family. This practice shocked early missionaries to Africa (see Hunter, this volume). As one missionary to southern Africa observed, “They had no marriage, nor any proper domestic order, nor acknowledged any moral obligation to duties arising out of that relation. Females were exchanged for others, bartered for cattle, given away as presents…” (Broadbent 1865, 204, cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 269). Subsequent Africanist anthropologists sought to rationalize these practices by demonstrating how they transferred productive and reproductive rights and responsibilities within and between kin groups (Comaroff 1980). Despite this anthropological emphasis on rights and responsibilities, our evidence suggests that bridewealth has also included affective dimensions. For instance, one elderly Malagasy woman proudly told Jennifer Cole how her former husband had “even paid a bull for her”—evidence in her mind not only of her productive and reproductive value but also of how much that man had loved her. Today, a language of romance increasingly pervades bridewealth exchanges, part of a more general shift from economies of production to those of consumption. To understand this shift and how it relates to the dilemmas raised in several of our chapters, it is important to consider what happens when money enters such exchange relations.

As part of their efforts to understand the emergence of modern societies, anthropologists have long argued about the social consequences of money entering exchange relations and replacing cattle or other items. Classical European social theorists such as Marx (1867 [1867]) and Simmel (1900) argued that heightenized monetization necessarily transforms the world either by alienating people from their labor or loosening social bonds. By contrast, much Africanist research argues against this perspective, suggesting that it is not money that transforms the world, but worlds that shape the meanings of money (Parry and Bloch 1989). Sharon Hutchinson (1996, 98), for example, has shown how among the Nuer in the Sudan during the 1980s and 1990s, “money’s power of effacement was checked by an ideological elaboration of the unique bloodlinks uniting people and cattle … an elaboration that was developed so as to preclude the possibility of any direct equation between money and people.” Similarly, David Lan (1989) has shown how in 1970s Zimbabwe, Shona distinguished between commodities acquired from forced relations of unequal trade and money that could be used to support shared social projects. Lan uses this example to argue that spirit mediums did not find money per se abhorrent; rather they rejected commodities that were iconic of exploitative social relations. These examples support the idea that cultural contexts shape the meaning of money, rather than money transforming social relations in a uniform direction.

By contrast, some of the chapters presented here challenge this perspective, suggesting that money does appear to have important and similar transformative effects on how people negotiate affective relations. They suggest that while older ideas of the mutual constitution of affect and exchange remain important, they have been challenged by heightenized monetization, raising the questions of what constitutes true love and whether someone loves them for who they are or is using them for material gain. In some places such as urban South Africa, these tensions date back at least to the 1930s (see Thomas, this volume). However, this volume suggests that these kinds of dilemmas have become much more widespread amid rising consumerism and ever-sharper social inequalities. Of course, the balance between love and money can shift over the course of a relationship: What begins as love may end up as a ploy to obtain money and what begins as a relationship meant to gain money may turn into love. But what is clear is that many of our informants constantly wrestle with these ambiguities.

As already mentioned, Jennifer Cole’s chapter examines the Malagasy concept of fitiaaina. She shows how rural Malagasy conceptualize fitiaaina as simultaneously material and moral, enacted in reciprocal exchanges of goods and labor distributed across social networks. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, missionaries sought to introduce new ideas of love as free from material self-interest, at the same time that colonization partially transformed the local economy. Today, in the context of growing social inequality fostered by neoliberal economic reforms, the opposition between fitiaaina and money that first emerged through mission Christianity has both spread and intensified. Young urbanites feel themselves caught between their desire to attain Western commodities and the lack of jobs. Young women increasingly rely on men, ideally Europeans, to obtain material resources. Forced by their economic circumstances to use their relationships to obtain resources in ways that are anything but reciprocal, and hence have little to do with fitiaaina, young Tamatavians have also started to reimagine fitiaaina according to a more Western opposition of love and money. Young people now talk about “clean fitiaaina” in which no material support is expected. Both young women and young men elaborate these distinctions as they increasingly foster some relationships because of emotional attachments and others because of the need for money.
Mark Hunter similarly draws on historical and ethnographic material from the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal to show how economic changes have shaped and reshaped the negotiation of affect and exchange. During the nineteenth century, Zulu speakers formed marriages through the transfer of *slobolo* or bridewealth. As young men participated in wage labor under colonialism and after the formation of the Union of South Africa, they began to earn money to pay their own bridewealth, providing them greater control over choosing their wives. Amid increasing economic hardship, evidence of thrift and hard work and the ability to provide for a family became qualities that women found most stirring and attractive. Today in South Africa, Hunter argues, high unemployment and rising expenses have made it difficult for many men to forge marriages and to support families. Consequently, unmarried young women seek relationships with multiple men, in which the provision of material support is taken as evidence of emotional commitment.

