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Translated by Allison Brown

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Love and Sex—Just a Feeling?

Love. Sex. Some people talk about it all the time. Others don't talk about it at all. Some act as if it were not at all important. And for some it is the most important thing in the world.

Love.

Between parents and children. Between siblings. Between a man and a woman. This exists.

But so does: Between rich and poor, between black and white, between Christians and Muslims, between young and old, between people from different countries, between women, between men, between disabled people, between disabled and non-disabled people, between weak and strong. Between you and me.

Sex.

Possible: Only within marriage. Only between lovers. Only with one partner.

But also possible: Before marriage. With several partners. Without love, just for pleasure. With love and pleasure. And even this too: With love but no pleasure. For money, with money, and without money. Between a man in love and a woman who isn't—or vice versa. As a girl who would rather be a boy, or as a boy who would rather be a girl. In old age. Between children. In freedom or as a prisoner. By yourself. With many others. At home or abroad. Sometimes a lot and sometimes a little. Or not at all. With me—and with you.

All of this exists and much much more. So many emotions, so many hopes, so many disappointments. We don't know much about a lot of this or maybe have never heard of some of it at all. We might never see or experience it personally. Because all cultures and societies have rules, conscious and unconscious, most of which are learned at a very early age.

Whether it is written down in law, conveyed through stares or turning away, hidden or in garish ads, whether it is broached openly or under threat of a beating, shame, or worse: Wherever people live or have lived, there are certain values that attempt to regulate our most tender longings and sexual fantasies.

These mores are well-known, and often there are not even all that many of them. They are deliberately kept clear-cut, so everyone knows what they are supposed to abide by: What

is right and what is wrong; what is beautiful and what is ugly. So some can be rewarded and others punished. So much happiness. And so much misery.

In contrast to this, the biological facts about love and sex are called the “facts of life” or “the birds and the bees” and are taught in biology books or even in a special subject called sex education. Without a doubt it is important to be well-informed—about sperm ejaculation and the erection of the penis, or about the growth of breasts and the start of menstruation. Also how you can protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases, and—in a worst-case scenario—how to recognize them; or how to avoid pregnancy by using contraceptives. There are meanwhile a multitude of excellent reference books (with real photographs instead of just multi-colored diagrams, like they used to have) and of course the Internet, with some good and some bad Web sites on love and sex.

That is why this book is not about offering yet more information on the subject, but instead about helping readers to better understand the many concepts, images, and claims dealing with love and sex. Where and when did they come from? How did people used to think and feel? Why was there so little talk and so many lies about love and sex? How can I set out to discover my own truth—my own story—about love and sex? How can I learn to decide who I am or would like to be, despite the confusing diversity of seemingly boundless freedom and arousing fantasies?

It is no wonder that the story of love and sex is often also a story of the first time: the first time includes a hunch about the many future times that are hoped for or which seem totally out of the question. Both of these possibilities—which can also occur simultaneously—lead to tension, either hopeful or fearful tension. The heart pounds, since the first time is the key to something from which you were previously excluded and from which you can guess that it will shake up the very foundations of your life, but might also satisfy the deepest of longings. And it definitely will not leave you cold. So much happiness. And so much misery.

The story of love and sex is also a story of terror, of excluding the disabled, of discrimination against various minorities, of public executions of witches and homosexuals, of persecution and manslaughter, of murder and suicide, of the worst humiliation and loneliness, of being alone and abandoned.

The story of love and sex, however, is always also a story of humanity, of the apparently indestructible longing for closeness, recognition, becoming one with someone, but also for the ability to let go, for holding on and being held. It is the story of hope for one’s personal happiness, even if reality stands so powerfully in the way.

Erich Fried on Love and Happiness

As a young Jew, the poet Erich Fried (1921–1988) was forced to flee his Austrian homeland during the Nazi era. He spent the rest of his life in England. One of his final poems was entitled, “Before I die,”¹ in which he wrote:

Before I die
to speak once more
of love
that some may yet say:
It existed
it must exist

To speak once more
of the joy of the hope of joy
that some may yet ask:
What was that?
When will it come again?

