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**Title:** Cultural Politics of Love and Provision among Poor Youth in Urban Tanzania

**Year:** 2017

**Version:**

**Please cite the original version:**

Stark, L. (2017). Cultural Politics of Love and Provision among Poor Youth in Urban Tanzania. *Ethnos : Journal of Anthropology*, 82(3), 569-591.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2015.1080749>

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Laura Stark

## Cultural Politics of Love and Provision among Poor Youth in Urban Tanzania

*ABSTRACT: This article examines how urban youth in the poorest neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam negotiate the terms of transactional intimacy, that is, heterosexual relations in which men are expected to provide for women materially. Using the concept of 'affect', I argue that this negotiation involves different levels of male providership, as well as moral values attached to notions of 'true love' and the Swahili concept of tamaa. Poor men and women view their agency differently within transactional intimacy, with women describing themselves as exploited by men who do not fulfill their end of the transactional bargain, and poor men portraying themselves as deeply disempowered in comparison to wealthier men. Yet women and men also produce shared cultural discourses to portray men's meagre providership in a positive light, and to place upon women the moral onus of sacrificing material aspirations in order to choose 'true love'.*

KEYWORDS: intimacy, Africa, love, sex, Tanzania, poverty, urban, affect, money

### Introduction

Contemporary African youth have been described as a generation occupying 'youthscapes' characterized by destruction, disease and decline; social environments in which their possibilities of living decent lives and fulfilling their goals are bleak (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006:9). This article examines one such 'youthscape' in two low-income neighborhoods of Dar es Salaam,<sup>1</sup> namely the convoluted terrain of what I call 'transactional intimacy' in which men are expected to provide materially for female sexual partners, a situation from which many poor women derive all or part of their income, and poor men derive social respect and a masculine self-esteem (see also Swider & Watkins 2007; Wamoyi et. al. 2010). I examine how urban youth<sup>2</sup> living in severe and enduring poverty navigate the terms of such relationships amid a lack of trust arising from the necessity of material self-interest. Poverty both constrains how transactional intimacy can be conducted and raises the stakes of this conduct, making it crucial that participants are competent in both correctly gauging a partner's feelings and intentions and in maneuvering around possible pitfalls. In doing so, the young persons I studied negotiate both the bargaining tactics and the moral standards needed to navigate intimate relations. These

moral standards are pluralistic rather than monolithic in nature, and the recognition of their diversity is culturally shared. For this reason, I do not consider the youthscape of transactional intimacy to be merely a space of mutual exploitation. Following Maira's and Soep's (2004) definition of youthscape, I view transactional intimacy as a space in which impoverished urban youth renegotiate their identities and actively imagine for themselves a better future.

It should be emphasized that the negotiation of sexual norms among urban Tanzanian youth is an active, interpretive process. This is necessary because older ethnic practices and beliefs no longer hold much relevance for the lives of youth in Dar es Salaam. In Tanzania, ethnic difference has been downplayed by the government since independence in 1961, and national unity has been emphasized through the adoption of Swahili as the official language. Tanzania has a large number (estimated 120) different ethnic groups, and intermarriage across ethnic lines is more common in Tanzania than anywhere else in Africa (Nyang'oro 2004:38–39; Deutscher & Lindsey 2005:165). As a result, many young persons in Kijito and Mahalikavu not only have parents but also grandparents who were born into different ethnic groups. Moreover, according to my interviewees, the steady influx of migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds to urban areas has resulted in ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods in which expressions of ethnic and cultural identity brought from the countryside are often suppressed or relinquished in order to maintain social harmony and bonds of neighborly cooperation. Sexual norms specific to particular ethnic groups are thus often not sustainable in such a setting. Indeed, most of the youth I interviewed do not speak the ethnic languages of their parents and are unfamiliar with their ethnic customs because their families never had the possibility to visit their grandparents' villages (see also Setel 1999:74). Many young persons have heard rumours of beliefs and practices typical of other ethnic groups which inform their sense of the broad range of norms and values that might be acceptable to other persons they meet, but these concepts must always be negotiated with others in specific situations. Much has been written on what has been termed 'transactional sex' in Sub-Saharan Africa, usually defined as women providing sex in return for money or gifts from men (e.g. Luke 2003; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Maganja et. al. 2007; Swider & Watkins 2007; Wamoyi et. al. 2010). I define transactional intimacy here as a continuum of relationships with sex work at one extreme, and provision of needs by a primary male partner (permanent boyfriend or husband) at the other.<sup>3</sup> The eventual form of the relationship is not always clear or decided in advance by participants engaging in their first sexual encounter. In this article, therefore,

I focus on those young persons who enter into sexual relations in the hope of creating a longer-term commitment.

The primary underlying cause of transactional sex has been seen to be economic gender inequality. Historically, men in Sub-Saharan Africa have possessed greater economic power and resources than women and have been expected to financially support their wives and families, an expectation still predominant in Tanzania today (Silberschmidt 2004; Hunter 2010; Wamoyi et. al. 2010; Plummer & Wight 2011:211). Even the chronically poor<sup>4</sup> men in the neighborhoods I study have higher levels of education and better access to informal wage labour than do poor women living in the same area.<sup>5</sup>

As Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas (2009:13) point out in their book on love in Africa, Africans have long used exchange relationships to create intimate attachments, but recently they have been forced to grapple with the strain put on these attachments by the rise of a money-based economy. Severe unemployment,<sup>6</sup> driven by the debt crisis and neoliberal economic reforms, has made it impossible for many African men to provide long term for female partners and dependents in the context of marriage (Silberschmidt 2004; Chant & Evans 2010:354). While most men still seek to be providers, this providership now tends to take the form of more precarious, short-term sexual relations with women. (Hunter 2010:190; see also Hunter 2009:136–137).