That Malagasy and South African urbanites (see also the chapters by Smith and Masquelier) forge their emotional attachments through both physical intimacy and material exchange has implications for the spread of AIDS. This point is explicitly developed in these authors' earlier work on transactional sex (Cole 2004; Mark Hunter 2002). However, a long train of Western observers—ranging from nineteenth-century missionaries who denounced bridewealth as the buying and selling of women to contemporary AIDS activists and scholars who interpret transactional sex strictly in terms of economic survival—have missed this subtle and ubiquitous intertwining of emotions and materiality. By providing fuller analyses of conceptions of emotional attachment, this volume challenges scholars to historicize and relativize the long-standing Euro-American folk dichotomy between emotional and economic concerns. This dichotomy not only stigmatizes African intimacy, but also fails to recognize how all human intimacy rests on a complex blend of the material and the ideal, compunction and choice. Scholars studying the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS need to recognize that emotional attachments as well as economic relations shape intimacy in Africa, as elsewhere in the world.

**REPRODUCING AND CONTESTING GENDERED INEQUALITY THROUGH ROMANTIC LOVE**

In his chapter on companionate marriage and infidelity in Nigeria, Daniel Smith cites a woman who compares her marriage to that of her parents: "My father had three wives and fourteen children. Often it was every woman for herself. My husband and I have a partnership. We decide things. There is love between us." This Nigerian woman is not alone in seeing her marriage rooted in the ideal of partnership as preferable to previous generations' marriages, especially polygynous ones. Contemporaries in many parts of the world have often described their embrace of romantic love and its cognate ideal of companionate marriage as part of broader efforts to achieve gender equality. But as scholars have also documented, they are frequently disappointed with the results (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006; Padilla et al. 2007).

In fact, some feminist theorists and scholars have long complained that romantic love assumes and perpetuates gender inequality. After World War II, Simone de Beauvoir blamed romantic love for cloaking and deepening women's oppression: "Love represents in its most touching form the curse that lies heavily upon woman confined in the feminine universe, woman mutilated, insufficient until herself" (1953 [1949], 669). De Beauvoir's insights were picked up by subsequent radical feminists who argued that love acted as an ideological smoke screen for gender inequality. Locating the roots of women's oppression in the division of household labor, some theorists understood love as a kind of false consciousness—a misguided conception of their interests—that encouraged women to work for free (MacKinnon 1989). Others, drawing on more psychoanalytic models, argued that romantic love enabled the abnegation of women and their achievements by encouraging women to sacrifice their own interests to those of men (Firestone 1970; Dworkin 1975). Social historians and cultural anthropologists have developed these insights by demonstrating how over the past century, as ideals and practices of romantic love that emphasize individual choice, self-sacrifice, and singular commitment have become increasingly widespread, they have often contributed as much to the reproduction of gender inequality as to its erasure (B. Bailey 1989; Collier 1997).