The reality of human love and sexuality is more diverse than it is or ever was in all the mores and regulations of all time and in all the countries of the world. Our fantasies and longings are more colorful than all the rules. They are more wild; they are more profound; they are more calm; they are more tender. They can be more egotistical or selfless, more uplifting or painful. They let us become human, human with all our weaknesses and strengths. Our conscious or unconscious way of dealing with love and sex contributes largely to letting each one of us become a unique individual.

It shapes you to be the person you are today, and the person you might become tomorrow. The better you understand yourself, the more you can understand others. And the less you will have to struggle against them.

That is anything but simple. Millions of people tend instead to suffer, some for their whole lives. They do without, become resigned and finally bitter, or they even die rather than get involved with trying, patiently and sometimes painfully, to understand the contradictory and nonconforming sides of themselves and others.

¹ See: <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=12451> (retrieved February 6, 2008); *Modern Poetry in Translation*, new series, no. 17, 2001, p. 137, translated by Tim Collard.

Thando M., 16 years old, a report from South Africa

Thando lives in a township, an impoverished settlement at the outskirts of Cape Town.² Since her mother died as a consequence of AIDS, she has been taking care of herself and her three younger siblings. The youngest sister, Nelisa, just turned two and is also HIV positive. Thando reported:

There is a billboard on the main street, supposedly to prevent AIDS. It shows a boy and a girl my age, maybe a little older, who are embracing and smiling at each other. Underneath it says, in English and Xhosa, "We love life." That's all. This sign makes me sad and furious.

Why doesn't the sign say: I am a boy and I will use a condom when I have sex with my girlfriend for the first time. Or: I am a girl and I will be strong and say "no" if the boy pressures me to have sex and I don't want to, and certainly not without a condom. So all it says is "We love life," like in any random advertisement for toothpaste or cars or clothing.

So you're supposed to think your part. And the two on the sign? Maybe they are thinking, since like most people they egotistically love their own life: I am the boy and if I don't lay the girl then I won't be respected by my pals. They've been thinking for a while that I am either gay or a little slow. And the girl is thinking: I love life and am sick and tired of the poverty in our township. This guy has a car and promised to stay with me and even to buy me a cell phone for my birthday. For sure nothing will happen just this one time.

Everyone acts as if they are doing the right thing, but no one, or else just very few, really are. Here in South Africa around 800 people die each day from AIDS, and most of them are young. It is because people don't talk honestly and respectfully with each other, but instead just grin stupidly like on the billboard.

When my mother died, suddenly there was no one around any more. No one wanted anything to do with her and with us, because it was supposedly her own fault that she got infected. And so nothing ever changes. No one says the truth. No one learns how to talk honestly with each other.

² Interview with the author, Cape Town 2006.

Yes, I would also like to have a boyfriend who loves me. But not just some idiot. No one who just thinks of himself. Someone who understands that I would never leave little Nelisa in the lurch.”

The story of love and sex is also the story of the oppression of one gender by the other, throughout most epochs in history and many countries and cultures today. If one were to consolidate the entire history of humankind from the first primitive humans to today into a single day, then the struggle of women for equal rights would have started a mere two seconds before midnight.

In most countries and cultures, girls and women are still treated as second-class citizens. They have little or no rights, receive lower or no wages for their work, and they enjoy less or no education and training. And where women’s rights are not respected, the rights of children, adolescents, and sexual minorities are generally disregarded as well.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 100 million young women, especially in African and Arab countries, experience so-called female circumcision. Their vaginas are sewn shut or the clitoris is removed; this genital mutilation makes it impossible for them to experience any form of sexual satisfaction their whole lives. In most European countries and the United States, women have been able to vote or hold elected office for less than a century (in Germany and Austria since 1918, in the United States since 1920, in Great Britain since 1928, in France since 1944, and in Switzerland women were not enfranchised until 1971).

People who are not at all interested in equal rights never tire of emphasizing the “natural differences” between men and women, as if that would justify the oppression of half of humanity.

Simone de Beauvoir published her book *The Second Sex* in France in 1949, when she was 41 years old.

