

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

The History of Romantic Love in Sub-Saharan Africa: between Interest and Emotion

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IN 1937 THE BRITISH SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGIST, Godfrey Wilson, was writing to his wife Monica (also an anthropologist) from his field site in south-west Tanganyika, where he was studying ritual amongst a group of people who had come to be known as the Nyakyusa.¹ The subject of Wilson's letter was intimacy. Over the previous year or so, Wilson had become particularly close to a man named Kasitile, a local ritual expert with whom he had discussed, again and again, the complex symbolism of Nyakyusa ritual and religion. Sexual symbolism was a central feature of many Nyakyusa rituals, including mortuary ritual. Sex, it appeared, was far from a private matter, even outside the ritual context. Wilson had already gathered from Kasitile that marital sexual intercourse never took place without a third party being present—that third party being the ancestral spirits. Excited by this discovery, Wilson wrote to his wife:

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¹ Godfrey Wilson died before most of his work came to publication. His widow, Monica Wilson (née Hunter), incorporated the results of his extensive research into a series of books: Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa* (London, 1957); Monica Wilson, *Good Company: a Study of Nyakyusa Age-Villages* (London, 1951); Monica Wilson, *Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa* (London, 1959); Monica Wilson, *For Men and Elders: Change in the Relationships of Generations and of Men and Women among the Nyakyusa-Ngonde, 1875–1971* (London, 1977).

I am pretty sure that the spirits come into the body at *every* sexual intercourse, cause the penis to erect and the loins of the woman to get hot, and that the man's ejaculation drives them away again . . . The Freudian I fear will have a romp with all of this!²

Wilson felt an intimacy with Kasitile. He thought that they had broken through the 'crust of culture' as he put it, and had become real friends. Sex began to enter their conversations in a rather different way. Spirits or no spirits, Wilson's model of male friendship included the man-to-man exchange of sexual experiences. They talked about the desirability of sexual partners reaching orgasm together, and Wilson tried to convert Kasitile to the practice of kissing. Kissing during intercourse was, according to Kasitile, unknown in his part of the world. In fact, he said, 'we look away from one another'. Undeterred, Wilson tried to convince Kasitile that his wife, Jane, would be delighted by this innovation: ' . . . the lips are the tenderness', Wilson told Kasitile, 'the loins are the strength of love, the lips are for Jane only!' Kasitile went away to try it out, 'positively trembling with the excitement of a new delight . . .'. But, wrote Wilson regretfully to his own wife, there was no escaping the fact that Kasitile's relationship with Jane lacked something which they, as a couple, took for granted as desirable: ' . . . I don't know, there is less tenderness between them than us, he told me that if Jane refused him one night, and said she was tired, "then there is war until dawn, I beat her, and after intercourse we don't speak to each other".'

Wilson seemed to be confusing sex with intimacy, and both of these with something called 'love'. It seems that Kasitile did not completely share Wilson's Christian ideal of a companionate marriage in which love, sexual satisfaction and intimacy would congeal in the course of a lifetime's cohabitation. Romantic love, companionate marriage and sex as a heightened form of intimacy appear to have been concepts which, if Kasitile was familiar with them at all, he was unlikely to put together in the way that Wilson did. That was Wilson's own peculiar cultural baggage.

But things were changing, as Wilson's wife, Monica, was documenting in her study of the small but growing community of Nyakyusa Christians. Here, as elsewhere in Africa, the economic, social and political changes of the colonial period seemed, for some at least and for the moment, to be accompanied by changes of heart. It reads like the classic tale of modern-

² Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson, 8–10 May, 1937, file B2 in Monica and Godfrey Wilson Papers, BC880, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department (hereafter Wilson Papers, UCT).

isation, and the rise of what Lawrence Stone called ‘affective individualism’ transposed to Africa with a bit of an imperialist twist.³ Colonialism and capitalism would combine to create a new more autonomous subject, one who would assert his or her ‘right’ to chose the partner of their choice—to marry out of *love*, not out of obedience to parents or out of economic obligation. Even in the Nyakyusa area, which had been relatively remote from such influences, significant changes could be documented. Young men, benefiting from the new cash economy, were less dependent on their male elders to determine who they would marry and when. They began marrying earlier, choosing their own brides. Women did not experience any such economic empowerment, but if they came under the influence of Christian missionaries they were encouraged to refuse early betrothals, polygamous marriages and the practice of widow inheritance—and some, at least, did. Even if they were not Christians, with increased movement and migration, and creeping literacy, both men and women became aware that there was an alternative version of married life out there, of men and women in monogamous marriages, apparently freely entered into.⁴

Despite the powerful interventions of historians of premodern periods, the theory that romantic love is closely tied with processes of ‘modernisation’ is a remarkably durable one.⁵ And despite a fair amount of cross-cultural research, the master narrative linking love and modernisation is the European one. Elite courtly love traditions (so the story goes) were incorporated into bourgeois culture of the late eighteenth century, but really flourished in the nineteenth century as a result of the alienation of the individual attendant on processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, and the spread of literacy producing a new kind of reflexivity.⁶ In this account romantic love is both the symptom and the solution to the

³ Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London, 1977).

⁴ Wilson, *For Men and Elders*. Such marriages and households were in a very small minority in this rural area, but those of the Wilsons’ research assistants were among them and these are described vividly in the Wilsons’ fieldnotes: Wilson Papers, UCT, file D4.2, Christian Amusements.

⁵ See for example, Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge, 1992). The argument has Durkheimian roots: Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (New York, 1933).

⁶ Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 40. On literacy and romantic love cross-culturally see Jack Goody, *Food and Love: a Cultural History of East and West* (London, 1998). David Lipset presents a very insightful critique of the association between romantic love and modern individualism in David Lipset, ‘Modernity without romance? Masculinity and desire in courtship stories told by young Papuan New Guinean men’, *American Ethnologist*, 31 (2004), 205–24.

problems of identity created by modern life. The atomised individual longs to be reunited with something. In place of kin or community or religious experience he or she falls in love in a bolt from the blue—a quasi-religious experience radically at odds (for men at least) with day-to-day life in which this same person must be fully in control and autonomous—and having fallen in love she or he exalts this experience. Love is a transformative thing and the relationship which (ideally) should follow from falling in love defines the adult self.⁷ Other relationships fade in romantic love's shadow. Marriage without love is not only undesirable, it is also faintly immoral and suspect, implying as it does some rational calculation of *interest* at the expense of *emotion*.⁸ The romantic love discourse is contradictory then, implying both individual choice (marrying the one you love not someone chosen for you), but doing so on the basis of a process beyond your control.

