



# Regulating Romance: Youth Love Letters, Moral Anxiety, and Intervention in Uganda's Time of AIDS

By Shanti Parikh

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Drawing on ten years of ethnographic research, two hundred fifty interviews, and over three hundred youth love letters, author Shanti Parikh uses lively vignettes to provide a rare window into young people's heterosexual desires and practices in Uganda. In chapters entitled "Unbreak my heart," "I miss you like a desert missing rain," and "You're just playing with my head," she invites readers into the world of secret longings, disappointments, and anxieties of young Ugandans as they grapple with everyday difficulties while creatively imagining romantic futures and possibilities.

Parikh also examines the unintended consequences of Uganda's aggressive HIV campaigns that thrust sexuality and anxieties about it into the public sphere. In a context of economic precarity and generational tension that constantly complicates young people's notions of consumption-based romance, communities experience the dilemmas of protecting and policing young people from reputational and health dangers of sexual activity. "They arrested me for loving a school girl" is the title of a chapter on controlling delinquent daughters and punishing defiant boyfriends for attempting to undermine patriarchal authority by asserting their adolescent romantic agency. Sex education programs struggle between risk and pleasure amidst morally charged debates among international donors and community elders, transforming the youthful female body into a platform for public critique and concern. The many sides of this research constitute an eloquently executed critical anthropology of intervention.

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## **Regulating Romance: Youth Love Letters, Moral Anxiety, and Intervention in Uganda's Time of AIDS** By Shanti Parikh Bibliography

- Rank: #331280 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-04-11
- Released on: 2016-03-30
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Shanti Parikh's exceptional new book, *Regulating Romance*, makes a major contribution to the study of the interconnections between desire and regulation by uncovering the political economy of love among young people in Uganda. The eloquently written book gives us new hope, documenting the diverse ways in which both desire and love are able to survive (and often triumph), even in the midst of a terrible epidemic, a moral battleground of conflicting cultural and religious ideologies, and the devastating effects of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, as played out in the lived experience of Ugandan youth."

--**Richard G. Parker**, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, editor-in-chief of *Global Public Health*

"*Regulating Romance* is a remarkable exploration of the tension between attempts to control young people and their own efforts to work out their romantic and sexual lives. Shanti Parikh's extraordinary collection of love letters and her careful analysis of what they are really about constitute an original insight into the life concerns of Ugandan youth. The wonderful illustrations are a bonus."

--**Susan Reynolds Whyte**, University of Copenhagen, editor of *Second Chances: Surviving AIDS in Uganda*

"*Regulating Romance* offers an incisive analysis of love, sex, and intimate relations in the context of economic uncertainty, competing moral structures, and the HIV epidemic in Uganda. Parikh vividly demonstrates the cruel optimism experienced by young people who are drawn to ideals of consumer romance that they can rarely, if ever, achieve. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in gender, sexuality, capitalism, and youth."

--**Jennifer Cole**, author of *Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar*

#### About the Author

**Shanti Parikh**, Associate Professor of Anthropology and African & African American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, is coauthor of *The Secret: Love, Marriage, and HIV* (also published by Vanderbilt).

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