French philosopher, writer, and women’s rights activist Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) was barely 35 years old when she was dismissed from her teaching position in 1943 in Paris. She had been charged with “the seduction of minor girls,” but behind this were in fact her superiors who had kowtowed to the German occupation forces during the Second World War. They were angry that Simone de Beauvoir publicly defended the relationship between a schoolgirl and a Spanish Jew.

That same year she decided to become a writer and she published her first novel. She became world famous in 1949 with the publication of the non-fiction book *The Second Sex* (French *Le deuxième sexe*), in which she analyzed women's oppression over centuries. She came to the conclusion that women must fight for equal rights for themselves, comparing women's emancipation from men with the liberation struggles of people of color against the domination of whites. The most well-known sentence in her book is "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

But love can be so wonderful. And sex. To feel the body of another person, so close, so warm, so exciting, so calming. A thousand and one nights. A thousand and one fantasies and realities. People have told each other love stories ever since there has been language. Literature, music, painting, sculpture, theater, ballet ... the greatest works have often been inspired by personal experiences of love and sex by the respective artists.

Where love exists, wisdom can grow, which is able to break rules and build bridges. It can bring understanding for things previously considered foreign. If feelings of love are disappointed, however, it can also trigger hatred, envy, and destruction.

And yet people have always dreamed of simple love. In paradise. On a deserted South Sea island. As if it were possible to find places where no rules and no conventions apply and where every individual could reinvent love and sex as he or she wishes. That is perhaps true to some extent. Many people who have just fallen in love feel like they are "in seventh heaven," and they don't care at all where this heaven actually is. Maybe it is in each and every one of us, if we manage to love another person and to be loved in return.

This book does not offer any new or particularly liberal rules. The concept of freedom has been incredibly misused, especially but not only in advertising and the media. And yet it is true that love cannot exist without freedom. It cannot be forced through money or power or even death. It can be tricked or feigned, but then it is not love anymore.

This story of love and sex tries to listen to the manifold voices of past times and less known cultures. They can encourage us to find our own voice and to express ourselves, regardless of the hullabaloo that so often surrounds love and sex.

For now it cannot be more than attempts. Maybe humanity will someday be sophisticated and open enough to write an unprejudiced story of human love and sexuality. We humans of today—from the small islands of our self-designed normalcies—are still light years away from making any conclusive judgments about our own or others' sexualities. But we can try to listen and to come closer. No matter how far away it seems to be at first glance.

Mohammed Hafiz wrote about love in 1360 in Persia

The poet Mohammed Hafiz (1320–1389), still today one of the most-read authors in Iran, wrote this about his ideal of love a good six hundred years ago:³

It happens all the time in heaven,
And some day it will begin to happen again on earth—
That men and women who are married,
And men and men who are Lovers,
And women and women who give each other Light,
Often will get down on their knees
And while so tenderly holding their lover's hand,
With tears in their eyes, will sincerely speak, saying,
"My dear, how can I be more loving to you;
How can I be more kind?"

I dedicate this book to a girl from Berlin and two boys from Iran, whose first times were marked by the most horrible loneliness and persecution—not in the Middle Ages or some other terrible era in history, but today. In our time, which those in the so-called West like to characterize as enlightened and humane, and which in many other parts of the world is considered wise and respectful of tradition.

We are only at the very beginning.

Cape Town, June 2007

Lutz van Dijk

³ From Mohammed Hafiz, "It happens all the time in heaven," in *The Subject Is Love: 60 Wild and Sweet Poems of Hafiz*, versions by Daniel Ladinsky (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Pumpkin House Press, 1996 [New York: Penguin, 2003]), 45. Recently there has been some controversy about the authenticity of Ladinsky's translations. Even earlier, the "sexualization of love" in Western translations has been criticized, with claims that Hafiz's concept of love would refer only to one's love of God, but never to sexual aspects of love. Even if that were the case, the poem cited here can perhaps nevertheless, or even precisely for that reason, stimulate interest in reading more of Hafiz, if possible in different translations, because only then will it be possible for people to draw their own conclusions.

Sex Tourism in the Countries of the South and the East

Traveling to foreign countries to experience sex that is more expensive, difficult to get, or even illegal in one's home country has only in recent decades become an option for people for whom the growing affluence in some regions of the world has now made it affordable. Sex tourists (mostly but not exclusively men) often come from the United States, Japan, Australia, England, France, Germany, Holland, and Austria.