Elizabeth Povinelli takes a hefty swipe at this tradition in her powerful book *Empire of Love*, in which she argues that liberalism, in its expansionist imperialist mode, relies heavily on the extension of this very particular and exclusivist notion of love and intimacy.⁹ She argues that love, as an apparently self-evident good, is central to the liberal discourses and practices of modern empires, and that the liberal discourse of love *opposes* itself to all other modes of organising and experiencing intimacy. Love between two people, love freely chosen without the constraints of societal norms or external considerations, this kind of love is the higher civilisational form. True love is a 'socially exfoliating love', as she puts it, a love that knows no bounds, no religious restrictions, no interfering elders and (presumably) no vengeful or inquisitive ancestral spirits. In making romantic love and the 'intimate couple' into an attribute of higher civilisation, western empires simultaneously defined as inferior the indigenous peoples they encountered who apparently did not share this ideal.

Though I disagree with Povinelli's over-simplistic narrative of the 'empire of love', it certainly finds resonances in parts of contemporary

⁷ Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley, CA, 1997); Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁸ The assumed opposition between 'interest' and 'emotion' was challenged in the 1980s by historians of early modern Europe: Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (eds.), *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁹ Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality* (Durham, NC, and London, 2006).

Africa, as anyone who reads the continent's newspapers and blogs will know. In parts of the continent affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic there is a debate on the utility, desirability, or possible dangers associated with health education messages which stress the importance of life-long, monogamous, 'love'-based relationships.¹⁰ In Botswana a wave of so-called 'passion killings' (in which young men, jilted by their girlfriends, kill them and then sometimes kill themselves) has given rise to public discussion on the politics of emotion.¹¹ Gay and lesbian activists on the continent, as elsewhere, campaign not only for their sexual rights but also for the recognition of their closest emotional attachments and are accused of having been colonised by a non-African perversion.¹² There *is* an unmistakably post-colonial feel to some of this—whether people are asserting that romantic love is an alien import which is at odds with African 'tradition', or whether they are arguing that Africa also has its romantic traditions, its love stories, its princesses in castles, ignored and sidelined like so much of African cultural tradition by western preconceptions, and particularly by western obsessions with African sexuality at the expense of 'feelings'.¹³

Valentine's Day is celebrated all over Africa (though frowned upon in Muslim countries) and it is an occasion which gives rise to debates on the nature of romantic love in modern Africa. In the lead up to Valentine's Day 2009 in Nigeria, one woman newspaper columnist berated her female friends for allowing their minds to be 'mentally and emotionally colonised' by feminist anti-Valentine's Day propaganda coming from outside the country. Let the Londoners do what they like, she wrote, 'We

¹⁰ Daniel Jordan Smith, 'Romance, parenthood and gender in a modern African society', *Ethnology*, 40 (2001), 129–51; Daniel Jordan Smith, 'Love and the risk of HIV: courtship, marriage and infidelity in southeastern Nigeria', in Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (eds.), *Modern Loves: the Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006), pp. 135–57.

¹¹ Dr Maude Dikobe, 'Report on the "National Conference on Crimes of Passion among Youth of Botswana', held in October 2008, *The Courier*, December/January/February 2009: <www.acp-ecourier.info/PASSION-KILLINGS-A-Fest.605.0.html> (accessed 31 March 2009); Dr Tsayang, Prof. Sheldon Weeks, Mrs Nonofho Mathibidi Ndobochani, 'Passion Killings: a Botswana Society Report', <www.botssoc.org/bw/reports/passion-killings.htm> (accessed 31 March 2009); Luca Letlhogile, 'Botswana floored by passion killings', BBC website, 2 Feb. 2006: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Africa/4685216.stm>> (accessed 31 March 2009).

¹² Chris Dunton and Mai Palmberg, *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa* (Uppsala, 1996); Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN, 2007).

¹³ Ama Ata Aidoo, 'Introduction', *African Love Stories: an Anthology* (Banbury, 2006), pp. vii–xiv.

Nigerians express love with price-tags, public displays and matching outfits.’¹⁴ But it was precisely this attitude which was worrying another columnist: the growing obsession with Valentine’s Day in Nigeria, he wrote, served to demonstrate ‘the emptiness of our passions . . . our expression of love is libidinal, selfish and alimentary’.¹⁵

The nature of romantic love is then the subject of much contemporary debate in Africa, but is it correct to assume that romantic love is a recent import to the continent and a consequence of ‘globalisation’?

Comparative history and history of the emotions

In setting out to explore the history of romantic love in societies of sub-Saharan Africa one is already located at the intersection of two different (but related) kinds of historical exercise. One is comparative history; the other the history of the emotions. Whilst the best of work in the history of the emotions follows the best social anthropological scholarship in this area and sets out to reconstruct the emotional lexicons, discourses and emotional communities of the past at least partially in their own terms, the comparative studies, particularly of love, often fall into that trap of citing non-European experiences merely in order to establish a European-type ideal.¹⁶ When ‘Africa’ is incorporated into comparative history it frequently suffers in just this way—comparing ‘Africa’ as an entity to other regions of the world has the drawback of obscuring what might be much more useful comparisons, for example, between *particular* societies of sub-Saharan Africa.

This is an area of inquiry in which anthropology and history intersect fruitfully, but on occasions social anthropologists and historians have been guilty of caricaturing each others’ work to serve their own purposes. When Lawrence Stone produced his seminal work on *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800*, he was taken to task, not only for his selective reading of the English historical record, but also for his misuse of anthropological examples to bolster his argument for the absence of

¹⁴ ‘Valentine’s Day—a golden opportunity!’, *Next*, 13 Feb. 2009: <www.234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/3448954-146/Valentine's_Day/> (accessed 13 Feb. 2009).

¹⁵ Reuben Abati, ‘Ah, God, what’s wrong with Valentine?’, *Guardian* (Nigeria), 13 Feb. 2009: <www.nguardiannews.com/editorial_opinion/article02/indexn2_html?pdate=13> (accessed 13 Feb. 2009).

