WS 301-4 – ST: Women from Africa: Cultures, Identities, Representations

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies

Course Description:
What cultural, social, and political structures determine the conditions of women’s lives from Africa? How is gender produced? What meanings are assigned to female (and male) bodies through sexuality, labour, education, the management of HIV/AIDS, and international migration? What is the role of representation in producing gendered and sexed notions of African identity? Through readings and discussions, we will address these questions to better understand the specific histories out of which a gendered discourse on Africa emerges and will examine the ways in which women contest, negotiate, and re-write these conditions to redefine difference and female subjectivity, thus challenging the construction of Africa as the “heart of darkness.”

Topics will include the historical and regional specificity in the production of gender and sexuality; the impact of colonialism on gender relations; the failure of nationalist ideologies and state politics to support women’s struggles; female labour and changing economies in the face of the global; transnational migrations; war and violence; sexuality and the politics of reproduction; eros and the female body as sites of resistance. Cultural texts from literature, cinema, and visual arts, as well as the examination of the rhetorical strategies employed in informal interviews, will allow us to probe the limits of theoretical analysis and sociological methodologies in grappling with the diverse conditions shaping women’s lives and the varied, and complex, constructions of female African identities.

Course Texts and Courseware:


Course Evaluation and Assignments:
20% Attendance and active participation (includes Blogs and short presentations)
10% Short assignments (two reviews x 2 pages each)
20% Short essay (5-6 pages)
20% Mid-term exam (take-home essay questions)
25% Final research paper (10-12 pages)

Prerequisites: six units in women’s studies including WS 101 and/or 102. (Cross-designated with Certificate in Africa Studies.)