History 4607  
History of Women and Gender Relations in Africa  
 Fall 2023  
Instructor: Prof. Katherine McKenna  
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This is a draft syllabus. Please see the course site on OWL for a final version.

Course Description
In the past African women were powerful leaders, strong economic contributors and respected members of their extended families. This course will examine these historical roles as well as factors that undermined African women’s status and changed gender relations, such as slavery, economic forces and colonialism.

Prerequisite(s): 2.0 courses in History or Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies, taken at the 2200 level or above if they are History courses or at the 2000 level or above if they are GSWS courses.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Syllabus
Women in Africa today are exceedingly diverse and accomplished, despite the negative news we read every day about violence, disease and poverty. Even those who recognize this often assume that women’s growing influence in African societies is a recent development due to the influence of modern liberal values. Contrary to this, in the past African women were not the victims of male domination, but held powerful leadership roles, were strong economic contributors and respected members of their extended families. African feminists today draw upon these traditions as a source of empowerment. This course will examine African women’s roles in the past as well as factors that undermined their status and changed gender relations such as slavery, economic forces and colonialism.

Course Objectives
- Develop a knowledge of how gender is an important factor in understanding history
- Learn about the variety of sources that allow us to reconstruct a history that was not always present in official written records such as linguistics, oral history, archaeology, anthropology and material history
- Examine the variety of important roles that African women fulfilled in the past
- Trace the shifts that occurred over time that changed gender relations and undermined women’s roles such as slavery, economic forces and colonialism
• Come to an understanding of how their traditions have empowered African women today

Course Materials:
All course materials will be posted in Resources on the course website in OWL

Methods of Evaluation
This course will be conducted as a seminar. Readings will be assigned every week and students will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss them. Students may from time to time be briefly off-screen for personal reasons, but are otherwise expected to be on-screen at all times except for mid-point class breaks. The class participation grade will be assessed on the basis of attendance and demonstrated engagement with the assigned reading. Each student will be required to give an introduction to the course reading for one class which will raise questions for discussion. The following week, they will be required to submit a paper based on all the reading for the class (5-6 pages). The major assignment in this course will be a research paper on a topic dealing with an aspect of the history of women and gender in Africa. Students are required to discuss this with the professor before the essay proposal is due in week 8 of the course. This will consist of one or two paragraphs describing the topic and the approach or thesis the student plans to present, plus an annotated bibliography of 8-10 scholarly sources that will be used. The proposal should be 6-7 pages. The final essay will be due in the last week of classes and will be 12-15 pages long. Students will be required to submit this paper to turnitin. All work submitted in this course must be your own. You may not make use of generative AI tools like ChatGPT for any assignments in this course.

Students who miss deadlines for illness or another reason for assignments less than 10% must speak to the professor to negotiate late submission. Students who miss more than 10% of assignments should consult with their Faculty for an accommodation.

Mark Breakdown:

Class Participation 20%
Class Presentation 10%
Class Reading Essay 20%
Research Essay Proposal 20%
Research Essay 30%
Total 100%

Course Materials
All course materials will be posted in Resources on the course website in OWL

Course Schedule and Readings
Subject to revision by September 2023.
1. September 7 Introduction

Reading:


Video: Umoja: No Men Allowed

Background Reading:


Pre-Colonial History:

2. September 14 Pre-history: Gender Roles and Matriarchy

Reading:


3. September 21 Women’s Spiritual Roles and the Importance of Motherhood

Reading:


Todd Sanders. Beyond Bodies: Rainmaking and Sense Making in Tanzania. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) ix-xvi; 139-159.

4. **September 28 Women of Power: Queens, Queen Mothers and Female Warriors**

Reading:


5. **October 5 Women’s Economic Roles and Contributions to the Family Economy**

Reading:


Challenges to Women’s Traditional Roles:

6. **October 12 Women and Slavery**

Reading:


7. **October 19 Christian Missionaries and Sexuality**

Reading:

Marc Epprecht. ‘This matter of women is getting very bad’: *Gender, Development and Politics in Colonial Lesotho.* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2000) 30-38.


8. **October 26 Women’s Resistance to Colonialism: Rebellion and the 1929 “Women’s War” in Nigeria**

*Essay Proposals Due*

Reading:


**November 2 Reading Week**

9. **November 9 Colonialism, Migration and Economic Change**

Reading:

Jean Allman. “Rounding Up Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante.” in Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy, eds. *“Wicked Women” and the


The Post-Colonial Era:

10. November 16 Women’s Contributions to African National Liberation Movements

Reading:


11. November 23 Gender Roles, Modernity and ‘Development’

Reading:


Video: *Sasa! A Film About Women, Violence and HIV/AIDS*

Can be viewed on-line at http://raisingvoices.org/resources/

**12. November 30 Women’s Activism and Struggles for Peace in Africa: The Case of Liberia**

Reading:


Video: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*

**December 7 Conclusion**

Final Essay Due

Please review the Department of History’s shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.