¹⁶ Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ‘Comparative history: a contested method’, *Historisk Tidskrift*, 127 (2007), 697–716.

romantic love in premodern societies.¹⁷ Meanwhile, those anthropologists who work within a comparative approach have a tendency to represent ‘western’ emotional regimes as unproblematic and uncontested in their ‘home’ contexts.¹⁸ In the case of romantic love, this frequently involves a slippage between the ideals of romantic love and the institution of companionate marriage with which it is associated and between the ideal of romantic love and the reality of peoples’ emotional lives.¹⁹ A recent volume on the globalisation of love recognises this problem, yet some of the essays in this same volume seem unable to resist pointing out that there are non-Western communities in which people *profess* a belief in romantic love whilst organising their love lives according to quite other principles—economic needs, for example.²⁰ But of course this is also a feature of the heartlands of ‘romantic love’, perhaps more so now than ever. Eva Illouz, for one, believes that in the developed world we are living in an era of ‘Cold Intimacies’—while economic relations have become deeply emotional, our closest intimate relationships have become infected by economic models of bargaining, exchange and equity, manifest, for example, in the technology and languages of internet dating.²¹

So when Elizabeth Povinelli characterises love as hegemonic within post-Enlightenment western societies, she ignores a large body of scholarship which problematises this. The discourse of love may indeed have a magically appealing quality which survives on (maybe even thrives on) the contradictions of everyday life, but those contradictions within the heartlands of romantic love are still worth mentioning. In the United States in the twentieth century, for example, the ‘intimate couple’ was not always viewed benignly by governments worried about their populations getting romantically over-excited at the expense of marital and social stability.²²

¹⁷ Alan Macfarlane, review in *History and Theory, Studies in the Philosophy of History*, xviii (1979), 103–26.

¹⁸ For example, William Jankowiak (ed.), *Romantic Passion: a Universal Experience?* (New York, 1995).

¹⁹ Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow, ‘Introduction’, in Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (eds.), *Modern Loves: the Anthropology of Romantic Love and Companionate Marriage* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006), pp. 1–34.

²⁰ Mark B. Padilla, Jennifer S. Hirsch, Miguel Munoz-Laboy, Robert E. Sember and Richard G. Parker, ‘Introduction: cross-cultural reflections on an intimate intersection’, in *Love and Globalization: Transformations of Intimacy in the Contemporary World* (Nashville, TN, 2007), pp. ix–xxx; L. A. Rebhun, ‘The strange marriage of love and interest: economic change and emotional intimacy in Northeast Brazil, private and public’, in Mark B. Padilla *et al.* (eds.), *Love and Globalization*, p. 111.

²¹ Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: the Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge, 2007).

²² Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow, ‘Introduction’; Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*; Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago, IL, 2001).

Rising divorce rates, juvenile ‘delinquency’ and the social cost of housing single people moving from one big love affair to another are regarded by governments of the developed world as the unfortunate consequences of the apparent dominance of the ‘intimate couple’ idea and they are constantly devising social policies which attempt to temper its effects.

Though the development of industrial capitalism and of liberal thinking may have played an important part in the rise of the romantic love ideal, nowhere has this followed a simple linear trajectory and, as historians of premodern periods complain, the modernising narrative frequently relies on a misrepresentation of earlier periods.²³ In addition, as both Barbara Rosenwein and William Reddy have argued, different ‘emotional regimes’ and ‘emotional communities’ can co-exist in societies, though at any given time one might dominate others and, depending on the nature of the dominant regime, individuals might find ‘emotional refuge’ in a range of situations.²⁴ All emotional regimes demand emotional effort on the part of individual members of society, though some are more demanding than others. Love, argued Laura Kipnis in her polemic ‘Against Love’, is just another mode of production, and an onerous one at that.²⁵ No emotional regime is without its contradictions. In contemporary Britain ‘chick lit’ is full of angst expressed by women who want to ‘have too much’: children, a family, money, an emotionally satisfying job, romantic love, security and an exciting sex life.²⁶ Despite the evidence provided by contemporary neuroscience for the biological basis of love, it appears that we seem often to get our neural pathways crossed.²⁷ ‘Chick-lit’ heroine Bridget Jones and her contemporaries constantly worry about whether they are in lust or love, and why they fall in love with people who are clearly so unsuitable as long-term partners. Confusion reigns in the heartlands of the romantic love ideal.

Although the comparative study of the emotions is fraught with problems, fortunately there is some insightful recent work in the *history* of the

²³ Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about emotions in history’, *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 921–45.

²⁴ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2007); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: a Framework for the History of the Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

²⁵ Laura Kipnis, *Against Love: a Polemic* (New York, 2003).

²⁶ Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young (eds.), *Chick Lit: the New Women’s Fiction* (New York and London, 2006).

²⁷ Larry J. Young, ‘Being human: love: neuroscience reveals all’, *Nature*, 457, 148 (Jan. 2009): <www.nature.com/nature/journal/v457/n7226/full/457148a.html> (accessed 9 Nov. 2009); Helen Fischer, *Why We Love: the Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (New York, 2004).

emotions which points the way forward: most notably Barbara Rosenwein's study of *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, and William Reddy's work, *The Navigation of Feeling*, on which she draws.²⁸ In the Introduction to her book Rosenwein deftly and elegantly deals with the major theoretical and methodological issues raised by the very idea of writing a history of the emotions. Rosenwein is clear, for example, that there can never be any way of directly accessing the emotions in history; that emotions are always 'delivered secondhand', as she puts it, and that yes, of course, there were and are prevailing emotional norms, and *genres* which 'shaped emotional expression even as they themselves were used and bent so as to be emotionally expressive'. Rosenwein makes strategic use of a capacious category she calls 'the emotions' as a starting point from which to analyse specific historical understandings of a range of feelings, affects, sentiments and passions in early mediaeval Europe. She acknowledges in the process that the meaning of the word 'emotions' is far from self-evident. Indeed, as Thomas Dixon's important work has shown, the category of the emotions in European thought is a recent one (nineteenth century) and there are problems with the over-inclusiveness of this modern-day term.²⁹ Furthermore, there is a distinct Anglophone bias to this category.

Social anthropologists have explored many of the same issues, simultaneously describing and questioning 'emotional' phenomena cross-culturally.³⁰ While some of his colleagues asserted that the expressions of the emotions *were* the emotions and describing this expression was as far as one could go, social anthropologist John Leavitt argued that emotions had a bridging character which made them peculiarly susceptible to cross-cultural analysis.³¹ Emotion terms and concepts, he wrote, refer to experiences that inherently involve *both* meaning and feeling; they are both individual *and* social in nature, learned and expressed in social interactions. Because they are socially and symbolically produced and felt this makes them not only observable but also available to translation and interpretation across societies (and, I would add, historically).

²⁸ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*; Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*.

²⁹ Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: the Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge, 2003).

³⁰ The social anthropological literature on this subject is very large and has been usefully summarised in Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, and William M. Reddy, 'Against constructionism: the historical ethnography of emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1997), 327–51.

³¹ John Leavitt, 'Meaning and feeling in the anthropology of emotions', *American Ethnologist*, 23 (1996), 514–39.

