

Sanyu Mojola, *Love, Money and HIV: Becoming a Modern African Woman in the Age of AIDS* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press), 2014. pp. 288.

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Sanyu Mojola's *Love, Money, and HIV* provides a thorough examination of the underlying cause of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Through seven chapters, Mojola details her observations and interviews with the locals of Kenya's Nyanza province, in a search to explain the gender and demographic disparities among those living with HIV/AIDS. She takes on the role not only as a sociologist and ethnographer, but also as a "marginal woman: belonging, yet not quite belonging."<sup>1</sup> Combining interview-based fieldwork, ethnography, and survey data from Kenya, Mojola meticulously analyzes and elucidates how the yearning for money, consumption, and modernity became gendered and entangled in females' intimate relationships with the riskiest male partners. She explores the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in three contexts: in communities, schools, and labor markets.

Mojola begins by first illustrating how desires in consumption and money motivated girls' proclivity to transactional relationships. Consumption is "*embedded*" within these interactions, which are always "intimate," but only "sometimes" romantic and loving.<sup>2</sup> In her fieldwork, she observes that women often have "*continual* needs" such as cosmetics that required continual funding.<sup>3</sup> This proved consequential in women seeking older men, who usually had more wealth, to satisfy their consumerist desires. The tradeoff? Higher epidemiological risks, according to the author.<sup>4</sup> Mojola successfully maintains her objectivity here, noting that although "modern" perspectives may sympathize with these needs, many of these needs are indeed only wants.<sup>5</sup>

Nyanza's changing socioeconomic status explains the shifts in attitudes towards beauty, consumption, and ideas. From a historical context, the effects of epidemics among livestock and taxation imposed by colonialists led to a search for additional sources of income, namely, labor migration out of the province.<sup>6</sup> *Jopango* (male migrants) living among a diversity of cultures returned home and shared new ideas and styles, most of them set by the *mzungu* (the white man).<sup>7</sup> According to Mojola, from these

Western standards arose a transposed perception of beauty in Nyanza and with it an increased demand for consumption.

Mojola argues that it is communities' infrastructures, labor markets, and schools that contributed to HIV/AIDS' spread. Within communities lay an almost paradoxical juxtaposition of admiration in the modern consuming woman and condemnation of transactional relationships—despite widespread denunciation of these relationships, women would be praised for the items they acquired from them.<sup>8</sup> Public approval towards the consuming woman often stemmed from existing social structures in schools, a setting from which young women often began developing gendered needs.<sup>9</sup> Mojola notes in her fieldwork that girls in school transitioned from wants to “needs” for items such as cosmetics, toiletries like deodorant and sanitary pads, and new clothes to feel like they “socially belong[ed].”<sup>10</sup> The costs of these needs were in addition to the already extensive cost of school, an amount which many families were unable to afford.<sup>11</sup>

Gender differences in the labor market only amplified these financial burdens, limiting the availability of jobs for women. Women's economic dependence on men extended to the labor market, most meaningfully in the Nyanza's fishing industry. There existed a gendered “sex-for-fish”<sup>12</sup> economy, a dangerous endeavor that spread HIV/AIDS even farther. After taking into account how these aforementioned factors play into the spread of HIV/AIDS, Mojola offers her own solution in diminishing the impact of a “sex-for-fish” economy—to train women to fish and to create a stable ecosystem.<sup>13</sup> She concludes her book by proposing local HIV-prevention strategies, explaining what has been done and what is left to do, offering not only the biomedical solution but also a socially structured solution for long-term benefits.

For anyone interested in an in-depth analysis of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Kenya's Nyanza province, Mojola's work provides an informative discussion of the disease on the behavioral, societal, and institutional levels. As the chapters progress, Mojola adds different variables to her examinations of relationships and HIV/AIDS, all of which are entangled with each other. She proves that there is no simple cause and effect; rather, it is the correlation of many factors that has led to the current state of the epidemic. There is some extrapolation on her part, in providing a socio-economic solution targeting an all-encompassing Africa, although

she provides some evidence that this solution has proved effective in the past. Mojola's study smoothly consolidates research and data with empirical evidence to provide a comprehensive explanation of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Her rich collection of resources gives the victims a voice while also proposing change on a larger scale—targeting HIV/AIDS rates indirectly through socioeconomic changes.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sanyu Mojola, *Love, Money and HIV: Becoming a Modern African Woman in the Age of AIDS* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.