In recent studies of transactional sex the focus has been on relationships in which women strive to enhance their social status by obtaining consumer goods from wealthier men (e.g. Luke 2003; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Swider & Watkins 2007; Wamoyi et. al. 2010). Shifting the focus to poor men who are less able to perform a masculine provider identity allows us to examine transactional relationships from a new perspective. Whereas material gifts in relationships with wealthier men are often described in the research literature as enabling female independence and bolstering women's perception of their own self-worth,<sup>7</sup> in my study what most interviewees of both genders wanted to talk about was *love* (-*penda*, *upendo*, *m(a)penzi*). In this article I explore the reasons for this and ask: *How are the terms of transactional intimacy negotiated by urban young men and women living in poverty? How do chronically poor men and women view the emotions, power relations and moral dynamics inherent in these relationships?*

### **Love, Exchange and Affect**

A key observation made by recent ethnographic literature on intimate exchange

relations in Africa has been that these relations are not merely instrumental, but are embedded in complex fields of emotion, with the giving of money or gifts from boyfriends to girlfriends or husbands to wives representing an act of caring, commitment and love (e.g. Cole and Thomas 2009; Hunter 2010:199). The observation that material exchange is tightly entangled with affection, attachment and caring transforms the meaning of money involved in transactional intimacy away from that of a cold, impersonal instrument of rational barter to a potentially warm and compassionate expression of concern and appreciation (see Poulin 2007; Swidler and Watkins 2007; Hunter 2010:180). The term ‘transactional sex’ has been used primarily in research related to public health and the AIDS pandemic to refer to African sexual practices seen as contributing to high rates of HIV infection.<sup>8</sup> Because the term ‘transactional sex’ implies a focus on health outcomes rather than emotional dynamics, I have chosen to use instead the term ‘transactional intimacies’ in order to shift the focus from the sex act to the quest for a longer-term relationship pursued by at least some participants. This quest was signaled in my interview data by interviewees inserting the word ‘love’ into discourse on sexual transactions. For instance, male and female interviewees explained that even during first sexual contact, when boys or men offered girls money, clothing, cosmetics or a meal of chicken and chips in the expectation of sex, girls understood this to mean ‘he really loves me’. Some men, too, understood their gift to be motivated by ‘love’ (see also Poulin 2007).

The pervasive ‘love-money entanglement’<sup>9</sup> within transactional intimacy can be difficult to grasp from a Eurocentric perspective. In Western discourse and practice, as Jo Helle-Valle (2004:205–206) points out, romantic love and pleasure are the only acceptable motives for engaging in sex, and material motives for sexual acts are strictly tabooed, being embodied in the image of the prostitute. The analysis of emotions and materiality in intimate relationships is further complicated by the fact that African youth themselves are reported to hold ambiguous and seemingly contradictory views of the relationship between the two. In her study of intimate relations in Madagascar, Cole (2009: 109, 129) points out that the girls she interviewed sometimes claimed there was no love without money, while at other times they spoke of love and money as separate, referring to ‘clean love’ or ‘love with a clean heart’ to indicate an idealized relationship free from economic interests. Three South African women interviewed by Mark Hunter (2009:147) also expressed what appears to be a paradox, claiming that ‘men’s ability to provide for [...] girlfriends provided evidence of love’, yet also arguing that ‘a more pure love rests tantalizingly outside of material relations.’

As a first step in clarifying these love-money entanglements in my own interview material, I use the concept of ‘affect’ rather than ‘emotion’ as a methodological tool for analysis. In proposing an ‘economy of affect’, Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnycky (2009) point out that the term emotion still carries the connotation of ‘inner’ experiences borne by individuals, and they define *affect* as referring to communicative action and relations practiced between individuals. Affect thus becomes a useful term to break down the dichotomy between feeling and economic transaction, and to move away from the view of economic relations as ‘transparent rational choices borne by self-interested individuals’ (Richard & Rudnycky 2009:61). It also shifts the focus away from the content of feeling to the effects of feeling.<sup>10</sup>

Although interviewees mentioned ‘inner’ emotional experiences such as having a ‘pain in the heart’ upon being abandoned by a lover, they also spoke about intimate feeling as something produced through practice and discourse which is evaluated or responded to by others. How affect behaviors constitute morally proper conduct within Tanzanian society is something that the youth must take into account when jointly negotiating the rules of intimacy. From a methodological standpoint, feelings can usually only be accessed through the ways in which persons choose to talk about them, especially in a society such as Tanzania that places a high value on decorum and self-restraint.<sup>11</sup> As Cole and Thomas (2009:2) point out, one cannot know whether the words informants use to signal passion or devotion map onto the same conceptual field as ‘love’ in a particular English-language context. The researcher must therefore deduce the meanings of love-related terms from their semantic frame of reference, meaning in this case descriptions of how such feelings are used in the everyday conduct of relationships. The notion of *affect* thus becomes a useful tool in such an investigation.

The aim of this article is not to examine the totality of meanings surrounding the concept of love in one culture as Cole (2009) has done for Madagascar, nor to provide an historical overview of transactional intimacy in urban Tanzania.<sup>12</sup> While it is important to acknowledge the long-term dimensions of discourses and practices related to African intimacies,<sup>13</sup> my interview data indicates that in the context of rapid socio-economic transformations in urban areas and the steady influx of poor rural migrants to cities, appeals to practices or norms prevailing during the colonial or early post-colonial period possess only limited explanatory force, and references to past sexual practices such as polygyny have only partial utility.