Drawing on the theoretical and methodological insights of both Rosenwein and Leavitt I hope, in the larger work of which this lecture is part, to be able to convince my readers that a study centred on the history of emotions in African societies is not only feasible but also illuminating of a range of concerns as diverse as the history of African capitalism and the nature of political authority. I remain, however, acutely aware of the complications entailed in attempting a study of emotion which is not only historical *and* cross-cultural but is also further complicated by colonialism.

Romantic love in sub-Saharan Africa

There must be two interrelated strands to any history of romantic love in African communities. Firstly we can attempt to reconstruct emotional regimes and genres over time and look for different configurations of love under changing economic and political conditions. Secondly, we can trace the history of what Povinelli calls the ‘empire of love’, that is, the particular version (or versions) of love which travelled with colonialism and has since gained ground with recent globalisation. The justification for this latter exercise is (as David Lipset argues in his work on Papua New Guinea) that many people in the post-colonial world do themselves perceive romantic love as a distinctively modern and imported discourse *particularly* when it is viewed as the exclusive motivational basis for marriage.³² We may want to contest the neat association between romantic love and ‘modernity’, but the fact is that many contemporary African discourses make this association very powerfully themselves.

Colonial anthropologists, if they mentioned love at all, generally argued that romantic love was an alien concept in Africa, but there is some evidence for questioning the generalisation.³³ There are of course

³² Lipset, ‘Modernity without romance?’, p. 208.

³³ Evans-Pritchard wrote that ‘. . . while there may be plenty of love-making, there is seldom anything corresponding to what we mean by romantic love . . . The primitive girl, though naturally she has her preferences, would find it difficult to understand either sentimental love, or what it has to do with marriage.’ E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology* (London, 1965), p. 47. See the useful discussion of love in social anthropological literature by William J. Goode, ‘The theoretical importance of love’, in Marcia E. Lasswell and Thomas E. Lasswell (eds.), *Love, Marriage and Family: a Developmental Approach* (Glenview, IL, 1973), pp. 162–9. The scholarship on love in Africa is also discussed in an important forthcoming volume co-edited by an historian and an anthropologist: Lynn M. Thomas and Jennifer Cole, ‘Thinking through love in Africa’, in Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (eds.), *Love in Africa* (Chicago, 2009), pp. 1–30. See also the very illumin-

vast differences in political systems, cultural and religious traditions and economic circumstances on the continent at any one time. In addition some parts of Africa had been receptive to 'external' cultural influences long before the imposition of European colonial rule (I am thinking especially of those parts of the continent which had for centuries been absorbing and indigenising Islam). To assume that anything at all is inherently 'African' must be mistaken. My own discussion, which follows, focuses on the Anglophone parts of central Africa, though I also draw on insights from scholars working in other regions of Africa.

Dating historical linguistic material is difficult, but there is certainly evidence that some precolonial African societies had rich vocabularies for the feelings and emotions which 'western' traditions would associate with passionate desire and with love, and that some, at least, had vocabularies that signalled the existence of the *idealisation* of the object of desire. It is this idealisation of the experience of love which is usually seen as definitive of 'romantic love'. The expression of this feeling, when we have evidence for it, is superficially at least strikingly familiar to that of a European romantic tradition. Hearts, in particular, seem to ache across cultures.³⁴ Jim Bell's discussion of the love vocabulary of the Taita of Kenya includes words for lust, for infatuation (interpreted as irresponsible feelings of longing felt by the young for each other) and something he reads as 'romantic love' (combining passion with enduring affection).³⁵ But the value attached to the 'idealisation of the object of desire' varied widely from one African society to another, which is hardly surprising given the size and diversity of the continent.

A wave of social anthropological work in the 1960s and 1970s, whilst focused on 'modernisation' and marriage, revealed love discourses in a number of societies from western to southern Africa, some of which predated colonial rule. Amongst others Victor Uchendu in 1965 examined passionate love in the context of concubinage in Southern Nigeria; Paul Riesman wrote on 'Love Fulani Style', and Christine Oppong on love and

ating work of Mark Hunter on ideas and practices around love in Kwazulu-Natal: Mark Hunter, 'Courting desire?: love and intimacy in late 19th and early 20th century Kwazulu-Natal', *Passages*, 2 (2005), <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4761530.0010.016>> (accessed 9 Nov. 2009).

³⁴ See for example, Rosemary M. F. Joseph, 'Zulu women's bow songs: ruminations on love', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 50 (1987), 90–119. There is scope for a great more historical linguistic work on lexicons of love in African languages.

³⁵ Jim Bell, 'Notions of love and romance among the Taita of Kenya', in Jankowiak, *Romantic Passion*, pp. 152–65.

marriage in Ghana.³⁶ Indeed, Oppong attempted to turn the dominant analysis of the relationship between romantic love and modernisation on its head by arguing that love in marriage *decreased* with modernisation. Ethnomusicologists collected traditional African love songs which are full of loss and longing, and of unrequited love, particularly (and not surprisingly) where there are clear institutional obstacles to the fulfilment of individual desires.³⁷ Traditional Swahili love songs meanwhile form a remarkable corpus of passionate love poetry.³⁸

Some communities then had long been singing about true love, the pain of love, the confusion of love and the obstacles placed in the way of love. But this was extremely variable: other emotional and political communities existed where such feelings and obstacles were apparently not considered worthy of much comment. For example, in 1933 the anthropologist Audrey Richards, working in Northern Rhodesia, wrote in a footnote to a paper on marriage that she had once recounted an ‘English folk tale’ to a group of elderly people. It was about the difficulties experienced by a prince in winning the hand of his bride: ‘glassy mountains, chasms, dragons, giants and the like. The old chief present was genuinely astonished. Why not take another girl? he said.’³⁹

What is clear from this material is that whilst many ‘traditional’ African societies had a vocabulary of passionate love which was at least to some extent distinct from that for sexual desire and sometimes included a degree of idealisation, most utilised these feelings by setting them up in opposition to the centrally important institution of social reproduction—marriage. Marriage, as Kasitile had reminded Wilson, involved others (alive, dead and yet to be born) and was too important to be left to individual passion.

Many societies associated passionate love (both heterosexual and homosexual) with the emotions of youth. To a greater or lesser degree

³⁶ Victor U. Uchendu, ‘Concubinage among Ngwa Igbo of Southern Nigeria’, *Africa*, 35 (1965), 187–97; Paul Riesman, ‘Love Fulani style’, *Society*, 10 (1973), 27–35; Christine Oppong, ‘From love to institution: indications of change in Akan marriage’, *Journal of Family History*, 5 (1980), 197–209.