If romantic love is as detrimental to women's interests as these feminists claim, then why have so many women embraced its ideals and struggled to forge companionate marriages? Surely it is not because they suffer from false consciousness. Our chapters elucidate two reasons that some women in Africa have found romantic love and companionate marriage so appealing. First, these ideologies promise women greater independence from kin during both courtship and marriage. Individual choice in courtship has often signaled the advent of such independence. As Tina Kelobele, an unmarried black South African woman, implored in 1934: "Parents allow us, your daughters, a free hand in choosing our life partners, so that if things become dark, we may not blame you" (see Thomas, this volume). Once wed, such women have expected their marriages to be less encumbered by the
meddling and potential financial burdens of natal kin and in-laws. Igbo women, Daniel Smith argues in his chapter, prefer “love marriages,” in part, because they believe that they entail greater autonomy from their husband’s extended family. Second, romantic love and companionate marriage have appealed to women because they promise more equitable and intimate relationships with husbands. For many, these ideals that valorize the singular bond between a husband and a wife entail the rejection of polygyny and the embrace of more egalitarian forms of decision making. As Laura Fair’s informants explained, the romances in Bollywood films appealed to audiences in 1950s and 1960s Zanzibar because they involved greater intimacy and communication between spouses.

Yet the chapters assembled in this volume also suggest that women have often been disappointed by romantic love's and companionate marriage's promises of greater independence from kin and enhanced equity and intimacy with partners. Daniel Smith's chapter about Igbo women's strategies for dealing with their husband's infidelities in “love marriages” powerfully illustrates this point. Smith describes how older Igbo ideals of marriage, much like the marriage that Forna's Scottish mother bitterly characterized as “African,” were premised on a conception of marriage as a joint project of social reproduction, in which men and women had separate but complementary roles. This ideal conflicts with that of love marriage, in which the quality of the marriage is judged according to ideals of emotional intimacy. While some men embrace ideals of companionate marriage, they nevertheless gain prestige from their peers when they engage in extramarital affairs because such affairs presume that the man has enough resources to support outside women and because they evidence sexual vitality. Smith argues that many women in such marriages choose to put up with these infidelities because divorce is highly stigmatized and because, in the context of a love marriage, cheating can imply that a woman has failed to satisfy her partner. “In such marriages,” Smith notes, “a woman challenging her husband’s extramarital behavior or asking for a condom may be undermining the very basis for the marriage and threatening whatever leverage she has with her husband by implying that the relationship itself has been broken.” In Africa, where the productive and reproductive value of women has often cemented kin networks and been marked by elaborate forms of exchange, the potentially deleterious effects for women of an ideology that foregrounds couples rather than kin is particularly striking. Smith concludes that for Igbo women, “love is less than liberating.”

Smith’s argument resonates with other scholarship that highlights how the ethos of mutual trust that is supposed to characterize relationships premised on romantic love may increase women’s vulnerability. Based on her research in northeast Brazil, Rebhun (1999) similarly argued that when notions of trust, monogamy, and singular commitment underpin a relationship, it is tricky for either partner to raise complaints, particularly about extramarital affairs, without throwing the entire relationship into question. Likewise, Abu-Lughod (1986) found that marriages rooted in romance have often made it more difficult for women to involve kin in their efforts to adjust or improve their intimate relations. Perhaps the starkest examples of how ideologies of romantic love can put women at risk come from studies on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Jamaica, Mexico, Uganda, and Nigeria. This research shows how ideologies of male privilege and romance can easily combine to frame a girl's or woman's insistence on condom use as an affront to love (Sobo 1995; Hirsch 2003; Parikh 2004; D. Smith 2006; Hirsch et al. 2006).

Two chapters here suggest how, since at least the mid-twentieth century, some African women have recognized this ambivalent effect of romantic love. As Thomas discusses, the version of true love elaborated by Bantu World writers during the 1930s emphasized female self-sacrifice and subservience. Male writers, she explains, readily branded women who challenged this ideal—by either demanding more egalitarian forms of courtship and marriage or rejecting marriage altogether—as “modern girls” and corrupters of African tradition. Yet, female readers' angry responses and ethnographic accounts suggest that men generally did garner more power within both arranged marriages and love matches. Mutongi similarly argues that the version of romantic love promoted in Drum’s “Dear Dolly” advice column during the 1960s and 1970s fostered a double standard: It “stipulated that women assume submissive roles in heterosexual courtship, that men initiate all sexual encounters, and that women alone bear responsibility for the consequences of premarital pregnancies.” Some young women voraciously read the “Dear Dolly” column and borrowed its language to craft love letters, Mutongi suggests, as ways to engage the pleasures of romantic love at a distance while avoiding venereal diseases, premarital pregnancies, and the label of “loose women.”

