

Syllabus On Gender And Sexualities In African Contexts

This syllabus is designed for senior undergraduate, or early postgraduate students. Its objectives are:

1. To introduce students to critical concepts: “*sex*”, “*gender*,” and “*sexuality*”
2. To contextualize the study of gender and sexuality in particular African contexts
3. To explore the links between “*becoming gendered*” and sexuality
4. To explore connections between gender, sexuality and other themes

The syllabus has been designed so as to offer the user access to as many of the recommended texts online as possible (either within the GWSAfrica site, or within other web-based resources: a list of these is appended to the syllabus). It is also recommended that for each session, material developed locally (by researchers, NGOs) or found within local magazines and newspapers be used, instead perhaps of the suggestions for materials. Much of the material recommended here has a Southern/Eastern flavour and thus would not be helpful in other contexts; and much of it has been developed through Feminist Africa. While that means it is easily available, it also narrows the scope of what is recommended. The syllabus has also deliberately avoided the recommendation of Northern material (except for the article by Mohanty and the IDS material, which is available online). This may or may not suit a particular teacher’s approach. See Draft Syllabus Two (*to be uploaded*) for an example of a syllabus which seeks to recognize (a) the influence of theorists such as Foucault, and the wide array of Northern voices on sexualities and gender (particularly Gayle Rubin, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Wendy Hollway, Patricia Hill Collins, and Carol Vance) and (b) the influence on the North on the development of notions of ‘*sexual and reproductive health and rights*’ on African discourses, activisms, and research.

Session One: INTRODUCING ‘GENDER’ AND ‘SEXUALITY’ (1)

The aim of this session is to introduce basic concepts to participants, starting with definitions of ‘*sex*’ and ‘*gender*’

Amina Mama’s “*Notes on Gender*”

Sections of the review essay on “*sex*” and “*gender*”

Session Two: INTRODUCING 'GENDER' AND 'SEXUALITY' (2)

The aim of this session is to introduce links between “gender” and “sexuality”
Sections of the review essay on linking gender and sexuality Mumbi Machera’s piece in *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa*, (Nordic Africa Institute) 2004, edited by Signe Arnfred gives a grounded review of connections between becoming gendered as a ‘woman’ through constraints and interpretations of ‘women’s sexuality’.

Session Three: WHY STUDY GENDER AND SEXUALITY?

The aim of this session would be to explore the intellectual (and political) point of exploring gender and sexualities as an academic area.

The two readings juxtapose two different voices: the Chandra Mohanty reading suggests that Western feminist writings upon ‘*Third World Women*’ present these women as vulnerable and victimized, homogenizing them as a single constituency under African men’s political and sexual oppression. She argues that this gaze is an imperialist one, seeking to analyse experiences of which the writers understand very little, in the name of an overarching ‘*feminism*’, controlled by white and Western women’s voices. Awa Thiam’s book, written in the early 70’s and translated later, argues passionately for African women’s liberation from gendered and sexual norms which she sees as violently oppressive (she names FGM/C, polygamy, domestic violence, and skin whitening as core elements of oppression).

It is clear from reading these two voices that discussing gender and sexuality in African contexts is a complicated enterprise. On the one hand, Northern interests have long caricatured African women as “*especially sexually vulnerable*”, and used these arguments as justification for Northern suppression and dis-respect for African-based norms and cultures. On the other hand, Awa Thiam points out that the women she interviews in West Africa do indeed suffer from the cultural norms of gender and the control of their sexual lives.

The session could tease out the debate, and explore why - and how - it is useful to study gender and sexuality in African contexts in 2009?

[Awa Thiam, "Speak out, Black Sisters! Black women and oppression in Black Africa," translated by Dorothy S. Blair, London: Pluto Press 1986 \(original, 1978\)](#)

Chandra Mohanty, "*Under Western Eyes: Feminist Politics and Colonial Discourses*," *Feminist Review* 30, Autumn, 1988

Session Four: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: BECOMING GENDERED: FEMININITIES

These two pieces explore the links between the creation of 'sexually attractive femininities' by examining different approaches to 'attractiveness.' In the course of the discussion, other concerns emerge such as the meanings of 'culture' and 'modernity', and the possibilities of pleasure within sexuality for people gendered as women in different African contexts

Sylvia Tamale, "[Eroticism, Sensuality and Women's Secrets among the Baganda: a critical analysis](#)", *Feminist Africa* 5, 2005

Pumla Gqola, "[Yindaba kaban'uba ndilahl'umlenze?](#)" *Sexuality and Body Image.*" in *Agenda*, 63, 2005 and [Desiree Lewis, "Against the grain: black women and sexuality," in Agenda, 63, 2005](#) Fiona Scorgie, "*The Politics of Sexual Responsibilities*," *Journal of African Studies*, 61, 1, 2002

Session Five: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: BECOMING GENDERED: MASCULINITIES

This week would explore links between becoming gendered as a 'man' and connections with heterosexual masculinities. There are many pieces which look at this (see bibliography) - the two below are particularly useful because they work with young university students. The piece by Pattman and Chege in the resources uploaded for this site might also work here.

