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Title: Book review *AIDS, Sex, and Culture: Global Politics and Survival in Southern Africa*. By Ida Susser, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 277 pp., ISBN 978-1-4051-5587-8.

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“The mode of being the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence,...but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator...” – Antonio Gramsci

Susser’s latest text examines the history of AIDS research, its ideologies and omissions, yoking political economic paradigms and practices of the Global North and South in this era of globalization to the evolution of the AIDS epidemic. The plight of women surviving in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa is the center around which these same women emerge as adapting and transforming activists. Throughout, the female condom serves as a symbol of liberation in sexual choice, empowerment, prevention and sadly, the invisibility of women in research and intervention. At the outset, Susser questions this global invisibility of women, from initial recognition of the disease to international conferences in the mid-’00s. She eloquently outlines the biological and social reasons demanding special prevention and treatment attention for women. She problematizes the placement of women as secondary to prevention of infection to fetuses, the controversy of the female condom, the exclusion of sex workers as part of the broader concerns of women, and the stigmatizing power of risk groups.

Next, Susser weaves comparisons between capitalist policies and practices in the USA and South Africa and the increasingly moral prescriptions which reify subordination of women, reduce sexual choice, aim to control the reproductive female body and ultimately have disastrous effects on HIV/AIDS. Employing ethnographic and historiographic methods, and indeed drawing upon her own experiences in South Africa and as a child of anti-apartheid activists, Susser traces gender domination, racism, labor exploitation and sexual moralisms through colonial government policies (such as pass law and restrictions on education and occupation) to the ANC underground activism to the transition government up to the late 2000s. Here, she insightfully links emerging political ideologies of the reproductive body, morality and neoliberal economic strategies within South Africa to global processes of dispossession, international debt repayment, the agenda-setting power of religious and nonscientific donor agencies with devastating impacts on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, in documenting uprisings, movements and alliances (often twinned political, social justice and AIDS activism spearheaded by women), Susser offers hope and courage to inspire readers.

In South Africa, the late 1990s marked a material shift in focus from public welfare to repayment of international debt and attraction of foreign direct investment. Susser notes specific neoliberal practices

(although in-depth analysis of those listed is scant) which re-shaped the material terrain of women's lives at the same moment as the responsibility of care for children and the ill is squarely placed on their shoulders.

Beyond this material shift, a shift in discourse on AIDS revealed a mistrust of ARVs by the national government and a new surge in nationalism, stressing women's subordination and patriarchal rights. While these shifts in materiality and discourse were taking shape in South Africa, the USA played an active role in TRIPS agreements, and tied massive amounts of aid to faith-based organizations preaching 'morality' and espousing blame, and eliminating preventative measures beyond abstinence. So, even as access to treatment increased through PEPFAR (although still under-serving), prevention faces setbacks from religious dogma, a focus on the male condom, and research funds predominantly aimed at treatment. In the face of subordinating political rhetoric and extreme adverse material and economic deprivation, contemporary African women serve as resilient, compassionate crusaders of hope for reducing new infections and caring for and ensuring treatment for those suffering from the disease. With women as a focus, we turn to her work as an activist and researcher.

Alongside Dr. Dlamini-Zulu and community women activists in informal settlements on the outskirts of Durban in 1992, readers can visually engage with early AIDS activism. Meetings, called together via bullhorn to modest rooms, involved display of female condoms and empowering messages espoused to unite women in making demands for basic needs and for the power to take control over their own lives in preventing HIV infection. Using a Gramscian notion of 'practical sense', Susser traces the possibilities for transformative, anti-hegemonic action in public and private spheres of women 'affected' and infected by HIV/AIDS, as care-givers, mothers, patients, and activists. She documents heterogeneous and sometimes conflicting responses and narratives of women, making divergences from hegemonic discourse about women and AIDS. In this work, Susser calls our attention to differences between adaptive activism (where pragmatism is the focus, rather than revolutionizing the situation) and transformative activism.

Through her work to uncover political, economic and social processes involved in gender subordination and material deprivation, and to unearth surprising resilience and unexpected sources of progressive action, Susser provides readers with hope in women's ability to take control over their lives and lead the way toward social justice and compassion, and in turn reveals herself as an organic intellectual.