

**WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
AFS 3331**

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LC 304
MMC
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COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

This course examines women's human rights in the context of global feminist social movements and evolving norms, institutions and practices of the international human rights system. We will focus on several thematic issues.

After providing a foundation for understanding the human rights system, we will examine how women's human rights pose particular challenges and opportunities for the realization of human rights and social justice more broadly. We will look at the interdependency of political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights and the relationship of these rights to questions of achieving gender justice and equality. The course will examine how the conception of a divide between public and private realms has contributed to the marginalization of women's human rights concerns, and how recently feminists have been able to successfully challenge this notion and begin to hold states accountable for acts of violence against women that take place within the home, community, or at the hands of public actors/the state. Cases will be drawn from Sub-Saharan African countries.

Class sessions include background lectures, intensive discussions of readings and human rights documents, and film and other multi-media materials.

The course is grounded on some fundamental premises: a) International violence against women happens in different contexts and cultures world-wide; the international study of these problems reveals the complicity and systematic toleration of violence against women by governments all over the world. International collaboration on addressing violence against women is crucial in building effective, wide-ranging responses that can strengthen women's rights wherever they may live. From girls seeking educational opportunities, to girls whose genitals are cut, to women forced into survival sex that kills them, women and girls are subjected globally to an intolerable amount of debilitating violence.

b) A look at the situation of women in Africa, in the past and in the present, shows that a univocal theory of global feminism does not address the special conditions in which African women find themselves.

We must not ignore the fact that there existed a complementarity of male and female roles in precolonial African societies. It is during and after colonization that the downfall of the African woman from a position of relative power and self-sovereignty to becoming man's helper occurred.

Contemporary situations of African women are often characterized by rigid traditions that discriminate against them, because they are seen as perpetual children and second-class citizens. Endemic sexism, patriarchal attitudes, and the force of blinding

tradition bond African men in a hegemonic system that nourishes and protects their interests.

Throughout the course, the objective will be to develop awareness of the historical and contemporary political contexts in which human rights violations against women occur in Africa, and of past and present efforts to ameliorate such violations. The course is intended to enhance your understanding of women's rights from African and non-African perspectives, of African history, and of human rights policies and pedagogies. Through the readings, writing assignments, films, and discussions, you should obtain the background necessary to understand current debates on human rights in Africa and to analyze human rights policies.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Students will submit **short responses** to readings posted to Moodle before class sessions; write a **mid-term essay** (4-5 pages) in response to one of two questions asked that will be made available one week prior to the actual due date; keep a **media log/journal** (in Moodle) with at least one entry a week related to the final paper project; and write a **10-12 page final paper** on a specific country and/or topic related to women's human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa. The final paper will require some outside research as well as integrating insights from relevant class materials.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Better understand international law as it pertains to human rights in general and particularly to women's rights in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Have an excellent understanding of the specific issues that have been emerging from the diverse socio-cultural, economic and political contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa about women's rights primarily, but also about human rights in general.
- Demonstrate knowledge about the mechanisms of protection of women's rights within the African Union Human Rights Commission.
- Have an excellent grasp of the debates about the universality of women's rights and the dangers/complications brought about by the notion of "cultural relativism."
- Have a good understanding of the major scholarly thesis about the history of women's rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, from pre-colonial times to the present.
- Have a good understanding of some of the cultural norms and practices that inhibit women's rights in Sub-Saharan Africa.

GLOBAL LEARNING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME

By the end of this course:

- Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of how much local African Women Human Rights are interrelated with global, international, and intercultural issues, movements, trends, and system. (GLOBAL AWARENESS)
- Students will be able to take into consideration both African and Global North feminist and other theoretical perspectives in their analyses of African women human rights issues as they exist locally, and are influenced by global and international forces and laws, in ever growing intercultural contexts. (GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE)
- Students will be able to propose solutions to specific cases of women human rights

issues and problems in given local, global and intercultural African contexts. (GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT)

COURSE READINGS

Required Readings are indicated for each week of class. They can be found in pdf on the Moodle site associated with this course.

