Sexuality and Gender in African History

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the history of sexuality and gender in Africa and explore the ways in which gender and sexuality were shaped in different social and cultural settings. We will examine themes and events in Africa over several centuries, but our main focus will be on the 19th and 20th centuries. Topics of historical analysis include life histories, rites of passage, courtship, marriage, reproduction, education, masculinities, homosexuality, colonial control and changing gender relations.

As we investigate many of the major issues in the historical scholarship on sexuality and gender in Africa, we will also discuss methods and skills used by scholars to understand the complexities of the past. We will analyze the research methods, sources, arguments and interpretations of various historians and anthropologists writing about the dynamics of sexuality and gender in Africa. Through readings, class discussions and assignments, students will become familiar with various historical interpretations of sexuality and gender relations and develop an ability to deal critically with both primary and secondary source materials. We will turn to various African contexts to gain insight into the contested terrain of African history.

The course will follow a seminar format with an emphasis on class discussions, some small-group work, a library project and several writing assignments. This is not a lecture class. My role as the instructor is to facilitate discussion and fill in gaps that may arise from the material at hand. Grades will be based on class participation, assignments, and a final exam. Writing is an integral part of this course. Assignments will be essays in lieu of quizzes and exams, except for one map quiz and the final. Students are expected to write in a convincing, coherent, and critical manner. Writing is a process, and all writers benefit from practice. Participants are expected to work on improving their writing skills in this class.

COURSE WEBSITE

Posted on Blackboard, http://courseware.ku.edu
Consult the site for announcements, images, links, grades, and other information.
REQUIREMENTS

1) Regular attendance and active, well-informed participation in class. Timely completion of all course readings & occasional submission of discussion questions.
2) Library investigation assignment comparing advice columns (4-5 pages)
3) A book review (2-3 pages)
4) Visual representation project and research on South African women (8-10 pages)
5) Final essay exam covering the main themes of the course
6) Map quiz

Details about the course requirements:

1) Seminar Participation
You will be expected to complete all readings for a particular week before our Monday seminar meeting for that week, unless noted otherwise. This will enable you to complete the occasional written assignments and participate in weekly class discussions successfully. The small size and seminar nature of our meetings provide you with the opportunity to work and learn in a participatory setting. You are expected to participate by preparing for class meetings in advance, contributing to class discussions (this includes coming to class on time and staying for the duration), and completing assigned work in a timely fashion. During our meetings students will be expected to take partial responsibility for framing discussion questions. This requires advance preparation and organization—Come ready to participate! Please note that your level of involvement will determine the success of the discussions, but our discussions will not simply echo the readings. Our meetings will overlap with and build on the common readings, but we will also discuss topics sparked by the readings. Come to class prepared and ready to think. (20% of the final grade)

2) Library Investigation Assignment
After consulting Mutongi’s article and attending our library orientation unit during the third week of class, gather more advice columns from two eras: the 1950s-1960s and the 1990s-2000s. Find at least 2 columns from each era that come from the continents of Africa and North America. (i.e. two columns per continent, per era) (You may use the columns reprinted in Mutongi’s article for the African examples from the 1960s.) Compare and contrast your columns in a 4-5 page essay with an eye for change over time and a sense of cultural contexts. How do the African columns resemble North American ones? How are they different? What are the older North American advice columns from the 1950s-1960s saying that is similar to and/or different from Dear Dolly’s advice to Africans? Analyze the queries, messages and intended audience of your collection. How do gender and sexuality come into play in these columns? Attach photocopies of the columns to your essay and provide full citations that detail where you found each one. (20% of the final grade)

3) Book Review
This will be a 2-3 page book review of one book from three possible choices: the novel So Long a Letter, the novel Nervous Conditions or the autobiography Kaffir Boy. You may choose which book to review based on your schedule, whim or interest. This book review is not a book report. You should give only a very brief summary of the book and then go on to
critique it. When making an argument, be sure to use specific examples from the book. Some of the questions that you might want to ask include: Is the book useful as an historical text? Why or why not? What is the role that gender and sexuality play in the book? How are women in the book portrayed (i.e. as active agents of change in their lives, as passive onlookers, as victims, etc.)? How are men depicted, especially in relation to women? How is masculinity defined? What are the relations of the characters to the state (colonial, apartheid, or other)? Does this contradict or reinforce what you have read about European occupation in the historical literature? Consider the relationship between the state and gender. How does the book describe conditions of women’s and men’s lives? What is the positionality of the author, and how might it have shaped the book? Who is the intended audience? (15% of the final grade)

4) Visual Representation Project
For this project you will explore visual representations of South African women and conduct your own research into gender and sexuality in South African history. (25% of the final grade)
This may be done in one of two ways:

**First**, by using existing images of South African women (drawings, paintings or photographs). These can be found in books, magazines and newspapers, or on the Internet. After locating one or several images and conducting your own research on South Africa’s history, write a commentary (8-10 pages) on your research and the way in which South African women are represented. Look at the image(s) critically and do not forget to consider the source(s) from which you found the image. Think about the ways these women are presented to the viewer and why the artist/author chose to represent them that way. Analyze the women themselves and their surroundings. Be sure to compare and contrast these images with the women in *Not Either an Experimental Doll*. Attach the image(s) or photocopies of them, with citations, to your paper.

The **second** way in which this project can be done is to generate your own image(s) of South African women. They can be in the form of drawings, paintings, photographs, poster collages, or whatever you decide. One who have created and/or assembled the image(s) and conducted your own research on South Africa’s history, you should include an 8-10 page typed text about your research and the images. In this commentary you will need to analyze the images and include an explanation of why you chose to represent South African women in the way in which you did. Be sure to compare and contrast your images with the women in *Not Either an Experimental Doll*. Again, you must turn in the image(s) with the text. (I encourage you to go out on a limb and choose this alternative method for the project.)