³⁷ Joseph, ‘Zulu women’s bow songs’; Hugh Tracey, *Catalogue of the Sound of Africa Series: 210 Long Playing Records of Music and Songs from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa*, vol. 11 (Roodeport, South Africa, International Library of African Music, 1973).

³⁸ Jan Knappert (ed.), *A Choice of Flowers: Swahili Songs of Love and Passion* (London, 1972); Said A. M. Khamis, ‘Images of love in the Swahili Taarab lyric: local aspects and global influence’, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13 (2004), 30–64.

³⁹ Audrey Richards, ‘Bemba marriage and present economic conditions’, *Rhodes–Livingstone Paper No. 4* (Livingstone, Rhodes–Livingstone Institute, 1940), p. 22, fn. 1.

they indulged those feelings but they also made a clear distinction between youthful passion and the emotional tenor thought appropriate to the marital relationship, and this is an issue to which I will return. In Gouin communities in Burkina Faso, for example, feelings of love, particularly those expressed by women, were regarded as a potential threat to social order and marriage, as elsewhere, was carefully controlled by the elders. Until the 1960s young men struggled to achieve the economic standing required of a bridegroom and marriages were consequently delayed. While they waited to marry spouses chosen by their elders young Gouin men and women were allowed to have unions with lovers of their choice, sometimes producing children. But once the bridegroom was ready to marry, the parents brought an abrupt end to these love relationships and the rupture was marked by the circumcision of the young woman. She was now ready to marry, relations with her former lover were forbidden and any children she had had by him were now formally the children of her husband. By the 1960s some Gouin women were expressing the view that they wanted to love their future spouses before marrying them. The elders were baffled: marry first and then you will love, was their answer.⁴⁰

In some societies, where betrothal took place at an early age, young men and women had very limited influence over the choice of their future spouse, but where divorce rates and death rates were high the probability of remarriage was also and sometimes this also implied a greater degree of individual choice over second and subsequent marriages. When an elderly Hausa woman, Baba of Karo, recounted her life history in the 1940s, she recalled being betrothed at the age of 14 years to her cousin, against her wishes. Hausa girls were expected to weep profusely at their weddings, and she found no difficulty in doing this. She was distraught at having to leave her family *and* she was in love with someone else. After a few years of marriage to her cousin (during which, crucially, no child was born) Baba initiated and secured a divorce. She then married the man she loved and stayed with him for fifteen years. But still there was no child. Once again the family asserted itself. Blaming her husband for her childlessness, they forced her, against her wishes, to divorce again. Years later Baba told her interviewer 'Even now I love him and he loves me', but fertility concerns were considered more important than her feelings of love for a man.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Michele Dacher, 'Les difficiles conditions de l'amour en pays gouin (Burkina Faso)', *L'Autre: Revue Transculturelle*, 4 (2003), 183–97.

⁴¹ Mary F. Smith, *Baba of Karo: a Woman of the Muslim Hausa* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1981 [1954]), p. 159. See also Odile Journet-Diallo, 'Sur les traces d'un objet insaisissable', *L'Autre: Revue Transculturelle*, 4 (2003), 211–25.

When Godfrey Wilson talked of marriage in terms of intimacy and saw the practice of kissing as representative of this—Kasitile spoke of the presence of the ancestral spirits at every act of marital intercourse. Passionate love and marriage did not always go together, not only because marriage was an important social and political institution which could not be left to individual passion, but (in the case of the Nyakyusa at least) because the marital relationship had a distinct and important *mystical* element. Marital sexual relations, in particular, involved an intimacy which included a powerful element of danger, and any inappropriate conduct had potentially disastrous consequences on the health, not only of the two spouses, but on their families and communities.⁴² It follows that the set of emotions associated with marriage was often focused on something which can be glossed as ‘respect’, but which is much more powerful and complex than is implied by the English term. Respect was not simply a value—it was a value to which were attached strong feelings. It was, if you like, an *emotion* but only if we understand that term to include a strong sense of moral responsibility.⁴³

Colonialism and affective regimes

Emotional regimes were not left untouched by the economic, social and legal changes which accompanied colonial rule, but these changes were often contradictory and non-linear. Creeping colonial capitalism had important effects on social relations of course, but this is not a simple tale of the triumph of economic or affective individualism. The spread of rural capitalism and the development of urbanisation and industrialisation were not linear processes, they proceeded in fits and starts and, as much important work in the economic anthropology of African societies has shown, both surviving and succeeding in the capitalist economy have

⁴² Megan Vaughan, ‘Divine kings, sex, death and anthropology in interwar East/Central Africa’, *Journal of African History*, 49 (2008), 383–401. On the construction of intimacy see Lauren Berlant (ed.), *Intimacy* (Chicago, IL, 2000); Povinelli, *Empire of Love*.

⁴³ The importance of respect in marriage emerges strongly from a variety of colonial anthropological accounts from central and southern Africa. See for example, A. L. Epstein, *Scenes From African Urban Life: Collected Copperbelt Papers* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 159; A. L. Epstein, *Urbanisation and Kinship: the Domestic Domain on the Copperbelt of Zambia, 1950–1956* (London, 1981); Elizabeth Colson, *Marriage and the Family among the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia* (Manchester, 1958). Colonial anthropologists also noted that affection between spouses often grew (and its expression became more socially acceptable) over time: Isaac Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe* (London, 1939), p. 276; Richards, ‘Bemba marriage’.

often necessitated a continued attention to and investment in a wide network of kin and community.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, colonial rulers were torn between advancing the cause of 'civilisation' and its implied liberation of the individual African subject from the repressive control of 'primitive' political regimes, and, on the other hand, reinforcing the traditional order and keeping all those potentially explosive emotions under control. Their legal regimes had an impact, certainly, on the regulation of gender and generational relations and, crucially, on marriage.⁴⁵ New languages to describe close relationships were evolving partly in the court room but, in British colonial central and eastern Africa at least (the region from which most of my material is drawn), the job of the colonial courts by the interwar period was primarily to uphold 'tradition', with varying degrees of success.⁴⁶

Colonial courts were flooded with marriage cases, or 'girl' cases as they were sometimes tellingly called, and historians of colonial Africa have used this material to explore conflicts in generational and gender relations.⁴⁷ Women took advantage of the colonial courts to try and escape

⁴⁴ Jane I. Guyer (ed.), *Money Matters: Instability, Values and Social Payments in the Modern History of West African Communities* (Portsmouth, NH, 2000); Sara Berry, *No Condition is Permanent: the Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison, WI, 1993); Parker Shipton, *The Nature of Entrustment: Intimacy, Exchange and the Sacred in Africa* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2007).