Among their preferred destinations in Africa are: Kenya and Gambia, as well as some North African countries, and in Asia: Thailand, Bali, the Philippines, and, more recently, Cambodia. Destinations in Latin America include especially Brazil and the Caribbean islands of Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, more and more Western sex tourists also go to prostitutes in border regions in Poland and the Czech Republic.

As much as some proponents of long-distance sex trips describe the advantages of seemingly "freer sexuality" or the "special friendliness of the young girls" (or boys) in foreign countries, nothing can hide the fact that sex tourism is based on the poverty of the "beautiful, innocent, free, and friendly" people. They do not offer themselves and their bodies because they find the (often older) men so nice or even nicer than the local men. Instead, they hope it will offer them a way out of what is often intolerable hardship. There are some exceptions, in which vacation romances develop based on true affection, but these often serve only to prove the rule. In Bangkok, Thailand, for example, young girls are sold by their families to pimps for about 8000 bahts, equivalent to about 160 euros.

Although prostitution is officially prohibited in Thailand, police and sometimes even judges work hand in hand with brothel owners. The earnings of female and male prostitutes in Thailand make up roughly 15 percent of the national income. Up to thirty percent of the incomes of poor rural families are earned by mostly girls and women through sex work in the cities.

The United Nations children's organization UNICEF estimates that 3–4.6 million children and adolescents (under 18 years of age) worldwide are forced to work in red light districts. They are preferred not only especially by pedophilic sex tourists, but also by those who believe in the false notion that they cannot contract HIV/AIDS and other diseases from child prostitutes.

Through the efforts of various children's relief organizations (Misereor in Germany, for example, and terre des hommes), laws have since been passed in a number of European

countries that make child abuse a punishable offense also in vacation countries. The first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children took place in 1996 in Stockholm. Since then a special task force has been fighting child prostitution; it submits annual reports to the World Tourism Organization, which is working within its ranks to prohibit this kind of business.

It is obvious that sexual freedom of the wealthy cannot be enjoyed at the expense of the poor and especially the children. As long as the gap between poor and rich continues to grow in the world, the road toward protecting children will remain rough and rocky.

Maricella A., 13 years old, born on the island of Ponson, works as a prostitute in Cebu, Philippines. She made this report in 2000:⁴

“I was the seventh child in my family, born in a tiny village on the island on Ponson. When I was little I was allowed to take care of the three caribou, our buffaloes, along with my big brother Adolfo. Our father had long since left for Cebu to find work there as a dockworker. He rarely came home and when he did, he often fought with my mother, because there was never enough money. Adolfo became like a father to me even though he is only five years older than I am. He often went to school barefoot just so we younger kids could get something to eat. That’s how Adolfo was back then.

Then he suddenly had to leave school after an argument with a teacher. That made him very bitter. One evening he said to me, ‘Maricella, I’m going to look for Father. Will you come with me?’ I didn’t hesitate for a minute and just nodded. The next day we rode on my uncle’s truck to Kawit, where the boats were moored. Adolfo sold a knife he inherited from Grandfather, and he used the money to pay for our ferry tickets to Cebu. The crossing was terrible; the boat was overloaded with too many people and a storm during the night rocked the boat to and fro so much that I thought it would capsize and we would drown. But no one fell overboard, just some luggage and a goat that was not tied down properly.

In Cebu we spent more than a week looking for Father. No one seemed to know him. We slept in an empty shed near a container loader and ate scraps that we found around the passenger port. Once Adolfo found work for a day as a dockworker.

⁴ Interview with the author in Cebu, Philippines, in 2000, with linguistic assistance from a friend of Maricella

That evening we ate warm bread and we each had a piece of fried chicken. Adolfo met other men at work, whom he got together with again the next day. On the third evening he said to me, 'I have something for you.' Trusting him totally, I followed him as he climbed up a flight of stairs in a rundown hotel. There an older man gave him 200 pesos⁵ and Adolfo said to me, 'Be nice to the man. I'll wait outside for you.'