In discussing notions of ‘love’ among African urban youth, it is important to

distinguish between two types of love addressed in scholarly discourse on Sub-Saharan African intimacies. The first is what Anthony Giddens (1992) has termed ‘romantic love’, in which the self is experienced as incomplete without an idealized other toward whom there exists an intense, erotic attraction and with whom a shared, long-term future is desired. Although there is some debate regarding when romantic love entered African cultures and how significant it has been, it is clear that by the 1970s, discourses on romantic love had become familiar to the majority of Africans through popular media, and were in the 1990s further bolstered by campaigns to combat HIV/AIDS. Researchers have speculated that for African youth and especially women, the ideology of romantic love has offered a greater emphasis on individual freedom and desire in contrast to traditional obligations toward natal and marital kin groups, as well as the promise of a more companionate and egalitarian form of marriage for women (Cole & Thomas 2009:10–13, 25–26; Plummer & Wight 2011:162–163; 192, 276).

A different notion of love is expressed in Mark Hunter’s (2010) concept of ‘provider love’, in which South African men express caring through material assistance to female partners, who recognize this provision as a form of love. Although Hunter’s concepts of provider love and provider masculinity represent useful and culturally-sensitive tools for analysis, certain aspects of the model remain under-theorized, such as the possibility of internal hierarchies within the category of male provider, and the question of how men negotiate possible limits on their ability to provide. The men in the neighborhoods I studied had clearly internalized the cultural ideology of a provider masculinity,<sup>14</sup> even going so far as to emphasize that the man should make sacrifices to be able to give more to his female partner because she is dependent upon him. Yet in many cases, male interviewees were unable to achieve this ideal of provision in practice (see also Bhana & Pattmann 2011:969).

In addition to notions of love, this article also explores the negotiation of *intimacy* in this particular cultural context. In his study of the link between witchcraft and intimacy across African cultures, Peter Geschiere (2013:xviii–xxii) points out that while intimacy is currently a fashionable concept, it is often inadequately defined, and that those we study should themselves be allowed to define what is intimate or ‘inside’ relationships. In classic anthropology, the underlying assumption has been that intimacy is a domain of harmony, with the home being a sphere of love and trust. Drawing on a long tradition of intellectual thought, Geschiere (ibid.) argues that intimacy also inheres anxieties over hidden aggressions by persons close to the self, therefore being experienced as involving

not only protection but also danger. In the case of the Tanzanian youth studied here, intimacy in the context of poverty is experienced as treacherous due to the scarce resources that are put at risk in its formation, and failure of the other partner to follow through and hold up his or her side of the intimacy bargain can have negative consequences for both women and men, as discussed in the next section.

### **Failed Providership and Fractured Trust**

Some men I interviewed saw poverty as preventing their participation in heterosexual intimacy. As 24-year-old Robert put it, ‘If you have money, girls will love you. If you have nothing, no one loves you.’<sup>15</sup> His 27-year-old brother Samuel likewise told that he wanted to marry and settle down but did not have the possibility, since he did not have any money or even a room of his own.<sup>16</sup> Poor men may have the option to abandon pregnant girlfriends and thereby, unlike women, avoid responsibility for provision of the child, but for some men in poverty, the ability to be a husband and father is a longed-for privilege beyond their reach.

But even men who were engaged in intimate relations complained that they suffered from their inability to sustain the role of masculine provider when their income was insufficient. As 23-year-old Joseph explained:

Maybe you are working or getting income, and your earnings for a day or a week are very small. Only sufficient for yourself, but you have to take care of another person, you love her and you want to buy the clothes, shoes, cosmetics she wants but you cannot. Some young men leave the girl because they feel bad and stressed about this – it can also be the same in marriage, if you have a demanding wife. It may cause separations. Sometimes you tell her that you don’t have the money, but she doesn’t believe you, thinking you have it but you don’t want to give it to her.<sup>17</sup>

Men living in poverty are also forced to adjust their expectations regarding the fidelity and commitment of female partners. When my interpreter jokingly asked 27-year-old Jalil, a construction worker with one child, what would happen if he found the mother of his child with another man, he responded, laughing, ‘oh, that is a normal situation. There might be a fight, but the relationship continues.’<sup>18</sup> Masculine provision to female partners provides the primary positive identity for men in Tanzania, and in order to sustain the illusion of this identity, some men were reported to look the other way when their female partners engaged in ‘outside’ sexual relations to supplement their income. This was particularly the case if such sexual relations were short-lived or perceived to be primarily instrumental, as



26-year-old Mwanaisha, a mother of three children who lives with her children's father, explained:

[Women might have sex outside the relationship] because the [husband] has given or left [the woman] only a little money [that morning], not enough, so she goes to the market and she wants meat today. So the butcher is a man. And the tomato seller is a man. And the husband asks nothing when he comes back and finds meat...<sup>19</sup>

Other forms of instrumental sexual infidelity were also sanctioned by poor male partners. For instance, some men were reported to allow their girlfriend to have a 'lover for money'. In this case the girl's 'real lover' secretly benefitted from the money given to the girl by her 'lover for money'. Unlike the cases reported by Christian Groes-Green (2009:293; 2011) for Mozambique in which the 'lover for money' is a wealthier man or by Cole (2009) for Madagascar in which he is typically an older European man, among my interviewees the lover for money could in fact be as poor as the girl and her real lover. Sixteen-year-old Hassan told how he was nearly duped by a girl and her real lover into becoming the girl's lover for money:

Nowadays love without money is not possible, because even if a girl tries to approach you, she may say she loves you, but she does not. She then goes to her boyfriend that she really loves and tells him, 'I told Hassan that I loved him, but I really don't, I'm just using him for money.' [...] That has already happened to me. The boyfriend allowed his lover to come to me and get money from me. Boys of the same age warned me because they knew the boyfriend, the boyfriend had told the other boys: 'Hassan approached my girlfriend, and I let her go to him to get money from him.'<sup>20</sup>