Two other chapters focus on the gender dynamics that ensue in contexts where ideologies of love emphasize the importance of men providing for women at the same time that multiple partnerships are commonplace. In both Cole's and Hunter's chapters on Madagascar and South Africa, respectively, economic conditions have made it difficult for one relationship to fulfill all emotional and material needs. In response, both men and
women forge relationships with multiple partners. Women negotiate notions of romantic love based on singular relationships and harsh economic circumstances that require them to have more than one relationship. As Cole describes in her chapter, women’s ability to gain money from their relationships with Europeans sometimes enables them to support other (Malagasy) men, thereby upending gender norms. But such arrangements also foster an idea that real fitavina requires self-sacrifice, an interpretation that some men use to explain why women remain in abusive relationships. Meanwhile, in South Africa, as Hunter notes, marriage still has a high status among men and women. But many men’s inability to secure lobola and women’s resultant sense of betrayal makes this path an unlikely one for most young people. Here too, men’s inability to fulfill the role of providers have become an important part of gender struggles between men and women.

In contrast to these analyses of how gender inequalities continue to structure contemporary romance, Rachel Spronk’s discussion of intimacy among NAirian young professionals offers a more optimistic perspective. She argues that this group’s embrace of therapeutic discourses that seek to foster “healthy” partnerships stems, in large part, from their desire to achieve more equitable relations than those of their parents. Both Spronk and her informants view self-reflexivity, emotional openness, and deeper communication within courtship and marriage as an advance for Kenyan gender dynamics. This view is in keeping with Anthony Giddens’s argument that intimacy became more democratic in the late twentieth century with the rise of therapeutic discourses and “a model of confluent love” that emphasizes autonomy and reciprocal sexual pleasure (1992, 61–64). Feminist scholars (Langford 1999; Evans 2003), however, have criticized Giddens for underestimating the persistent structural inequalities embedded in real-life heterosexual relations. Given the profound material poverty that informs so much gender inequity in Africa, it remains even more uncertain there than in the Euro-American contexts considered by Giddens and his critics whether therapeutic discourses and models of confluent love alone will lead to more equitable intimate relations.

Conclusion

If we began with a quote by Wainaina mocking the failure of Western popular representations of Africa to address love, our approach to the study of love in Africa both affirms and complicates what his remark implicitly assumes. Wainaina’s reproach suggests that love is universal and that by providing representations of love between Africans (without death), Africa will look more familiar to global audiences. In keeping with the spirit of Wainaina’s remark, we elucidate commonalities and connections between love in Africa and elsewhere. But rather than assuming love as a universal category, we examine how affective practices and discourses emerge out of the particular convergence of political, economic, and cultural processes. In so doing, we offer two broad contributions: one perhaps most relevant to researchers, policymakers, and others interested in HIV/AIDS in Africa, the other directed toward anthropologists examining love and its contemporary global framings.

African intimacy cannot be reduced to sex. This might seem like a commonsensical point, but in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, scholars have largely examined sex to the exclusion of other facets of intimacy. Such a reduction denies the emotional, affective dimensions of all human relationships. When analysts focus only on the sexual or even the economic dimensions of HIV transmission, they may intend to explain the structural forces that produce the AIDS epidemic. Unwittingly, however, they also reinforce older, dehumanizing portrayals of Africa. To acknowledge the importance of affective attachments is to begin to paint a fuller picture of social life, its contradictions and consequences.

At the same time, any study of love must take into account the historical processes that shape and produce intimacy. In Africa—as in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere—contemporary ideologies and practices of love are the product of complex historical processes and intersections. What presently appears as an unprecedented explosion of public discourse about love prompted by globalization is, in fact, the result of a long history of the imperial and cross-regional movement of affective ideals and practices. From examining how Africans have deployed various ideologies of love to debate difference and claim political inclusion, to considering the intertwining of material support and emotional attachment, to exploring romantic love’s promises and disappointments, we analyze how political, economic, and cultural formations specific, though not limited, to African contexts have profoundly shaped affective relations. We also insist that the only way to understand these processes is to trace the tangled, multilayered histories through which they emerged. Attention to these longer histories that include colonialism highlights how politics of exclusion and inclusion have so often animated affective discourses and practices. Moreover, it reminds us how social change, especially as regards intimate affairs, is far from linear but rather defined by uneven, circuitous, and submerged routes, as well as generational forgetting and the continual reformulation of cultural boundaries.
Notes