I had no idea what I should do and stood there nervously next to the closed door. Then the man said to me, 'It's all okay. Your brother has agreed to it.' He waved for me to come closer and took off the little clothing that I was wearing. I felt very ashamed as I stood there in front of him, but he kept saying, 'It's okay, it's okay.' Then he pushed me under a shower and rubbed me down with cheap soap. I let him move me around as if I were a doll. I wanted to call out to Adolfo for help, but I didn't have the courage. Finally he pushed me onto the bed and lay down on top of me. He was so heavy that I could hardly breathe. So heavy and so hard ... it hurt so much, but I didn't scream, not even once....

When he was finally done, he stayed lying there on the bed and said I should get dressed and disappear. I pulled on my tatty dress as fast as I could and ran out, down the stairs, until I finally saw Adolfo standing across the street. I ran over and just stared at him. He took me in his arms and said softly, 'We'll manage okay, Cellita!'

That was almost a year ago. Now I only see Adolfo every few weeks. I have to work for a friend of his, who has contact to some of the tourist hotels near the airport. I don't go to any old men anymore; instead, Peter—that's what he calls himself, so the tourists can remember his name—brings the men to us, a group of six to eight girls, two of whom are younger than I am. 'Peter will take care of you,' said Adolfo, when he first brought me to him. When I suddenly got a high fever two months ago, Peter actually did call a doctor for me, who examined me and gave me medicine.

Most of the tourists are nicer than the Filipinos at the port. In any case some of them even give us a present at the end, which Peter sometimes lets us keep. Adolfo and I have gone back home to Ponson twice. Everyone asked about Father. We told Mother, 'We couldn't find him, he is no longer working at the port of Cebu....' No one asked how we are supporting ourselves. No one asked where I got the dress, the shoes, and the small suitcase. Mother looked at me with such a sad look that I thought she must suspect the truth. But she didn't say anything, not a word.

⁵ 200 Philippine pesos were about 6 euros in 2000.

Adolfo left some money at home with the family. Both times. From him and from me. I don't know exactly how he earns his money. 'Also something with the tourists...,' he once told me."

Globalized Sex—Globalized Love?

Around 100,000 people presently starve to death worldwide each day. Every seven seconds a child dies of starvation. Nutrition experts from the United Nations have calculated that existing foodstuffs today are capable of feeding up to twelve billion people.⁶

We don't even need that much. Today there are a little more than 6.5 billion people living on our planet.⁷ Every second, between four and five children are born and at the same time two people die. Although the world population continues to grow, the rate of growth has slowed down significantly. Scientists presume that the seven billion mark will be reached in 2012 and that in 2050 the number of people on the earth will stabilize at around nine billion.

If the prognoses are relatively accurate, there will be enough food in the long term. Then why is the distribution of food so inequitable? Why do a few have such a surplus that they end up discarding a lot, while most of the others must watch their own children starve?

Does love in times of globalization mean closing one's eyes to all of this more and more, despite increasing sources of information? Does it mean only being able to think about yourself and your closest family? And sex in times of globalization—does that mean unlimited erotic feelings, but only for those who are rich or young and beautiful and who do not pose any difficult questions?

Globalization was at first just a new catchword. What does it mean? And ultimately what does it have to do with love and sex?

First of all, globalization denotes world trade that had changed radically through new technologies such as computers and the Internet, in which money and goods flow across national borders virtually uncontrolled and in which many multinational concerns (so-called global players) have more power than the national governments. Hardly anyone believes that the technological development of computers and the Internet can be undone. But opinions diverge regarding the question how and if the power of these industrial multinationals can be

⁶ According to Jean Ziegler, Swiss UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food. See also his book *La faim dans le monde expliquée à mon fils* [Hunger in the World Explained to My Son] (Paris: Seuil, 1999); and <<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/icons/ziegler.html>>

⁷ Based on figures of the German World Population Foundation (DSW), on January 1, 2007, there were exactly 6,597,893,867 people living on the earth.

controlled—when they are logically more concerned with making profits than with the welfare of humankind—so that all people can profit from the developments and the environment is not destroyed. Supporters of globalization praise how continents are being “drawn together” and how there are greater “information and travel options for the new world citizens,” but critics point to the fact that only privileged minorities enjoy the “new affluence” and the “world openness.” For a majority of the population in the industrial and developing countries, globalization means increased unemployment, worse health care, and more hunger.