Poor men's difficulties in sustaining a providership role have a number of important consequences for the negotiation of love and trust in intimate relations. Although throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa it is assumed to be natural for men to desire multiple women,<sup>21</sup> most of the men I interviewed explained that they had multiple concurrent sexual partners because they worried that a girlfriend might leave them at any moment for a wealthier man. For this reason, they explained, they often strive to maintain relationships with two or three girlfriends, so that even if one leaves, there is still at least one girlfriend to give them love and caring. As described by 24-year-old Yusuf,

maybe a man can have a girl, and that girl is escaping him in different ways, he thinks that she doesn't love me, so he thinks that he will find another one, but he keeps the first one, he is just looking for one

with which to be close. The word for the first girl is *miyayusho*, the one who pretends to love him but doesn't want to be with him, and the word for the second one is *waukweli*, the true love.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph explained the same motive for having multiple girlfriends as follows:

The biggest problem is the economic problem. Many relationships which would otherwise exist here in [this neighborhood] don't because of lack of money. [There is a] constant changing of lovers, [since] a girl has another lover for money. Because of [this] feeling of insecurity, nothing is certain, relationships are always changing. So this is why young men have several girlfriends – in case tomorrow he doesn't have her. No money, no honey. If you see and like a girl but you have no money in your pocket, you just give up.<sup>23</sup>

In my interview data the multi-partner sexual practices of *both men and women* can thus be traced to female dependency on multiple male partners. Women who in previous decades would have married in their teens<sup>24</sup> must now seek out one or more 'boyfriends' to assist them financially, since 'marriageable' men with steady incomes, especially in low-income neighborhoods, are increasingly rare. Likewise, poor men explain their own multi-partner relationships as motivated by the assumption that women will be opportunistic and change partners in order to find those men who can best provide for them. Sylvia Chant and Alice Evans (2010: 364) make similar observations for the Gambia in Western Africa:

...in a general context of secrecy and subterfuge most men come to distrust women's motivations, recognize that their partners may be unfaithful and adjust their own commitment accordingly, most notably in the form of maintaining a string of concurrent partnerships or 'back-up girlfriends.'

Liv Haram (2004:214) has referred to the trust between sexual partners in Tanzania as a 'scarce resource',<sup>25</sup> and comments from my interviewees support this view.<sup>26</sup> Thirty-one-year-old Abdul,<sup>27</sup> for instance, pointed out that "for the young married man like me [...] the marriages don't last long and end in divorce" when I asked him at the end of the interview if there was anything else he still wanted to say. Zena added at the end of her interview that

the difficulty is understanding each other and to settle down together. Many relationships just end quickly. It is difficult to understand what the partner wants, and the process is complicated when one or both partners have other women or men.<sup>28</sup>

In the context of poverty, lack of trust is exacerbated by the high stakes inherent in heterosexual relationships. Young men must scrimp and make sacrifices in order to spend time and money on their female partners, and women who become pregnant are usually abandoned by their male partners.

### **Negotiating the terms of the relationship**

The formation of intimate transactional relationships among my interviewees can be seen as a two-step process, with both steps requiring the articulation of appropriate affect. In the context of the first sexual encounter, both partners must fulfill the immediate bargain related to the sexual transaction itself: if a man gives money or a gift to a girl, she must reciprocate with sex, and if a girl engages in sex with a boy, he must give her something in return. This was by no means understood as a purely instrumental exchange; indeed ‘love’ was understood to be one of the things which was exchanged and/or motivated the exchange. Female interviewees told me repeatedly that if a boy bought chicken and chips, skin oil, or clothing for a girl in expectation of sex, the girl was likely to think ‘he really loves me’. Young men agreed that girls would think this way, and described gift-giving as a way to ‘win a girl’s heart’. Laughing shyly, 18-year-old Juma described his own affective response in the same terms: ‘for example, I see a girl passing by and I think, “oh I love that girl”, I tell her I love her and I put my hand in my pocket and pull out money to give her.’<sup>29</sup> Although interviewees cited stories of beatings and even gang rape as examples of what could happen to girls who took gifts from a boy but did not reciprocate with sex, Juma felt that most men in such a situation would simply ‘give up’ on the girl and walk away, since her actions would clearly indicate that she ‘did not love him’.

In order to assess the other person’s character and intentions, both men and women described strategies for ‘testing’ their potential partner, usually at the first meeting. Abdul explained that ‘in order to see whether the girl really loves him’, a man might pretend that he has no money the first time he approaches a girl with intimate intentions.<sup>30</sup> Benjamin explained how a boy can turn a girl’s refusal of sex to his advantage by staying calm and appearing to be understanding, because some girls refuse sex in order to ‘test’ the intentions of the boy:

Most guys in [this neighborhood] expect a return on their gift and they lose hope easily. When she refuses, if he doesn’t lose hope he can act wisely and use his skills to persuade her, saying, ‘it’s okay,

we can be brother and sister, let's leave it.' He doesn't create a conflict, so the girl starts to come to the boy and talk to him. But here in [this neighborhood], most boys react quickly if she refuses and make a conflict, beating her and doing bad things. But some girls test the guy and see how much he reacts if she says 'no'.<sup>31</sup>

Nineteen-year-old Emanuel described other 'traps' that girls could set for boys whom they suspected of being insincere:

For the first time I meet a girl, I use sweet words. I will tell the truth to the girl, because the girl may set traps for me to see if I am really sincere. [Interviewer: What traps?] The girl tries to find out if the boy really loves her or not. The girl looks at the way the man talks, and asks others if he has a girlfriend already...<sup>32</sup>

