

The Power(s) of Love. New insights on intimacy in Africa

International Workshop

December 10-12, 2019

Stone Town, Zanzibar (Tanzania)

Love in Africa (Chicago 2009), co-edited by Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas, was the first book to offer an anthropological and historical analysis of love on the continent and its islands. The eight chapters, which covered both the colonial and postcolonial periods and drew on a variety of case studies (South Africa, Zanzibar, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria and Niger) examined the various ways in which Africans imagine, experience, and express love, defined as "the sentiments of attachment and affiliation that bind people to one another" (p. 2). The book was particularly important in a context where representations of intimacy tended to foreground sexuality at the expense of emotions. By restoring the emotional dimension of intimate relationships, the book helped to deconstruct racist representations of Africans' hyper-sexuality, and to reorient the study of intimacy in Africa, which had hitherto focused largely on reproductive health and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. *Love in Africa* also served as a powerful reminder that the social practices through which people create and express love are neither universal nor timeless. Ideals of romantic love have been transformed as the continent has undergone political, economic and social changes over time, and Africans have deployed love to craft new definitions of conjugality, to redefine kinship and gender relations, and to build new forms of power and respectability. Ten years after the publication of the book, anthropologists have attended to the unprecedented spread of information and communication technologies on the African territory, the new visibility of queer sexualities in public space, and the acceleration of transnational mobility, much of it navigated via intimate relationships. Historians, in turn, have begun to examine how love shaped a wide range of intimate relations and political formations, including interracial marriages and nationalist imaginings, during the colonial and postcolonial periods, and how emotions and affect, more generally, are vital to understanding Africa's *longue durée*.

This international workshop will bring some of the authors from *Love in Africa* together with a new generation of researchers in order to revisit the empirical developments that have occurred since the publication of the book and generate new understandings of love and intimacy. We particularly seek papers that include, but are not limited to, the following themes:

1. The government of love

How is love implicated in projects of governance? While there is much work on the control, supervision or regulation of intimacy in Africa (by the state, family, religion, etc.), most studies have focused on sexuality, concubinage or marriage. We would like to encourage participants to revisit these now classic issues by focusing more specifically on how affective regimes regulate intimate relationships. Papers may address the role played by political, religious or judicial authorities in controlling emotions, and the means used to impose legitimate definitions and manifestations of love. They may also investigate the role of other agents and institutions likely to exercise this control, such as the media, peer groups,

kinship groups, associations (cultural, sports, etc.). How do Africans deal with these normative frameworks? How, if at all, do they subvert them?

2. Power relations in the experience of love

Aside from feminist scholars of the 1970s who attacked love as an ideological smokescreen justifying the unequal division of household labor, little attention has been paid to power relations within couples, for the experience of love is sometimes considered a "suspension" of the domination that crosses the other spheres of social life. We invite papers that examine the different relations of domination that may be exercised within couples, and their articulation. How do gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, age, etc. relations shape the practical experience of love in Africa? What is their role in the perception, or even production, of power relations and inequalities within couples?

3. The occult powers of love

What are the occult dynamics of love? Scholars have long noted the importance of love magic and other secret, invisible or magical practices associated with romantic and sexual relationships. We invite papers that address the occult means used to obtain or retain love (finding a husband or wife, ending a dispute between spouses) or to punish an unfaithful lover, as well as romantic relationships with invisible entities or illegitimate partners. Also of interest is what people claim to do "out of love", in other words, the inherent power of love as the motor of action, whether it is a matter of performing prowess to win the heart of a loved one or of sacrificing oneself.

4. Love mobilities and the articulation of power relations

In recent years, much work has focused on the emotional and sexual dimensions of transnational mobility. Whether focusing on finding an intimate partner (cross-border marriages), joining a spouse (family reunification) or escaping persecution related to gender or sexual orientation, these studies have mainly documented migration routes from Africa to Western countries. In doing so, they have tended to focus on the situation of migrants in their host country and the weight of administrative constraints and racist stereotypes in the experience of transnational love. We invite contributors to consider love stories that develop along the reverse path, from the West and the Middle East to Africa. Arab sailors and traders on the Swahili coast in pre-colonial times, European administrators and travelers in colonial times, tourists, expatriates and "returning migrants" today are examples of communities whose journey to Africa may have been marked by love and marital adventures. What place have these adventures occupied in African societies? How did they fit into local power relations: colonial and postcolonial relations, ethnic, kinship, age, etc.?

5. Cross-cutting themes

What are the methodologies that scholars use to study love? How can we grasp a phenomenon and domain of social life that is difficult to observe, internally felt, and profoundly subjective? Proposals concerning the epistemological, methodological or ethical dimensions of research on love in Africa are welcomed.

Organization:

The workshop will take place over three days, **10-12 December 2019** in Stone Town, Zanzibar. It will include the presentation and discussion of academic work, round tables, the screening of films and artistic performances, and a visit of Stone Town.

Participants will be expected to make their own travel arrangements (although some assistance with travel costs may be available), but the workshop will provide accommodation in Stone Town (from 09 to 13 December 2019), half-board catering (breakfast and lunch), and participation in the cultural activities scheduled during the workshop.

It is expected that the workshop will result in a publication and participants should bear this in mind when preparing their contributions. Please note that the working language of the conference will be English and all papers should be in English.

Abstracts are due by **20 June 2019** at the latest. They should be written in English and should not exceed 500 words. They must clearly present the research question, methodology (fieldwork, methods and/or sources), and arguments. They should also include a short biography of the author, their institutional affiliation and complete contact information.

Proposals should be sent to the following address: **powersoflove.znz@gmail.com**

We would expect to advise of acceptance or otherwise by July 15, 2019.

Papers are expected no later than **December 1, 2019**.

For further information, if required, please contact the organizers:

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Partnerships:

- European Commission - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
- The State University of Zanzibar (SUZA)
- The Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA).
- French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nairobi)