David Mills and Richard Ssewakiryanga, "[No Romance Without Finance: Commodities, Masculinities and Relationships amongst Kampalan Students](#)", in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, edited by Andrea Cornwall, Bloomington and Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2005

Allen Gore, "[Making Student Men at the University of Zimbabwe: Politics, Masculinity and Democracy](#)", in *Speaking for Ourselves: Masculinities and Femininities Amongst Students at the University of Zimbabwe*, edited by Rudo Gaidzanwa, University of Zimbabwe Affirmative Action Project, 2001

Session Six: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: HEALTH

A wide variety of foci could come here - the topics of disability, HIV, gender-based violence, reproductive health, HPV, could all work as a way of exploring links between gender, sexuality, and health. The chapter below, looking at gender and sexualities in a South African township context is offered because it is accessible online (through the HRSC website - under publications). There would however be many others (see section on gender-based violence, already loaded on this site; Gender and Health will be loaded in 2010)

Nthabiseng Motsemme, "*Loving in a Time of Hopelessness: On women's subjectivities in a township in a time of AIDS*" in *Nomboniso Gasa, Ed Women in South African History: Basus'iimbokodo; Bawel'iimilambo* Pretoria, HSRC Press, 2005

Session Seven: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: YOUTH CULTURES

This session explores ideas about gender and sexualities within the changing economic climates of different contexts - there is much opportunity here to use local material (such as Straight talk in parts of eastern Africa and/or TV soap operas, popular songs, and so on)

Sandra Manuel, *Love and Desire: Concepts, Narratives and Practices of Sex among Youth in Maputo City* CODESRIA Publications 2008

Session Eight: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: GLOBALIZATION AND CHANGE

This session specifically focuses on the role played by economic changes (driven by colonialism, and then by later '*development*' debates) may impact on gender and sexualities. The IDS website holds a lot of useful material on gender, sexuality and development, in a way that is accessible to students.

Agnes O'Runganga and Peter Aggleton, "[Migration, the family, and the Transformation of a Sexual Culture](#)", in Sexualities, Vol 1, 1, 1998

Susie Jolly, "[Not So Strange Bedfellows: Sexuality and International Development](#)", in Development 49 (1), 2006

IDS material on gender, sexuality, and development

Session Nine: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: VIOLENCE

This material explores links between gender, sexuality, and violence by locating the issues first within a colonial context (Zimbabwe). The material then explores sexual harassment within some university contexts, and Zanele Muholi's piece looks at the 'curative rape' of young black lesbian women in South Africa. This is the first piece in the syllabus which explicitly raises the question of homosexuality. It is placed here in order to locate homophobia as a form of violence, which can have severe impact. The course convenor will have to make his/her own assessment of whether the students are ready for this discussion.

Pape, J. 1990 "[Black and White: The 'Perils of Sex' in Colonial Zimbabwe](#)", Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, 4: 699-720.

Jane Bennett, excerpts from [Killing a Virus With Stones: Researching the Implementation of Policies Against Sexual Harassment in Southern African](#) Higher Education, Cape Town: African Gender Institute, 2005

[Zanele Muholi, "Thinking through lesbian rape"](#), in Agenda, #61, 2004

Session Ten: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: ACTIVISM (1)

Ife Amadiume, "[Sexuality, African Religio-Cultural Traditions and Modernity: Expanding the Lens](#)", paper written for African Regional Sexuality Resource Centre, Lagos, 2006

Hlatshwayo, Z. and Klugman, B. 2001 "[A Sexual Rights Approach](#)", Agenda, 47

Jessica Horn, "[AMANITARE and African Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#)", Feminist Africa 2, 2003

["A Space in which "Vagina" is not a dirty word: the Vagina Monologues in the GWS listserve](#)", compiled by Helen Moffett, Feminist Africa 5, 2005

Sylvia Tamale, ["Out of the Closet: Unveiling Sexuality Discourses in Uganda"](#),
Feminist Africa 2, 2003

Session Eleven: THEMES IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY: ACTIVISM (2)

Debate in Feminist Africa 2, 2004, between Patricia McFadden, "*Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice*" and Charmaine Pereira, "[Where Angels Fear to Tread?: Some Thoughts on Patricia McFadden's 'Sexual Pleasure as Feminist Choice'](#)"

Kiragu and Nyongo, "[LGBTI Organizing in East Africa: The True Test for Human Rights Defenders](#)", Urgent Action, March, 2006

Session Twelve: COURSE SUMMARY