Emanuel's statements here refer to the affective labour that poor men perceive they must carry out through 'sweet words' and 'truth' when they cannot attract girls through long-term provision or expensive gifts. Whereas Haram (2004:221) reports that men among the Meru of northern Tanzania rarely spoke of searching for intimacy, faithfulness and equality, chronically poor men in Dar es Salaam have little alternative but to offer women something they may not find from wealthier men. According to 26-year-old Ahmed, 'I never thought to give a woman any kind of gift, I try to persuade her through good language and beautiful words – this is my gift. Because she will have already received a lot of gifts from different persons.'<sup>33</sup> Sixteen-year-old Saidi also described this strategy when I asked him what are the best gifts that a boy can give a girl:

When [boys] see the girl, they go to her and say, 'you know, I love you from the bottom of my heart'. When I see you, I feel distressed. So please, be with me.' If the girl stays quiet, he continues, 'you know what, I'm not able to sleep because of you, and if I do sleep, I dream of you.'<sup>34</sup>

Young women, however, tended to be skeptical of whether such discourses of romantic love signaled that the male partner was ready to invest in the relationship over the long term. As fifteen-year-old Fatima<sup>35</sup> explained laughingly, 'men come with sweet words, but they are making empty promises and lying [...].' Several female interviewees explained that they sought additional evidence of commitment beyond gifts and sweet words, for instance that the man would be willing to present himself to her family, a sign of long-term

commitment to providing for her. As 25-year-old Safiya explained, ‘Love is not some guy on the road saying he loves you, he must know your family and you must know his family, or at least it helps.’<sup>36</sup>

If the first stage of bargaining over the initial sexual contact is successfully negotiated, the next step is determining whether or not the partner is ‘serious’, meaning that both men and women watch closely for signs that the other is trustworthy and committed to monogamy.<sup>37</sup> For female interviewees, ‘seriousness’ meant planning a future together. For male interviewees, seriousness meant that the female partner was not just using him for his money but that she actually cared for him. For both men and women, ‘planning a future together’ was an important characteristic of a desirable relationship in which the transactional aspect of intimate relations was downplayed. According to Safiya,

most men like to have many girls but they don’t have any plans with them, he stays with you but goes to other girls, he might have three or four girls at the same time. A few boys or men want to have a girl *in order to plan for their future*, plan for a business together. [...] If he is your permanent boyfriend, it is not necessary to take money from him every day, *if you are planning a future together*.<sup>38</sup>

Twenty-year-old Ahmed was one of the few young men I interviewed who felt he had found a girlfriend with whom he could plan for the future, who was not expecting money from him:

It is possible to have a woman without money. I give my own example. I do not have a permanent job, I might do odd day jobs. My girlfriend does not ask me for money because her parents give her money. She told me not to make a great effort on her behalf. I like it because I have never found a woman like that before. She is supportive, *with good plans for the future*. She is different from other girls. Nowadays things are changing. If you don’t have money, you are nothing. And the young [girls] are looking for the [men] with money.<sup>39</sup>

### **‘True Love’ versus *Tamaa***

From men’s interviews regarding transactional intimacy emerges a perception of male providership as hierarchically organized. At the top of this hierarchy, the poor youth I interviewed see rich men as using their disposable wealth to attract women by purchasing for them the *non-necessities* of a middle-class consumer lifestyle such as cosmetics, jewelry, expensive clothing, mobile phones, and visits to the hair salon.<sup>40</sup> This type of providership was beyond the means of most men I interviewed. At the bottom of the

hierarchy, by contrast, the poorest men were described as expected to provide – to the extent that they were able – only for a woman’s most *basic needs*. At this most basic level of providership, the female partner’s most pressing ‘small problems’ are solved, but the role of the money given to her is played down.

At this lowest level of providership, chronically poor men and women tended to view their possibilities for agency differently. Most women considered themselves to have few options when it came to their economic dependency on men and presented themselves as victims of transactional intimacy. This perception was motivated *not* by the fact that they were expected to provide sex in return for money or goods,<sup>41</sup> but from a sense of injustice that the male partner did not provide as expected and thus did not fulfill his end of the bargain. The women I interviewed did not necessarily experience male provision by poorer men as empowering, as 29-year-old Lidya explained:

Here in [this neighborhood], there are few men who have enough money, so they use their money to cheat the girls. They try to engage in sexual relations with them, but they don’t have enough money to provide for them. To get the men who have the money, it is up to God. Otherwise, you cannot find them. You might meet a man with money in a bar, while travelling somewhere, if God wills it.<sup>42</sup>

Men, on the other hand, viewed female partners as possessing considerable agency within relationships. When I asked 30-year-old John whether love was possible without money, he responded that it was very rare, explaining, ‘when the woman or girl loves the man, then it is possible. The one who can decide about this is the woman or girl.’<sup>43</sup> Benjamin and William described in a similar vein:

If you have a girlfriend who truly loves you, she can love you without money. She shares your ideas. She doesn’t ask for money. The boy can provide money for basic clothes and food, but not as a means of maintaining the relationship. But nowadays many girls prefer men with money. They are in love with money.<sup>44</sup>

The girl might accept the guy who has no money, thinking that tomorrow they might find money to meet the girl’s needs. [...] The girl is the one who decides to reject him because he has no money . It is the girl’s decision.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas the man – regardless of his socio-economic position – was expected to give all he could to his girlfriend or wife, the female partner was thus seen to have the power to decide which level of providership she was willing to settle for: mere provision of basic needs or social status through financial support from a wealthier man.

In navigating the broad and murky semantic fields of love and intimacy in Tanzanian culture, one concept frequently used by my interviewees was *tamaa*, functioning both as a noun and a verb and denoting lust, greed, envy, excessive desire, and a readiness to obtain desired things through means not considered socially acceptable (see Setel 1999; Wamoyi et. al. 2010:8; Plummer & Wight 2011:204–205).<sup>46</sup> Although *tamaa* was described as positive when it motivated a person to struggle diligently toward his/her goal,<sup>47</sup> it became negative when someone sought to take ‘a shortcut’ or the ‘easy way out’. In reference to intimate relations, the *tamaa* of both men and women was always depicted negatively.

