

**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:

Kelly Askew. "Unmoja: No Men Allowed Dr. By Elizabeth Tadic (review)." *African Studies Review*. 57, No. 3, (2014) 271-273.

Video: *Umoja: No Men Allowed*

Background Reading:

Cheryl Johnson-Odim. "Women and Gender in the History of Sub-Saharan Africa." in Bonnie G. Smith, ed. *Women's History on Global Perspective Vol. 3.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) 9-67. Powerpoint summary will be posted in OWL

**Pre-Colonial History:**

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

Reading:

Ifi Amadiume. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1989) 13-23.

Wairimu Ngaruiya Njambi and William E. O'Brien. "Revisiting 'Woman-Woman Marriage': Notes on Gikuyu Women." in Oyeronke Oyewumi, ed. *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 145-65.

Oyeronke Oyewumi. "Reconstituting the Cosmology and Sociocultural Institutions of Oye-Yoruba: Articulating the Yoruba World-Sense." in Oyewumi, ed. 98-119.

Christine Saidi. *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa*. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press 2010) 1-22.

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

Reading:

Dorothy L. Hodgson. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters Between Maasai and Missionaries*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005) 19-40.

Balogun Abiodun Oladele. "Yoruba-African Understanding of Authentic Motherhood." in Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak, eds. *Beyond Tradition: African Women in Cultural and Political Spaces*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011) 17-28.

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

Jan Bender Shetler. "The Gendered Spaces of Historical Knowledge: Women's Knowledge and Extraordinary Women in the Serengeti District, Tanzania." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. 36, No. 2 (2003) 283-307.

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

Reading:

Sa'ad Abubakr. "Queen Amina of Zaria." in Bolanle Awe, ed. *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*. (Lagos and Ibadan: Sankore Publishers and Bookcraft, 1992) 11-23.

Edna G. Bay. "The Kpotjito or 'Queen Mother' of Precolonial Dahomey: Towards an Institutional History." in Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan ed. *Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender*. (New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, (1997) 19-40.

Beverly J. Stoeltje. "Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority." in Kaplan, ed. 41- 71.

David Sweetman. *Women Leaders in African History*. (London: Heinemann, 1984) "Nzinga of Angola" 39-47; "Dona Beatrice of Kongo" 48-54; "Yaa Asantewa of Asante." 82-90

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

Reading:

Nwando Achebe. *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igbo land, 1900-1960*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005) 109-160.

Dorothy L. Hodgson. *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Maasai Development*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 21-39.

Alina Segobye. "Daughters of Cattle: The Significance of Herding in the Growth of Complex Societies in Southern Africa Between the 10th and 15th Centuries AD." in Susan Kent, ed. *Gender in African Pre-History*. (Walnut Creek CA: Alta Mira Publishers, 1998) 227-233.

#### **Challenges to Women's Traditional Roles:**

#### **6. October 12 Women and Slavery**

Reading:

Edna G. Bay. *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998) 40-51.

Susan Herlin Broadhead. "Slave Wives, Free Sisters: Bankongo Women and Slavery c. 1700-1850." in Claire C. Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds. *Women and Slavery in Africa*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997) 160-181.

Pernille Ipsen. *Daughters of the Trade: Atlantic Slavers and Interracial Marriages on the Gold Coast*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.) 114-139.

Marcia Wright. *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Stories from East/Central Africa*. (New York: Lillian Barber Press, 1993) "Meli's Account of Slavery" (Late 19th C Zambia) 94-112.

## **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.

Tabitha Kanogo. *African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya 1900-50*. (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2005) 73-103.

Nakanyike Musisi. "The Politics of Perception or Perception as Politics? Colonial and Missionary representations of Baganda Women, 1900-1945." in Jean Allman, Susan Geiger and Nakanyike Musisi, eds. *Women in African Colonial Histories*. (Bloomington: IN: Indiana University Press, 2002) 95-115.

Elizabeth Schmidt. *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992) 122-154.

## **8. October 26 Women's Resistance to Colonialism: Rebellion and the 1929 "Women's War" in Nigeria**

### **Essay Proposals Due**

Reading:

Nwando Achebe. *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960*. 161-195.

Toyin Falola. *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) 108-130.

Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian and Susan Kingsley Kent. *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 188-227, 235-9.

## **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*

*Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*. (Oxford and Portsmouth, NH: James Curry and Heinemann, 2001) 130-148.

Marjorie K. McIntosh. *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009) 240-6.

Phoebe Musandu. "Daughters of Odoro: Luo Women and Power. Re-examining Scripted Oral Traditions." *Women's Studies*. 41 (2012) 536-57.

Elizabeth Schmidt. "Patriarchy, Capitalism and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe." *Signs*. 16, No. 4 (1991) 732-56.

## **The Post-Colonial Era:**

### **10. November 16 Women's Contributions to African National Liberation Movements**

Reading:

Jean Allman. "The Disappearance of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism and the Tyrannies of History." *Journal of Women's History*. 21, No. 3 (2009) 13-35.

Joyce M. Chadya. "Mother Politics: Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Woman Question in Africa." *Journal of Women's History*. 15, No. 3 (2003) 153-7.

Gisela Geisler. *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa*. (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004) 39-63.

W.O. Maloba. *African Women in Revolution*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007) 1-12.

### **11. November 23 Gender Roles, Modernity and 'Development'**

Reading:

D.J. Chandler and Njoki Wane. "Indigenous Gendered Spaces: An Examination of Kenya." *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*. 2, No. 1 (2002) 1-25.

Amina Mama. "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa." in J. Alexander and C.T. Mohanty, eds. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. (New York: Routledge, 1997) 46-62.

Nkiru Nzegwu. "Recovering Igbo Traditions: A Case for Indigenous Women's Organizations in Development." in Martha C. Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, eds. *Women, Culture and Development*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 445-465

Njoki n. Wane. *Indigenous African Knowledge Production: Food-Processing Practices among Kenyan Rural Women*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014) 87-97.

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:

Iris Berger. "African Women's Movements in the Twentieth Century: A Hidden History." *African Studies Review*. 57, No. 3 (2014) 1-19.

Abosede Ipadeola. "The Subaltern in Africa's Political Space: African Political Philosophy and the Mirror of Gender." *Journal of Black Studies*, 48, No. 4 (2017) 391-407.

Anne Theobald. *The Role of Women in Making and Building Peace in Liberia: Gender Sensitivity versus Masculinity*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem Press, 2012) 31-59.

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](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.