1. The words affect and emotion are used fairly interchangeably in this introduction as in common parlance, though they also function as terms of art within particular disciplines. For example, in psychology and psychoanalysis, affect is usually used to indicate the physical manifestation of an emotion, while emotion is presumed to indicate an internal state specific to an individual. Within recent work in cultural studies, however, affect has been used to refer to a general state of bodily excitement that precedes the insertion of such excitement into a cultural narrative, where it then becomes a particular emotion (Massumi 2002; Berlant 1997).

2. The assumption of universality is especially problematic with respect to love, which does not even feature on psychologist Paul Ekman's (1980) well-known list of "basic" emotions that he derived from an analysis of everyday facial expressions.

3. We are indebted to Megan Vaughan, who alerted us to the usefulness of Rosenwein's work for approaching the history of emotions in Africa.

4. We cannot offer as complete a picture as we would like. We especially regret the absence of essays focused on queer love in Africa, a topic that certainly merits future investigation, particularly given the insights our own approach has gained from queer studies literature more broadly. We also hope that other scholars will push the study of love in Africa further back in time, before the late 19th century.

5. Thanks to Stephanie Camp for directing us to this quote from Jefferson.

6. In part, these arguments build on those made by scholars who have examined the popularity of romantic fiction in the United States and who have argued that while the ideals of romantic love—including self-sacrifice and singular commitment—promoted in such literature often reinforce "patriarchy," romance reading can be an "oppositional" act that allows "women to refuse momentarily their self-abnegating social role" (Radway 1991 [1984], 210).

7. These recent efforts to break down the opposition between love and money notwithstanding, one way to read the historiography on love in the West is that it recapitulates the ideology of a separation of love and money as history. According to this narrative, there has been a gradual transformation from marriages premised on the demands of property and the needs of the wider kin group to marriages premised on personal choice and emotional and sexual desires (Stone, 1997; Shorter 1975). Shorter sums up this argument when he says, "Romantic love unseats material considerations in bringing the couple together. Property and lineage would give way to personal happiness and individual development as criteria for choosing a marriage partner" (1975, 5). Though subsequent historians have contested and complicated this narrative, it has nevertheless proved tenacious, in part because the underlying narrative of increasing individuation and choice fits so well with narratives of modernization. More recently, Anthony Giddens has breathed new life into this teleological model and given it a libidinal, political twist by suggesting that Western forms of intimacy are increasingly characterized by the democratization of personal ties enabling individuals to negotiate "pure relationships" that are free from material demands.

Love, Sex, and the Modern Girl in 1930s Southern Africa

Lynn M. Thomas

In 1938, the black South African newspaper Bantu World published a letter from Absalom Vilakazi, under the headline: ""To Be a Flapper: Is It Fashionable?"" Vilakazi, at the time, was a student at a mission school in Natal. Remarkably, he later went on to earn his PhD in anthropology, to teach as a professor at American University in Washington, DC, and to become the president of the U.S.-based African Studies Association. When he was about sixteen years old, he wrote the following:

I do not know what the standard definition of the word "Flapper" is ... but I choose to use it here to designate a woman who, in the words of the Countess of Von Arnim, "is fluid"—a woman who is passing on perpetually; carrying on a petty love affair here, flirting with another man there, and playing at the same game of loving again elsewhere.

It's astounding the way modern women act nowadays. They are so defiant and so rebellious. ... They think nothing of planting a kiss on a man's lips in public and of caressing him and calling him some sweet names in the street and thus inviting publicity—things which our old-world maidens would have blushed to do.1

In this letter, Vilakazi drew on a definition of the flapper offered by the Australian-born novelist Elizabeth von Arnim to make sense of black South African women. During the 1920s and 1930s, people in many parts of the