International Women's Tribune Centre

1998 *Rights of Women: A Guide to the Most Important United Nations Treaties on Women's Human Rights*. New York. International Women's Tribune Centre.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

It is the professor's understanding that the required and active learning strategies described below in this section of the syllabus are necessary for the students to reach the global learning outcomes listed in the previous section of this syllabus and that relate to global awareness, global perspective, and global engagement.

Participation (10%)

Participation is a crucial part of this course. Your thoughts, ideas, and critiques help to animate the learning process within and outside the classroom. Questions you may raise or ideas you have about given topics will challenge us all to think actively and critically. I've highlighted some ideas about what makes for the most successful class sessions (and especially those focused on discussion).

Reading. A strong classroom discussion is based on your careful reading of the assigned texts for the session. **I suggest taking brief, scholarly notes on readings.** Write down the key argument made by a given author, keywords or concepts that are important to consider, what sorts of examples or evidence the author uses to support her/his case, and questions or critiques you may have. Write all of these points in clearly separated sections.

As you reflect on sets of readings, think about connections between authors' arguments, points of convergence or difference, etc. This will also assist you in preparing your E-posts.

Listening. This is one of the most important aspects of discussion. You must be able to re-state classmates' contributions so that they would recognize and accept your reformulation of their ideas. Listening allows you to build on or challenge others' ideas respectfully within the flow of ideas under discussion.

Speaking. Address your remarks to the class and not solely to the instructor. Be aware of how often you are contributing to discussions and how this contributes to the tone of the class.

Bring the key texts under consideration for the session(s) to class.

Reflecting. During and after class, reflect on how your ideas have been challenged and/or confirmed by classmates, readings, videos, or the instructor.

If you are not accustomed to voicing your opinion in large groups, please talk to me in person in the first two weeks to identify ways in which you might begin to actively participate during class sessions.

Moodle Reading Response E-Posts (20%)

During the semester students must contribute eight 3/4 - 1 page (approximately 300-400 words) reading response e-posts under the “discussion” section of the Moodle site. E-posts are aimed at encouraging inquiry, analysis and discussion among students, both in class and on-line. E-posts are due by 10:00 am the day of class. Students are encouraged, but not required, to read one another’s e-posts. These responses are evaluated on the basis of the quality of students’ engagement with the core themes of the readings and the coherence and clarity of the writing. As you read for the week, consider the following questions. These will also help you to write your reading response.

- 1) What is the main argument(s) Why did the author(s) write the article or chapter?
- 2) What are the data used as evidence by the author to support the claims he/she makes in his/her argument?
- 3) What is useful about the reading(s)?
- 4) Were any of the points made questionable? If so, why?
- 5) What points, issues, or terms would you like to discuss or have clarified?
- 6) How do the various readings assigned inform each other? Contradict? Raise new questions?

Write a Report on the Africa-focused AADS Event Organized this Semester (10%)

Attend the AADS Africa-focused event organized this semester. More details will be given in class at the beginning of the semester.

Even if the presentation you attend doesn’t tackle the question of women’s human rights directly, consider how the issue is gendered and may intersect with women’s rights in your analysis/critique. In your response outline what the key point(s) was in the presentation, discuss how it intersected with other themes we have been learning about in class, and offer your opinion about the usefulness of the event for expanding your understanding of human rights. Turn in your paper within two weeks from the date of the event that you analyze.

Make sure you proofread your essay and provide appropriate citations when referencing readings from our class. Papers will be evaluated based upon the following criteria:

A: *outstanding* analysis; solid examples and reasons are given to support your views; clearly written.

B: fulfilled the assignment adequately; few if any grammatical problems or unclear sentences.

C: fulfilled the assignment but either the analysis is insufficient or superficial and/or there were a number of grammatical mistakes.

D: the assignment was not adequately fulfilled and/or there were a substantial amount of grammatical errors and awkward and confusing sentences.