⁴⁵ There is now a large literature on the history of marriage and gender relations in colonial Africa, and specifically the impact of colonial legal systems: Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: the Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge, 1985); Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895–1912* (Portsmouth, NH, 2005); Dorothy Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (eds.), *'Wicked' Women and the Reconstruction of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth, NH, 2001); Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion and Power: the Construction of a Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia, 1894–1930* (Oxford, 1993); Sean Hawkins, "'The woman in question": marriage and identity in the colonial courts of Northern Ghana, 1907–1954', in Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi (eds.), *Women in Colonial African Histories* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 116–44; Victoria B. Tashjian and Jean Allman, 'Marrying and marriage on a shifting terrain: reconfigurations of power and authority in early colonial Asante', in Allman *et al.* (eds.), *Women in Colonial Africa*, pp. 237–60; Derek R. Peterson, 'Morality plays: marriage, church courts, and colonial agency in central Tanganyika, ca.1876–1928', *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), 983–1010.

⁴⁶ Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*.

⁴⁷ Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (eds.), *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives* (Boston, MA, 1982); Marjorie Mbilinyi, 'Runaway wives in colonial Tanganyika: forced labour and forced marriage in Rungwe District, 1919–1961', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 16 (1988), 1–29; Elizabeth Schmidt, 'Negotiated spaces and contested terrain: men, women and the law in colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1939', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (1990), 622–48; Brett L. Shadle, 'Bridewealth and female consent: marriage disputes in african courts, Gusiiland, Kenya', *Journal of African History*, 44 (2003), 241–62.

forced marriages, violent husbands, and sometimes polygamy. Young people eloped, either because they were tired of waiting for protracted marriage arrangements to be concluded by their parents or because they wanted to marry partners of their own choice. If this is evidence of love, then there was quite a bit of it around and it was being used powerfully by rebellious adolescents against controlling parents. In some places elopement created serious moral concerns which combined with economic considerations, as Kenda Mutongi showed in her study of widows in Western Kenya in the 1940s.⁴⁸ Girls in patrilineal societies who eloped deprived their parents of bridewealth, a major form of family capital, and in the process made it more difficult for their brothers to marry. In some places parents recouped this loss by going to court and claiming damages from their daughter's lover. British colonial officials sometimes suspected collusion and worried that by awarding damages they were themselves implicated in a moral decline.⁴⁹ In the interwar period especially they shared, with African elders, a sense that things were falling apart and that uncontrolled female desire was to blame. Sex dominated colonial thinking on these matters. No one (except perhaps a few of the more sentimental missionaries) appears to have viewed these developments in the interwar period as evidence of the arrival of romantic love or 'affective individualism', though that would certainly be a plausible interpretation.

Inconsistency is a critical component of this story. Anyone entering a colonial courtroom had to be armed with more than one set of legal arguments and be adept at the strategic use of apparently conflicting languages on questions revolving around the nature of personal autonomy, values, responsibilities and emotion. In the urban courts of the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia in the 1940s and 1950s African court elders usually adopted a traditionalist approach to the marriage cases before them, instructing people to remember their tribal traditions, women to obey their husbands, men to obey their fathers and so on. Occasionally, though, they took another tack, urging partners to adopt a more 'modern' approach to marriage, as in the following case recorded by the anthropologist A. L. Epstein:

Elders: Do you love one another?

Husband: Yes.

⁴⁸ Kenda Mutongi, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family and Community in Kenya* (Chicago, IL, 2007).

⁴⁹ Bonnie B. Keller, 'Marriage by elopement', *African Social Research*, 27 (1979), 565–85.

Wife: I love him, but my sister-in-law does not like me.

Elder: No, no. A marriage is between the woman and the man. If a couple love one another, then the marriage can stand. If not, then the relatives themselves cannot support the marriage. Now, my question to you is—‘Do you love your husband?’

Wife: Yes.⁵⁰

Not only were colonial laws and institutions often internally inconsistent and at odds with prevailing social and economic circumstances (in this case the consequences of labour migration), but Christianity was also a powerful force in the affective lives of many communities in colonial Africa and Christians shared a new language of love. True Christian love could not be coerced, it had to be freely given. Missionaries translated Christian love into African languages, along with brotherly love, conjugal love and lust. African lexicons of passion and love were consequently revised, producing new languages of the passions. Christian missionaries did not usually actively promote the idea of romantic love amongst their converts—they shared with African societies the idea of the centrality of marriage as the foundation of reproduction—but they did promote the ideal of companionate marriage and the individual choice of spouses (within reason).⁵¹ They also insisted on monogamy. Male converts were required to give up (that is, divorce) all but one of their wives. From the point of view of some African traditionalists the result was decline in moral standards. Men would now take lovers rather than additional wives, and these relationships were not subject to the oversight of family elders. Undoubtedly some women did welcome the refuge from forced marriages offered by Christian missions, and missionaries often prided themselves on their support of female freedom of choice. But, there is more than one story to be told here. As Mark Hunter shows in his study of courtship in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Natal,

⁵⁰ Epstein, *Urbanisation and Kinship*, p. 287; James M. Ault, ‘Making “modern” marriage “traditional”’: state power and the regulation of marriage in colonial Zambia’, *Theory and Society*, 12 (1983), 181–210. On women in Copperbelt communities in this period see also Jane Parpart, ‘Sexuality and power on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1926–1954’, in Sharon B. Stichter and Jane L. Parpart (eds.), *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workplace* (Boulder, CO, 1988), pp. 141–60; Jane L. Parpart, ‘“Wicked women” and respectable ladies: reconfiguring gender on the Zambian Copperbelt’, in Hodgson and McCurdy (eds.), *Reconfiguring Gender*, pp. 274–92; Jane L. Parpart, ‘“Where is your mother?”: gender, urban marriage and colonial discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924–1945’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27 (1994), 241–71.

⁵¹ Peterson, ‘Morality plays’; Parpart, ‘“Where is your mother?”’.