Representatives of corporations and wealthy countries created the World Trade Organization (WTO), giving them an international institution to dictate trade requirements to the rest of the world using the friendly and liberal-sounding word *free trade*. The WTO does not consider itself bound to any of the other international institutions that humanity has created to resolve political conflicts peacefully (like the United Nations since 1945) or to tackle global environmental problems (like the UN Conferences on Environment and Development, UNCED, in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro and 2002 in Johannesburg).

ATTAC, initially founded in France in 1998, is a broad alliance that is critical of globalization.⁸ Tens of thousands of mostly young people have since joined the organization in roughly fifty countries in the form of a grassroots democratic network. At public protests—for example on the occasion of the G8 meetings of the heads of government from eight of the wealthiest industrial countries (most recently at the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, in northern Germany)—hundreds of thousands of demonstrators come together. The initial idea was to introduce a control mechanism to curb illegal business through public taxes levied on international financial transactions. The revenue collected was to be used to finance international projects to promote social justice and environmental protection.

Many people often first feel the consequences of globalization in their everyday lives on the labor market: Entire branches of production can disappear overnight if the multinational corporations decide that investments in one country seem more lucrative than in another. Whereas trade unions used to fight for the rights of employees and laborers, the investors now simply disappear without having to worry about social repercussions, moving to where lower wages and acquiescent workforces promise greater profits and less conflict.

For all who are not global players—even if they acquire some stocks (instead of the outmoded savings account passbook) and actively follow the stock markets, giving them the

⁸ Association pur une Taxation des Transaction financieres pour l’Aide aux Citoyens; in English: Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens. See also ATTAC (ed.), *Die geheimen Spielregeln des Welthandels* (Vienna: Promedia, 2003)

impression they are able to enjoy profits on the world market—this initially means they must be flexible and stay that way: to get retrained whenever the occupation they were trained in is no longer in demand (or at least not at the present time in this country), or to keeping packing up their suitcases and moving. This trend cuts through all social classes in the industrialized countries and applies for both men and women. In Germany, one in four marriages among college graduates is today lived as a weekend relationship.

Most developing countries (aside from a few self-assured exceptions in Asia and elsewhere, where they have organized among themselves, such as the African Union since 2002 and more recently in Latin America) have virtually no chance in view of this competition. Even worse, they are simply “written off.” If they have raw materials the prices are largely set by the World Trade Organization. If they happen to have natural attractions or wildlife parks, the global players (in this case the international tourism sector) are certainly willing to compromise, but generally only under the condition that the corresponding resorts and lodges have “top level” prices and luxury and are securely fenced in from the local population, which is otherwise (except for doing the cleaning, cooking, and garden work) visible only as folklore groups or tour guides.

How long can the gap between poor and rich continue to grow? Of the estimated nine billion people living on the planet in 2050—assuming the current course of globalization is maintained—only 1.2 billion will be living in the wealthy countries and roughly 7.8 billion in the poor ones. How long will border regulations, barbed wire, and “the war on terrorism” be able to prevent refugee movements and unrest by desperate masses or the apocalyptic panic of fundamentalist “saviors of the poor”?

The many images of hardship and misery in the world can harden us and make us closed, and cause us to defend our own, small good fortune all the more aggressively. But they can also encourage us to understand the causes and to support peaceful solutions that strive for people to be just and considerate of one another and of nature, as imperfect as these solutions might presently be. Violent military solutions have also been anything but successful up to now.

These images can also give us confidence not to become resigned, but instead—in the face of so much apparent senselessness in the world—to make a start by doing something meaningful at one particular place. To give someone warmth. To listen. To say something when others would rather remain silent and look away.

There is no love—neither global nor between you and me—if it not at the same time possible to empathize with the needs and joys of others.

There is no love without at some point also discovering common ground with those who at first seemed so different from you and me. Nanuk from Greenland, for example, or Mercedes and her grandmother from Panama, or old Stefan from Poland or Maricella and Adolfo from the Philippines.

And sex? It can only get better, the closer you stay true to yourself. And the less you make a show for someone else, whoever that might be.