

BOOK REVIEWS

ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

Frederick Klaits. *Death in a Church of Life: Moral Passion During Botswana's Time of AIDS.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. 352 pp. \$24.95. Paper. \$60.00. Cloth. Available in E-book (\$20.00) and Kindle (\$9.99).

Until now, HIV/AIDS has been studied primarily as a source of jealousy, fear, accusation, immiseration, and death. In this rich ethnography, Frederick Klaits explores HIV/AIDS as a site of love, caring, and attention to the well-being of others. While never ignoring the damage done by the disease or the socioeconomic inequalities within which it is often acquired and managed, Klaits directs our attention to the specific ways in which people are brought together in communities of caring.

Klaits bases his study on a small Apostolic church he calls the Baitshepi Church and its charismatic leader, MmaMaipelo (the names are pseudonyms), in a historically poor neighborhood of Gaborone, Botswana, where he has conducted research since the early 1990s. While MmaMaipelo's messages about dealing with disease and social discord are in some ways idiosyncratic, as Klaits makes clear, they also reflect ideas about community and intersubjectivity that are shared broadly in Botswana. Klaits provides a thick ethnographic account of how people in Botswana pay attention to the ways that emotions such as jealousy, scorn, anger, desire, and love link people, both emotionally and physically, and therefore make the well-being of the individual a communal concern. Such emotions not only shape the actions that people take toward one another, but also link their internal and, for church members, spiritual states. Scorn or jealousy, for example, may prompt someone to refuse food, lodging, or other aid, and therefore can have a direct bearing on physical health. Love is also an emotion that affects the well-being of individuals but also radiates outward to unite a community in bonds of caring and goodwill. Klaits includes much of MmaMaipelo's instruction about how to foster love; her voice is strong in the book, even as Klaits explains and contextualizes her words, both the biblical verses she recites and her exegesis of them. Klaits's account also builds upon the work of others in Botswana and elsewhere, and he applies their insights to his examination of funerals, residential arrangements, suffering, and disease. His account provides important new ideas about why people do, or do not,

speak of HIV/AIDS, why they seek or do not seek testing, and the impact of free antiretroviral therapies.

Klaitz focuses on what he calls “housing activities,” which refer broadly to domestic activities fostered not only by an individual household but also by the church, and that include the provision of shelter, clothing, and facilities for personal hygiene, and emotional caring and encouragement. According to MmaMaipelo’s teachings, “faith”—*tumelo*, which also means “to agree”—involves not so much belief, but rather accepting and acting upon the implications of their communal life. The church, unlike many others in Botswana, eschews accusatory and divisive practices such as divination, emphasizing instead the need to foster love—even as many of the members are alienated from their families or embroiled in complex family disputes. In this sense the book provides an antidote to the many ethnographies that describe the tensions and antagonisms that often characterize relationships between family members, spouses, neighbors, and coworkers in Botswana.

The book is written in a clear and engaging style, with a wealth of details that build upon one another, and it is filled with complex and often heart-wrenching portraits of people struggling to maintain dignity, civility, and love in a time of frequent death. Many of the endnotes are illuminating in and of themselves, and an “audio annex” of a young woman’s preaching at a funeral is available on-line at the University of California Press Web site. This is a book that would work well in the classroom, and it enlarges our understanding of how people nurture loving relationships in the context of AIDS.

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