Christianity could also merge with a form of neo-traditionalism to restrict young women's love lives.⁵²

By the 1940s in many urban areas of Africa there was more than one version of 'modern' love around in addition to any pre-existing ones. On the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia, for example, while missionary societies promoted the idea of companionate marriage and respectability, and cultivated the arts of female domesticity, urban residents were also watching Hollywood films in which women were dangling cigarettes from their mouths and falling passionately and helplessly in love with unsuitable objects of desire. The anthropologists watching Copperbelt residents watching films (microphones suspended over their heads) noted that one of their most frequent reactions was that of shock and moral outrage. The public display of intimacy between men and women, and kissing in particular, gave rise to the view that Europeans were 'basically immoral'.⁵³ The long-standing colonial suspicion of Africans 'aping' Europeans in their clothing and gestures was supplemented by an internal critique, directed mostly at those women whose version of the modern was less Christian housewife and more Hollywood movie-star. Popular songs on the Copperbelt mocked the lipsticked woman, 'tottering' along the road in her 'European' sandals, but they also celebrated romantic love.⁵⁴ The hugely popular singer, Alick Nkhata, performed on the radio, singing of love in a number of languages and drawing on a number of musical traditions.⁵⁵

'Love' was undoubtedly sometimes part of a performance of a certain kind of modernity, and one whose stage instructions one had to learn. But was it less 'emotional' for having to be learned? Northern Rhodesia did not have the equivalent of the extraordinary output of 'pamphlet literature' on love which was produced in Nigeria around the same time, with titles like 'The School of Love and How to Attend it', 'How to Play Love', 'How to Make Love' and 'How to Get a Lady in Love', but it did

⁵² Mark Hunter, 'Courting desire?'; Mark Hunter, 'Masculinities, multiple sexual-partners, and AIDS: the making and unmaking of Isoka in KwaZulu-Natal', *Transformation*, 54 (2004), 123–53.

⁵³ Hortense Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa: the Human Situation on the Rhodesian Copperbelt* (New York, 1962), p. 166.

⁵⁴ Both attitudes are evident in the songs collected by ethnomusicologist, Hugh Tracey, on the Copperbelt in the 1950s: Tracey, *Catalogue*. Some of Tracey's original Copperbelt recordings are available on compact disc: *From the Copperbelt . . . Zambian Miners' Songs, 1957* (International Library of African Music and Original Music OMCD 004, 1989).

⁵⁵ A selection of Alick Nkhata's songs is available on compact disc: *Alick Nkhata: Shalapo and other love songs: original Zambian hits from the 1950s* (RetroAfrica, RETRO4CD, 1991).

(like South Africa) have agony columns in the newspapers where young people (mostly men, reflecting their higher literacy rates) sought advice on the interpretation of their emotional states and the confusing choices that faced them in their love lives.⁵⁶ Sometimes these questions referred to traditional obstacles in the way of desires: my parents won't let me marry the girl I love, what shall I do? Sometimes the letter-writers asked for confirmation that the symptoms they were experiencing were, indeed, those of love. Sometimes they reflected confusion over powerful feelings felt for a person of the same sex.⁵⁷ More frequently they sought counsel on pragmatic questions of choice of marriage partner, for example in weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of marrying a 'village girl' over a more sophisticated but possibly more independent 'town' woman.

The comparative historical literature places considerable emphasis on literacy as a technology with the capacity to produce a new self-reflexive subject, and a new private sphere of the emotions.⁵⁸ Literary scholars and historians of Africa, whilst acknowledging the great importance of the written word, have produced an important powerful critique of the more simplistic versions of this idea.⁵⁹ Literacy, as it spread in Africa, was a technology which was adapted to local circumstances. Love letters were, it seems, a blossoming literary form amongst the emerging middle classes and the labour migrants of the 1950s and 1960s, but they were often composed collectively and read aloud.⁶⁰ As Stephanie Newell and others have shown, there is no escaping the theme of romantic love in African popular literature from the 1940s onwards, and it is a theme which ranges in

⁵⁶ Donatus Nwoga, 'Onitsha market literature', in Stephanie Newell (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 37–44; Kenda Mutongi, "'Dear Dolly's" advice: representations of youth, courtship, and sexualities in Africa, 1960–1980', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33 (2000), 1–23; Gustav Jahoda, 'Love, marriage and social change: letters to the advice column of a West African newspaper', *Africa*, 29 (1959), 177–90; Barbara Hall (ed.), *Tell Me Josephine* (New York, 1964); J. H. Chaplin, 'Wiving and thriving in Northern Rhodesia', *Africa*, 32 (1962), 111–22; Powdermaker, *Coppertown*.

⁵⁷ Chaplin, 'Wiving and thriving', p. 115. This issue is also evident in the letters to the South African Drum magazine discussed by Mutongi, "'Dear Dolly's" advice'.

⁵⁸ Goody, *Food and Love*; Stone, *Family*; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

⁵⁹ Karin Barber, 'Introduction: hidden innovators in Africa', in Karin Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, IN, 2006), pp. 1–25; Thomas and Cole, 'Thinking through love'.

⁶⁰ Keith Breckenridge, 'Love letters and amanuenses: beginning the cultural history of the working class private sphere in Southern Africa, 1900–1933', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26 (2000), 337–48; Lynn M. Thomas, 'Schoolgirl pregnancies, letter-writing and "modern" persons in late colonial East Africa', in Barber (ed.), *Africa's Hidden Histories*, pp. 180–207.

tone from frank sentimentalism to brutal realism.⁶¹ Sometimes it promotes the mystical version of love which triumphs over ‘backward’ traditions and oppressive parents, and is closely tied to middle class identity and new forms of consumption. Sometimes it pitches romantic love against new forms of consumerism. Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ was widely performed in African boarding schools, and, thinly disguised, continues to be performed in numerous African TV soap operas. Unsurprisingly, where love across racial divisions was frowned upon (or, in the case of South Africa, legally prohibited), interracial relationships come to represent the highest romantic love ideals. But often African cultural productions around love reflect a realistic version of the love story, a more socially embedded love and one in which economics and emotion are closely related.

Love, sex and economics in everyday life

Late colonial central Africa had its love stories and love letters and agony columns, but there is little evidence for romantic love triumphing over other ways of understanding and ordering intimate relationships, particularly those associated with marriage.

In the 1950s when the anthropologist A. L. Epstein was conducting research on urban politics and kinship in the towns of the Copperbelt, the classic circulatory male migrant system was slowly giving way to the creation of a more settled urban population, now including many more women, though still with a highly skewed sex ratio. Epstein’s imaginative and practical research strategy was not only to employ African research assistants to interview, listen into and record the daily lives of urban residents, but also to employ their wives and girlfriends to write (or if they were illiterate) record daily diaries.⁶² These are of course problematic texts, written and recorded for ‘Mr Epstein’ (whose precise instructions to his informants I have so far not been able to locate) but the records and transcripts of these diaries give us the possibility of some insight into the lives of a working class elite of urban women, and the shifting emotional

⁶¹ Newell (ed.), *African Popular Fiction*; Aidoo, *African Love Stories*; T. Odhiambo, ‘Troubled love and marriage as work in Kenyan popular fiction’, *Social Identities*, 9 (2003), 423–36. There is nothing peculiarly ‘African’ about this, of course: Swidler, *Talk of Love*.