5) Final Exam
The final exam, in essay format, will cover the main themes of the course. At least one optional question will involve the two recommended readings (*Book of Not* and *Miriam’s Song*). Further details will be provided during the semester. (20% of the final grade)
6) Map Quiz
You must pass a map quiz (Week of February 9th) in which you will be asked to identify African countries on a current political map of Africa. The quiz will not be graded, but it must be successfully completed as one of the requirements of the course.

- All essays must be doubled spaced and typed in 10-12 point font. Adhere to page guidelines listed above and a consistent citation style.

- All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified. Late papers will be marked down one full grade for each day late, except in cases of illness or comparable crisis. In these instances students will be required to present an appropriate explanation (such as a physician’s note). Please contact me (preferably by e-mail) before missing the due date, if possible.

- The course schedule outlined below is subject to change, and assignments may be modified or added throughout the semester at the discretion of the instructor.

- Students in this course with disabilities that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should contact the instructor as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate educational opportunity. The staff of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), 135 Strong Hall, (785) 864-2620 (v/tty), coordinates accommodations and services for KU courses. If you have a disability for which you may request accommodation in KU classes and have not contacted them, please also do so as soon as possible.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All forms of academic misconduct—including, but not restricted to cheating, fabrication and falsification, plagiarism, facilitating academic misconduct, and tampering with materials, grades, or records—carry severe penalties, including possible failure in this course. If you are unfamiliar with proper citation methods, consult the instructor. Plagiarism is the theft of ideas or information from a source without proper credit. It is your responsibility to know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Plagiarism is a serious offense that could lead to failure in this course.

REQUIRED READINGS

Required Books Available for Purchase:

Mariama Bâ, So Long a Letter (Heinemann, 1991)

Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy* (Touchstone, 1998)


**Recommended Books Available for Purchase:**

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Book of Not* (Lynne Rienner, 2006)

Mark Mathabane, *Miriam's Song* (Touchstone, 2001)

**Other Required Readings:**

Some articles and selections from books listed in the schedule below are accessible to you on the Internet, and others will be available in a course pack produced by AAAS. (Details TBA.)

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**FIRST DAY-JANUARY 21ST**  
**INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND AFRICA:**  
*MYS, IMAGES, STEREOTYPES, AND DEFINITIONS*

Purchase your books now. Read this introductory link on why Africans are often (mis)labeled as “tribal”:


**WEEK OF JANUARY 26**  
**A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN HISTORY**

Begin reading by Monday’s class meeting and complete for Wednesday:  
Turn in 3 discussion questions from Parker and Rathborne on Wednesday Jan. 28th

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 2  THEORETICAL CONCERNS IN THE STUDY OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER

Ethnography & Sexuality
FILM (on Monday): Monday’s Girls

Fault Lines Between ‘Traditional’ and ‘Modern’
- Africa Speaks: West African University Students Write About Their Lives
  http://patstoll.org/afspeaknew/

For discussion on Wednesday:


CHOOSE EITHER:
OR

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 9  COLUMNS ON COURTSHIP: DEAR DOLLY, DEAR DIARY

- MAP QUIZ & LIBRARY ORIENTATION (Details TBA)

- (Library Investigation Assignment Due Next Week on February 18th)

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 16  MASULINITIES**


- Library Investigation Assignment Due on Wednesday February 18th

**WEEK OF FEBRUARY 23  ORAL HISTORY AND HISTORICAL PRACTICE**

**FILM: The Language You Cry In**


**In-class activity:** Assume the role of either Geiger, Gengenbach, or Hoppe & come to class prepared to defend your position as stated in the writing(s) of that author.
WEEK OF MARCH 2       THE FAMILY: COLONIALISM AND GENDER CONTROL


CHOOSE EITHER:
OR

- Turn in three discussion questions on your readings in class on Monday March 2nd

WEEK OF MARCH 9       PATRIARCHY & ITS DISCONTENTS

Mariama Bâ, So Long a Letter

FILM: Faat Kine

WEEK OF MARCH 23       WOMEN IN SENEGAL

Discussion: So Long a Letter and Faat Kine

- If you select Bâ, your review is due Wednesday March 25th

(Begin reading Not Either an Experimental Doll for next week.)

WEEK OF MARCH 30       RACE, GENDER, AND APRATHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA
Lily P. Moya (and Shula Marks) *Not Either an Experimental Doll*

- **Visual Representation Project** due next Wednesday April 8th

**WEEK OF APRIL 6**  **RACE, GENDER, AND APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*

- If you select Mathabane, your review is due Monday April 6th

*Presentation of Research Projects; Projects DUE Wednesday April 8th*

**WEEK OF APRIL 13**  **GENDER AND A CHANGING WORLD IN ZIMBABWE**

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

**FILM: Flame**

- If you select Dangarembga, your review is due Wednesday April 15th

**WEEK OF APRIL 20**  **THE BODY: ALTERED & SEXUALIZED**

Zine Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus'," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (December 2001), 816-34. **Available through J-STOR**


WEEK OF APRIL 27  AFRICAN HOMOSEXUALITIES


FILM: Dakan

WEEK OF MAY 4  CONCLUSIONS AND REVIEW


TUESDAY MAY 12TH, FINAL EXAM AT 10:30 A.M.

RESOURCES

Consider following some of the issues affecting Africa today to enhance your knowledge and enrich our classroom discussions.
The cheapest way to Africa from Lawrence, Kansas is online!