Interviewees reported that some girls begin sexual activity already before puberty, between the ages of nine and twelve. When asked why, the typical answer was that girls were motivated by either poverty or *tamaa*. Whereas monogamy represented the cultural ideal, *tamaa* was seen by interviewees to be what motivated people to seek multiple partners. Particularly in speaking of the money and expensive gifts offered to women by wealthy men, interviewees described both the man and woman as motivated by *tamaa* rather than love. The ideal relationship, by contrast, was one which lacked *tamaa*: a man without *tamaa* remains faithful to his long-term partner and does not seek the sexual variety which would divert his resources away from her, and women without *tamaa* do not covet the fine clothes and other expensive goods that would put a strain on their male partner’s pocketbook.

Interviewees repeatedly remarked that *tamaa* was highly prevalent among young girls and was reinforced by peer pressure, as comments by 15-year-old Fatima and 19-year-old Faiza illustrate:

When the girls sit together and talk, one might say, ‘I have a very rich man, he gives me lots of things, why don’t you find one?’ This has to do with *tamaa*, because the girl thinks that she should look like her friends, dress like them.<sup>48</sup>

Nowadays the young girls go out with men as old as their fathers, a poor girl might have girlfriends in a bad group who say, ‘do you see my blouse, it’s like Oprah’s!’ Then the poor girl follows them to clubs to meet old men. And the girl sees that it is true, she can get what she wants. Girls have *tamaa*.<sup>49</sup>

*Tamaa* was blamed for inspiring a version of love in intimate relations that was too closely linked to material interest. As thirteen-year-old Mwajuma explained, it is not possible for there to be love without money ‘because most girls “*tamaa*”’.<sup>50</sup> Young women described how they were repeatedly taught to reject *tamaa* by ‘everyone’. This included teachers at

school and the madrasa,<sup>51</sup> and other women – mothers, grandmothers, and female elders, particularly in the context of traditional puberty rites (*unyago*) still undergone by some girls in the neighborhoods I studied. Both boys and girls were urged to ‘control’ their *tamaa* and train themselves in a different kind of affect behavior, one characterized by modesty, self-respect, diligence, and willingness to take the hard but socially acceptable road to fulfilling one’s aspirations. As Rehema explained, ‘If you want to stop *tamaa*, you can. You can talk to your heart and say “from now on, I don’t want *tamaa*. I want to struggle with my life.”’<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, some women argued that their capacity to reject *tamaa* was constrained by poverty:

We don’t know how to escape *tamaa*, this is because our life depends on men. They come to you and lie to you and get you pregnant and go away. We do that because we need money. And that is how we raise our children, by using the money of the men.<sup>53</sup>

In the context of the affective entanglement between love and money, the notion of morally objectionable *tamaa* was useful for teasing apart different types of love and evaluating them according to their relationship to material gain. Aziza, aged 28, used *tamaa* to distinguish between the concepts of love attached to the two different levels of male providership in transactional intimacy:

Years ago, our grandparents could love each other without money. But nowadays, things have changed. If you have a boyfriend who is poor, he doesn’t have anything, but he loves you from the bottom of his heart. And you love him too. But you get another man who is rich, he has a lot of money. Do you love him because he has a lot of money? If yes, that is *tamaa*. Nowadays, a lot of *tamaa* is taking place...<sup>54</sup>

Here Aziza identifies *tamaa* as equivalent to an inferior form of love, one expressed toward a rich man on the basis of his ability to provide, whereas the ‘true love’ engaged in by poor lovers is presented as both authentic and linked to a traditional, simpler, uncommodified past (see also Setel 1999:60, 70; Lange 2001:150). Sixteen-year-old Ephraim expressed a similar conception of ‘true love’ when he described the difficulties experienced by poor men who are unable to compete with wealthier men for women’s affections:

A lot of men here have been abandoned by their girlfriends because the girl does not have true love



(*mapenzi yaukweli*), so the men have psychological problems, thinking about that situation.

[Interviewer: What does it mean, the girls don't have true love?] Maybe she has stayed with the man for a long time, but he is poor. So when she gets another man who is rich, she abandons the first one.<sup>55</sup>

In their statements, both Aziza and Ephraim make it clear that it is the woman in the relationship who must choose between an inferior and superior form of love by choosing which man will be her partner. The only way in which the practice of 'true love' or 'loving someone from the bottom of one's heart' was seen to be possible in a relationship was if the female partner could reject or control the *tamaa* that motivated her to perceive 'love' as linked primarily to male provision of non-necessities. In these discourses, the materially inferior provider love offered by the poorest men was transformed into a more ethical and desirable form of affect by linking it to notions of romantic love in which partners were seen to share responsibility for building a joint future based on bonds of affection and caring. This form of intimacy required that the female partner be willing to be patient and tolerant at times when her male partner might not have any money to give her, as 20-year-old Asha explained:

If he does not have a job or money, sometimes the girl likes the boy from the bottom of her heart. She doesn't want money from him, she loves the boy. But sometimes, if he does not have money, the relationship ends. In this case, she didn't love him from the beginning. But the girl who loves him will be tolerant.<sup>56</sup>

In these discourses, the choice of 'true love' decoupled from self-interest becomes a moral ideal whose fulfilment becomes the responsibility of the female partner. In real life, however, a relationship with a man who is barely able to provide is not necessarily an option for poor women with few opportunities for independent livelihoods.

## Conclusions

In answering the question of who, ultimately, has power in transactional intimacy, attention must be paid to the intersections between gendered and socio-economic power. Men may have greater access to income than do women, and some women may see

themselves as helpless to prevent poor men from communicating a misleading affect and ‘cheating’ them out of even the barest provision they see as their rightful due. Chronically poor men, though, experience themselves as deeply disempowered in comparison to wealthier men, since they are unable to embody a positive masculine identity or display to female partners a convincing affect of love through based on material provision. Whereas rich men are seen to use their disposable wealth to lure women into relationships, a man in extreme poverty who is unable to provide adequately for his wife or girlfriend must be willing to share her with other men if he wishes to preserve even the partial semblance of masculine provider.