⁶² On the methods of colonial anthropologists, including Epstein, see Lynn Schumacher, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, NC, 2001).

communities in which they lived.⁶³ The following extract gives some sense of the tone and content of these diaries.

(12 December 1955)

This afternoon at round about 4 o'clock bana Mambwe came to our house. She first knocked at the door by saying Odi. I then answered and allowed her to come in. 'Have you got a piece of washing soap to give me please?' she asked me. 'I have a very small piece', I replied. Then I went in the kitchen and but [*sic*] a piece of soap and gave her. She thanked for that. 'Bana Mambwe are you just thanking for such a piece of soap?' I asked her. 'I should do so' she replied 'because I am leading such a boring life'. 'Why are you suffering so much?' I asked. 'I have failed to get a proper husband', she replied. 'You are just worrying yourself bana Mambwe, you will soon get married', I added. 'I know you are mocking me' she said. 'It is a very long time since I asked you to give me some love medicine to make my husband love me but you did not give me' she said. 'I have no idea of such things' I concluded. Shortly I heard her friends call her. And so she walked off and said, we shall talk over this matter about love medicines next time, 'cheerio'. She went away.⁶⁴

Epstein's diary-makers were married women. If notions of romantic love had informed their marriage choices at all, they were apparently little evident after marriage. Against the background of the regular rhythm of everyday life, the endless housework and attention to detail which marked respectable from unrespectable, and the daily work of lighting fires and heating water and procuring food for dinner, what emerges from these diaries are personal lives dominated by economic insecurities, the desire for children and anxiety about pregnancies and miscarriages and infertility. Marriage was central to life but women's dependence on male incomes produced powerful feelings of insecurity, hence the need for 'love medicines' mentioned in this excerpt. In the crowded conditions of the Copperbelt it was sometimes difficult if not impossible to maintain the spatial configuration of conjugal life which in the village had had strong spiritual overtones. Husbands and wives on the Copperbelt argued about household economics and sex, but they also argued and worried about 'respect'. Even those who were committed to a Christian-style companionate marriage worried at times of crisis (especially when experiencing infertility or child deaths) that modern urban marriage was endangering their wellbeing and that of their children. Practising

⁶³ A. L. Epstein's fieldnotes and other papers are held at the University of California, San Diego: Arnold Leonard and Trude Scarlett Epstein Papers, 1949–1995, MS 0022, Mandeville Special Collection Library, Giesel Library, University of California, San Diego.

⁶⁴ Epstein Papers, MS 0022, Series 2 (Field Notes, A. L. Epstein), Box 11/f/3, Kabushi interviews, Mrs Nyirenda, 12.12.55.

‘affective individualism’ was a dangerous business if this entailed neglecting the interests and wishes of a wider set of relations among the living and dead.

Colonial anthropologists of central Africa were accused of painting a bleak picture of marital relationships, and no doubt there were many happy loving marriages amidst all the difficulties. However, it is not surprising in the circumstances that marital relations were often fraught, with men and women attempting to bend different available emotional languages for their own purposes. Economics and emotion were closely bound up in matters of ‘love’ and of course there is nothing specifically ‘African’ about any of this.⁶⁵ Urban women, though they did their best to make an independent living in the interstices of the male mining economy, were still economically dependent on their husbands and vulnerable to being either neglected or sent home to rural areas. Some found themselves caught up in circumstances which amounted to a new and unwelcome emotional regime. Living independently of a man on the Copperbelt was extremely difficult, not least because access to housing for women depended on their ‘marriage’, formal or informal, to a male wage-earner. If your husband did not provide for you, you had either to return to a rural area or find a lover. Women’s complaints about marriage largely revolved around the lack of generosity of their husbands in sharing their wages with them. ‘Love’ for them meant being cared for and provided for materially, shown respect and being endowed with children. When asked what defined a good husband women used a word (*uwatekanya*) which Epstein translated as ‘patient, good-hearted and attentive’.⁶⁶

Many of these issues have surfaced again in the literature on the gendered experience of both poverty and HIV/AIDS in Africa. Taking lovers or engaging in transactional sex is a necessity for many women and girls, and their economic realism in this context leads to male accusations that they are (variously) ‘gold-diggers’ or ‘razor blades’ or ‘blood suckers’. Women’s necessary realism about the economics of relationships with men lives alongside *both* the apparently growing attraction of the language of romantic love and sexual fidelity *and* the continuing importance of marriage as an institution involving a wider set of relations and still (in some places at least) concerns over fertility. Daniel Jordan Smith’s study of love and marriage in Southern Nigeria, for example, shows that modern courtship practices (for both men and women, and in both urban and

⁶⁵ Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*.

⁶⁶ Epstein, *Urbanisation and Kinship*, p. 118.

rural areas) are imbued with the ideals of romantic love, but once married, couples are subject to the expectations of a wider set of kin, as well as their own concerns over achieving an ideal of parenthood. Married men typically take additional lovers while married women hold on for longer to the discourse of romantic love and fidelity in their attempts to maintain the attentions, both affectionate and economic, of their husbands.⁶⁷ The language of romantic love in this context looks very much like a weapon of the weak—but it also seems to be a rather weak weapon.

Love, as the evidence of African societies reminds us, and as Godfrey Wilson learned, takes forms that are far richer and more diverse than can be allowed for by the restrictive ideals of romantic love. While Kasitile had challenged Wilson's views of the centrality of love to both sex and marriage by referring to the role of ancestral spirits in the marital bed, this did not exhaust his views on love and intimacy. Wilson wrote to his wife Monica that at the end of one long day Kasitile had turned to him and said, 'I have exhausted all the thoughts of my heart to you, I have told you everything I know.' But then he added 'If I were a woman I would go to bed with you, so that you might know the very body of the Black People', a statement which I read as both a lesson in the multiple forms of love and of the politics of knowledge of which this lecture is inescapably a part.⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ Daniel Jordan Smith, 'Romance, parenthood, and gender in a modern African society', *Ethnology*, 40 (2001), 129–51; Hunter, 'Masculinities'; Andrea Cornwell, 'Spending Power: love, money and the reconfiguration of gender relations in Ado-Odo, Southwest Nigeria', *American Ethnologist*, 29 (2002), 963–80.

⁶⁸ Wilson Papers, UCT, B2, Folder 4, Letter from Godfrey Wilson to Monica Wilson, 21 Feb. 1937.