F: the assignment was not turned in within two weeks of the due date, or was not completed according to the criteria listed above.

Mid-Term Essay (25%)

A take-home mid-term exam will be given. You will be given one week to respond to a question or questions (4-5 double-spaced, typed pages), documenting your answers with references to appropriate readings and other class materials. **No late exams will be accepted**, but for exceptional medical or emergency circumstances that can be clearly documented to the Professor in writing.

Final Paper (35%)

You will write an 10-12 page final paper on women's human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on a particular topic, theoretical question, or a specific country of interest to you. You will turn in a one page proposal, including a list of five scholarly sources (not including class sources) that you intend to examine in order to write your paper. In addition to the five outside sources, students will be required to integrate insights from at least 3 other class sources when writing their final papers. Students will all give a short class presentation during one of the last two class sessions. You **must** attend the last two class sessions. Each student will have to listen and learn from all the other students' presentations.

Papers must be uploaded on Moodle.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1

I What are human rights? Women's human rights?

Exercise on defining human rights

Introduction to the course's objectives, assignments, and other details.

Fundamentals of the human rights system

Assignment for next class session: Bring to class one newspaper article that addresses women's human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa (must be from after 2005; consult the New York Times, the Economist, and any major news outlet, as well as alternative news media).

Week 2

II African Feminisms in a Global Perspective(1)

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

George, Glynis

2005 "Feminist Questions, Grassroots Movements: An Overview" *Voices: A Publication of the Association for Feminist Anthropology*. 7(1):12-14.

Okeke, Philomina E

1996 "Postmodern feminism and knowledge production: the African context." *Africa Today* 43(July/September): 223-33.

Kalu, Anthonia C.

1996 "Women and the Social Construction of Gender in African Development." *Africa Today* 43(July/September): 269-88.

Wakoko, Florence and Linda M. Lobao

1996 "Reconceptualizing gender and reconstructing social life: Ugandan women and the path to national development." *Africa Today* 43(July/September): 307-22

Week 3

II African Feminisms in a Global Perspective(2)

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Sylvester, Christine

- 1995 “African and Western Feminisms: World-Traveling the Tendencies and Possibilities.” *Signs*. 20, no. 4, (1995): 941-970.
Wehrs, Donald R and Michael C Mbabuike
2002 “African Feminists and Feminisms: African Feminist Fiction and Indigenous Values.” *African studies review*. 45(3): 63-67.
Mekgwe, Pinkie
2007 “Theorizing African Feminism(s): The 'Colonial' Question.” *Matatu*. 35: 165-175.

Watch the video by Jean-Marie T no, *Chef*.

Week 4

III Women’s Rights Are Human Rights

UN human rights system and core concepts; women’s rights AS human rights

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Smith, “The United Nations System of Human Rights Protection,” pp. 348-351
- Bunch, “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” [read 57-69].
- Friedman, “Women’s Human Rights: The Emergence of a Movement,” [read 18-25]

Watch the video documentary: *Vienna Tribunal*

Week 5

IV Realizing Women’s Human Rights through the United Nations System

The Women’s Convention, human rights monitoring of women’s rights; key institutions and agencies; strengths and weaknesses of the current system

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

- International Women’s Tribune Center. *Rights of Women*, [read 1-16, 20-22] (IWTC)
Stamatapoulou, “Women’s Rights and the United Nations,” [read 36-48]
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in IWTC, pp. 137-143 or at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>

Week 6

V Realizing Women’s Human Rights through the African Union Commission System

The AU Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. http://www.achpr.org/english/info/women_en.html
- African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. (Moodle)

Week 7

VI The Universality of the Human Rights of Women

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

L. Amede Obiora, *Feminism, Globalism and Culture* 4 Ind. J. Global Legal Stud. 2 (1999) at <http://www.law.indiana.edu/glsj/vol4/no2/obipgp.html>

-A Reservation to the Women's Convention and Objections to that Reservation

-Reservation of Bangladesh to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Objections of Mexico, Sweden and Germany

-Human Rights Committee, General Comment 24 on Reservations

-Rebecca Cook, Reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 648-660, 678-687

Rebecca Cook, Effectiveness of the Beijing Conference in Fostering Compliance with International Law Regarding Women in Michael G. Schechter ed., *UN-Sponsored World Conferences: Past, Present and Future*, United Nations University Press

Barbara Stark

2000 "Women and Globalization: The Failure and Postmodern Possibilities of International Law," *Vanderbilt J. of Trans'l Law* 33: 503-571, 546-556.