In urban Tanzania, women’s economic dependence on men and the commoditization of intimate relations thus co-exist in uneasy tension with the cultural privileging of monogamous forms of intimacy, and this tension has given rise to a deep distrust that one’s partner may seek additional partners outside the relationship. Men’s and women’s perceptions of agency, responsibility and blame in transactional intimacy tend to diverge, with men and women viewing their own behavior in the different terms that the opposite sex does. Women tend to see themselves as victims of men’s exploitation, lust, and neglect, whereas men view women’s behavior as opportunistic and themselves as diligent, self-sacrificing and victimized by women’s lack of fidelity and ‘true love’. Both discourses serve as useful strategies to win sympathy and affection from partners in transactional intimacy, but they also point to the difficulty of establishing trust and a baseline for negotiations. In order to frame the negotiations to their advantage, poor men seeking heterosexual intimacy challenge the socio-economic advantages of wealthier men by reinterpreting the latter’s providership as morally questionable and exploitative, and by defending their own inability to provide as the foundation for a less commoditized and more egalitarian relationship. They also frame provision in terms of female choice: it is ultimately up to the female partner to choose the level of provision she will accept.

The notion of a less materially motivated, more future-oriented relationship seems to hold appeal for poor women, who, while they may resent the fact that poor men often cannot fulfill their end of the transactional intimacy bargain, also have sympathy for poor men’s claims that wealthy men and their female partners are motivated by *tamaa* rather than love.

Thus whereas women in Sub-Saharan Africa have been seen by some researchers as internalizing discourses of romantic love in order to negotiate for more equitable and intimate marriage relations and gain greater autonomy from their own and their husbands’

extended families, the chronically poor men in my study have appropriated discourses of romantic love to bolster their own claims to intimacy and strengthen their own position vis-à-vis wealthier men. Regardless of gender, interviewees from the neighborhoods I studied sought to portray men's meagre providership in a positive light, invoking an exemplary form of affect in which both partners should reject *tamaa* and choose a monogamous 'true love' free from material interests. Yet because women are acknowledged to have fewer economic opportunities and therefore more to lose from tolerating the inadequate provision offered by poor men, both parties understand that women are unlikely to accept men's promise of love and commitment at face value. In a two-phase process during which the terms of the relationship are negotiated, partners attempt to determine each other's level of commitment and lay traps for each other to judge the true intentions behind the affective projection of 'love'. In a youthscape plagued by economic insecurity and a profound lack of trust between partners, young men and women have thus devised tactics for both navigating the risks of transactional intimacy and assessing the morality of affect within it.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I conducted interviews in two adjacent neighborhoods (subwards, *mtaa*) within Tanzania's most populous city, Dar es Salaam. These two subwards are located roughly five kilometres from the centre of Dar es Salaam and are home to some of the worst conditions in the city, meeting the UN-Habitat's (2010: 14–15) criteria of a slum. They are not identified here in order to preserve the anonymity of their residents.

Information was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with 166 persons aged 13 to 35, mostly in groups of two or three persons, during six field visits between 2010 and 2015. Seventy-three per cent of the interviewees were women, and 27% men. More women were interviewed due to the fact that women were easier to reach, being at home at least part of the day, unlike men who were generally outside the neighborhood seeking work or working at day jobs in mainly construction, repair, transportation or informal vending. Eighty-three per cent of those interviewed were Muslim, while 17% were Christian, a distribution which reflects the demographics of Dar es Salaam in general. Interviewees represented 32 different ethnic groups. In terms of educational level achieved, 65% of my interviewees had only a primary education (age 7–14) or less. Interviews were conducted primarily in Swahili with the assistance of two female interpreters. Instead of asking interviewees directly about their sexual activities, I used the method of *third-person elicitation*, in which interviewees were asked to talk about what *others do*, what *other people* in their neighborhood say or believe. Some interviewees nevertheless described their own personal experiences in the interviews. The primary method of data analysis employed in this study was contextualized thematic analysis.

<sup>2</sup> The category of 'youth' is a problematic one in the neighborhoods I study, since it implies a culturally-recognized and lengthy period of adolescence prior to the responsibilities of adulthood. From interviews it is clear that while some families allow their children a period of adolescent economic dependency (strongly corresponding to whether their child is a student in secondary school from approximately age 14–18, and whether parents can pay secondary school fees), for other families, children are expected to be self-sufficient adults when they leave primary school (ages 14–15), and to either marry or find their own source of livelihood, including 'boyfriends' (see also Plummer & Wight 2011:134, 203).

<sup>3</sup> MacPherson et. al. 2012. For a more fine-grained distinction among the different practices comprising the continuum of transactional intimacy in northern Tanzania, see Setel 1999: 104:108. See also Swidler and Watkins 2007; Maganja et al. 2007; Luke 2005; Hunter 2002, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> I define the chronically poor as those who have suffered from long periods of material want and who are unable, due to lack of education and other social and economic capital, to benefit from economic

growth or development efforts.

<sup>5</sup> See also Plummer & Wight 2011:378.

<sup>6</sup> In 1978, 84% of men in Dar es Salaam had formal employment, but in the 1980s large numbers of workers lost their jobs and by the early 2000s only a small fraction were employed in the formal sector (Silberschmidt 2004:237).