Week 8

VII Western Law and the Judiciary in Africa: Colonial Impositions and Emancipations

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Roberts, Richard

2005 "Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan: 1895-1912," Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Conklin, Alice, "En Faire des Hommes: William Ponty and the Pursuit of Moral Progress," in Alice Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, Stanford University Press.

Week 9

VIII Challenging the Public/Private Divide

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

IWTC, "Violence against Women," [read 62-66].

Sullivan, "The Public/Private Dichotomy in International Law," [read 126-134].

Benninger-Budel and O'Hanlon, "Expanding the Definition of Torture," [read 14-15].

Heise, "Freedom Close to Home: Impact of Violence Against Women on Reproductive Rights," [read 238-255].

-From the *Secretary General's In Depth Study of the Consequences of Violence Against Women*

Week 10

IX The Issue of Female Genital Cutting in Parts of Sub-Saharan Africa

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

-The WHO's statement on "Female genital mutilation," Fact sheet N°241, February 2010. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

Wright, Stephanie

2011 "Female genital cutting: A woman's right to choose." UCL Centre for Applied Global Citizenship. http://www.ucl.ac.uk/network-for-student-activism/w/Female_genital_cutting:_A_woman%E2%80%99s_right_to_choose

-The free collection of articles from the New York Times on "Female Genital Mutilation,"

<http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/health/diseasesconditionsandhealthtopics/femalegenitalmutilation/index.html>

Week 11

X Rwanda: Gender, Genocide, and Reconstruction

Genocide, postwar reconstruction, and health (HIV/AIDS)

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Nowrojee, Binaifer

1996 "Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath." New York: Human Rights Watch. [read 1-43].

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

2000 "Rebuilding Rwanda: A Struggle Men Can Not Do Alone." New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. [read 1-28]

Watch Documentary: *Ghosts of Rwanda* (and *Ladies First*)

Week 12

IX Democratization and Women's Rights in South Africa (March 29)

Civil and political rights; apartheid legacy and various levels of violence against women; social and economic rights (education)

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Mabandla, "Women in South Africa and the Constitution-Making Process," pp. 67-71 (P&W)

Excerpts from Human Rights Watch, *Forgotten Schools: Right to Basic Education on Farms in South Africa*, [read only pages 1-51].

CEDAW, "South Africa," Report of the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, [read only 58-61].

Week 13

X Women's Health and Human Rights in South Africa (April 5)

Human security; social and economic rights (health, HIV/AIDS)

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Harper, "Rights for All in the New South Africa," [read 8-9]

Albertyne, "Contesting Democracy: HIV/AIDS and the Achievement of Gender Equality in South Africa," [read 595-615].

Peris Jones, "'A Test of Governance': Rights-Based Struggles and the Politics of HIV/AIDS Policy in South Africa," [read 419-47].

Watch video documentary: *State of Denial*

Week 14

XI Women's Rights and Rape as a Weapon of War

Critical Reading of the following Required Texts:

Hunt, Nancy Rose

2008 "An Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition." *Cultural Anthropology*, 23(2), May: 220-253.

Nolen, Stephanie

2005 "'Not Women Anymore...': All sides of the Congo war have used rape as a weapon -- Even the peacekeepers." *Ms.* 15, no. 1, (2005): 56-62.

Puechguirbal, Nadine

2003 "Reports: Women and War in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Signs*. 28(4): 1271-1283.

Week 15

Students' Presentations.

Do not copy