<sup>7</sup> See Helle-Valle & Talle 2000:193; Haram 2004; Groes-Green 2011, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Hunter 2002; Luke & Kurz 2002; Luke 2005; Swidler and Watkins 2007; Maganja et al. 2007; Leclerc-Madlala 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Bhana and Pattman 2011: 965; see also Cole & Thomas 2009:24; Haram 2004:22; Chant & Evans 2010:359.

<sup>10</sup> It is not clear how much Richard's and Rydnyckyj's concept of affect owes to the work of affect theorists drawing on neuroscientific research, but here I define affect as being *social* and at least partly *intentional* rather than a non-conscious experience or reflex-like response (see Leys 2011).

<sup>11</sup> See Heald 1995:134.

<sup>12</sup> There is still little research on the history of transactional sexual relations among the youth in Tanzania, but such relations were already a focus of concern among Tanzanian researchers by the late 1980s (Rwebangira 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Cole & Thomas 2009; Hunter 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Also Silberschmidt 2004:237.

<sup>15</sup> Robert, 24-year-old Christian male, no children, secondary school education, Gogo ethnic group. All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of interviewees.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel, 27-year-old Christian male, no children, secondary school education, Gogo ethnic group.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph, 23-year-old Christian male, no children, secondary school education, Chagga ethnic group.

<sup>18</sup> Jalil, 27-year-old Muslim male, 1 child, primary school education. Ndegereko ethnic group.

<sup>19</sup> Mwanaisha, 26-year-old Muslim female, three children, primary school education, Pare ethnic group.

<sup>20</sup> Hassan, 16-year-old Muslim male, no children, secondary school student, Ngindo ethnic group.

<sup>21</sup> See Hunter 2010:166.

<sup>22</sup> Yusuf, 24-year-old Muslim male, no children, primary school education, Kwele ethnic group.

<sup>23</sup> See note 14.

<sup>24</sup> According to earlier cultural norms in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, marriage was seen as a natural life event following puberty (see Bledsoe & Cohen 1993; Plummer & Wight 2011:275).

<sup>25</sup> See also Maganja et al. (2007) for similar descriptions of mistrust among sexual partners in Dar es Salaam.

<sup>26</sup> Lary et al.'s (2004:203) study of relationships in Dar es Salaam likewise describes a high incidence of reported infidelity and resulting mistrust among partners.

<sup>27</sup> Abdul, 31-year-old Muslim male, married with one child, primary school education, Makua ethnic group.

<sup>28</sup> Zena, 33-year-old Muslim female, mother of two children, primary school education, Manda ethnic group.

<sup>29</sup> Juma, 19-year-old Muslim male, no children, primary school education, Zaramo ethnic group.

<sup>30</sup> See note 24.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin, 25-year-old male who self-identified as both Christian and Muslim, two children, primary school, Kaguru ethnic group

<sup>32</sup> Emanuel, 19-year-old Muslim male, no children, secondary school education, Ngindo ethnic group.

<sup>33</sup> Ahmed, 26-year-old Muslim male, no children, primary school education, Bondei ethnic group.

<sup>34</sup> Saidi, 16-year-old Muslim male, no children, secondary school student, Luguru ethnic group.

<sup>35</sup> Fatima, 15-year-old Muslim female, no children, student in secondary school, Luguru ethnic group.

<sup>36</sup> Safiya, 25-year-old Muslim female, 1 child, primary school education, Zigua ethnic group, emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> Plummer & Wight (2011: 301–302) note that young persons in northern Tanzania expect fidelity from their partners but not necessarily from themselves.

<sup>38</sup> Emphasis mine. See note 32.

<sup>39</sup> Emphasis mine. See note 30.

<sup>40</sup> From poor women's perspectives, however, these goods and services are not necessarily luxuries. Instead, they are necessary in a cultural context in which a sophisticated personal appearance is needed to attract male partners with money. Men I interviewed admitted that they prefer – and are more likely to offer gifts to – women who are well-groomed (also Maganja et al. 2007; Wamoyi et al. 2010:11).

<sup>41</sup> According to Plummer & Wight (2011:134), none of the women interviewed in their large-scale study in northern Tanzania considered material exchange for sex problematic in itself, and my own data supports this conclusion.

<sup>42</sup> Lidya, 29-year-old Christian female, 2 children, primary school education, Pogolo ethnic group.

<sup>43</sup> John, 30-year-old Christian male, 1 child, secondary school education, Gogo ethnic group.

<sup>44</sup> See note 28.

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<sup>45</sup> William, 21-year-old Christian male, no children, secondary school education plus vocational training, Haya ethnic group.

<sup>46</sup> Philip Setel (1999:59) links *tamaa* among the Chagga in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania to the notion of bad moral character (*tabia mbaya*). In my interview data, however, informants tended to externalize the causes of *tamaa*, explaining it instead as a response to the 'hard life' (*maisha magumu*, also mentioned by Setel 1999:76) lived by those in poverty and which is beyond their control.

<sup>47</sup> See also Setel 1999:100.

<sup>48</sup> See note 32.

<sup>49</sup> Faiza, 19-year-old Muslim female, no children, 2 years of secondary school, Zigua ethnic group.

<sup>50</sup> Mwajuma, 13-year-old Muslim female, student in secondary school, Kwele ethnic group. Mwajuma requested to be interviewed, and permission was obtained from her mother.

<sup>51</sup> A local Islamic school.

<sup>52</sup> Rehema, 30-year-old Muslim female, unmarried mother of two children, secondary school education.

<sup>53</sup> Jamila, 29-year-old Muslim female, one child, no education, Bondei ethnic group.

<sup>54</sup> Aziza, 28-year-old Muslim female, 2 children, 3 years of secondary school, Pare ethnic group.

<sup>55</sup> Efraim, 16-year-old Muslim male, no children, secondary school student, Pogolo ethnic group.

<sup>56</sup> Asha, 20-year-old Muslim female, no children, secondary school education, Ngindo ethnic group.



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