

**HS 744: AFRICAN WOMEN IN HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**  
**SAMPLE SYLLABUS for Cross-listing Purposes** Instructor: Claire Robertson

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**Goals** In this course we will widen our appreciation of African women's experiences, including history, legal and socio-economic status, religious and political roles, productive and reproductive roles, and the impact of colonialism and post-independence development, feminisms, and representation issues. We will work our way from prehistory to the present.

**Format** This course follows a proseminar format pioneered at the University of Wisconsin, emphasizing weekly assignments and individualized research papers. The weekly assignments (discussion questions) require students to synthesize course materials for every class. They and the research paper thus substitute for an examination.

**Requirements and evaluation**

Students are expected to participate extensively in discussions, answer discussion questions about the readings, and do a term paper whose content is conveyed to the class orally. All essays will be graded according to the SCOR sheet attached to this syllabus. There are no exams; rather, you are expected to work as you go along on the discussion questions. Grades will be assessed as follows:

**30% Class participation, including:**

10% Attendance

20% Discussion/Presentation of paper (ten minute discussion of your findings).

**30% Discussion Questions**

For each class session students should do a one page (typewritten) answer to one of the discussion questions listed on the syllabus. The discussion question answers should reflect knowledge of all assigned readings and be footnoted (in-text notes as on SCOR sheet please). If you do a paper or film review for that date, you do not need to do a discussion question. The questions will also form the basis for class discussion that day. On two occasions you may choose to devise discussion questions of your own instead of answering one. When you decide on that option case you will need to devise two questions pertaining to each of the readings for that day, type them up and hand them in instead of the question.

**28% Paper** 8-10 pages of text in length excluding notes and bibliography, 12 point font, 1 inch margins, on a topic selected by you at the beginning of the course from among those asterisked on the syllabus under the dates when that paper is due. On that date you will hand in the paper and convey your findings to the class to contribute to our discussion. Pay close attention to the SCOR sheet criteria. Begin your research by consulting the readings for that day and those recommended on the syllabus, not forgetting previous course readings. In many cases that will be sufficient; if not, they include relevant bibliography. You must, in any case, refer to course materials in your paper. In your paper and presentation be sure to develop a cogent argument and convey to the class the gist of the assigned articles and other materials you discovered while researching your topic. The question you are asked to answer in your paper should be discussed with the instructor.

**12% Film Analyses** Films are an integral part of this course. Three times during the term you

are asked to do a two page (typed, 12 point font, 1 inch margins) analysis of a film shown to the class that analyzes its relationship to the topic for the day it is shown. Your analysis is due at the next class, for which you do not need to do a discussion question. Six films listed on the syllabus will be shown.

**Readings** The reading for this course averages approximately 100 pages per week. All required books are on reserve in the Main Library and on sale at SBX Bookstore:

- Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood* (novel)  
 Hay, M.J. and S. Stichter, *African Women South of the Sahara* (second edition)  
 Mikell, G., ed. *African Feminism*  
 Ndambuki, B. and C. Robertson, *We Only Come Here to Struggle* (life history)  
 Reader available from Tuttle Place Cop-ez

**Video List:**

*Maids and Madams*  
*You Have Struck a Rock*  
*Second Face*  
*Mama Benz*  
*Rites*  
*Femmes Aux Yeux Ouverts*

**Overall Basis for Grades**

30% Class Participation  
 30% Discussion Questions (15)  
 28% Paper (1)  
 12% Film Analyses (3)  
 100%

**Class Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading</b>
<b>Sept. 20</b>	Organization and Introduction to Africa	
<b>Sept. 25</b>	Women in African Society. Introduction. Discussion questions (select one): 1. How does polygyny affect the position of African women? 2. What are the most important basic differences you see between African and American social structures affecting women?	Reader: McCall, Saul and Karp
<b>Sept. 27</b>	Women's Precolonial Roles Discussion questions: 1. What effect did some African women's rights to own property independently of men have on their roles in history? 2. Why were so many slaves kept in Africa female?	Hay/Stichter, Ch. 1; Reader: Wadley, Robertson and Klein
<b>Oct. 2</b>	Women in Precolonial and Colonial Politics Discussion questions: 1. How did women wield political power in precolonial times? 2. How did colonialism affect the political status of women?	Reader: Okonjo; Hansen, Ch. 7

\*Paper topic: Was precolonial politics the province of elite women only? Recommended sources: Awe article in A. Schlegel, ed. *Sexual Stratification* (pp.144-160); Aidoo article in F. Steady, ed. *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* (pp.87-101).

**Oct. 4 Women and Religion**

Hay/Stichter, Ch.6; Discussion

questions:

Mikell, Ch. 12

1. What roles have African women played in old and new religions?
2. What was the appeal of new religions for African women and what did they do to

the religions brought by the missionaries?

\*Paper topic: What did participation in Christian sects offer women?

Recommended sources: Berger article in Hafkin and Bay, *Women in Africa*; Jules-Rosette article in B. Jules-Rosette, ed., *The New Religions of Africa*; Spring article in A. Spring and J. Hoch-Smith, eds., *Women in Ritual and Symbolic Roles*; M. Grosz-Ngate/O.H. Kokole, eds., *Gendered Encounters*.

**Oct. 9 Colonialism and Economic Change: Agriculture**Reader: Hay; Hansen, *Video*:*Maids and Madams*

Ch. 8

Discussion questions:

1. What changes in women's economic activities were caused by colonialism?
2. How did colonialism affect women's agricultural work?

**Oct. 11 Colonialism and Economic Change: Crafts/Trade**

Reader: Etienne;

Discussion questions:

Mikell, Ch.5

1. What changes happened in the cloth industry in Ivory Coast with what effects on women's position?
2. What was the importance of beer to Lusakan women and how did that change? \*Paper topic: How did colonialism affect the gender division of labor in agriculture or women's trade (pick one)? Did the changes benefit women?

Recommended sources: relevant Hansen articles; Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl, Trouble Showed the Way*; Muntamba article in E. Bay, ed., *Women and Work in Africa*; Eliz. Schmidt, book on Zimbabwean women peasants.

**Oct. 16 Women, Colonialism and Social Change**

Hay/Stichter, Ch.4;

Discussion questions:

Reader: Hansen, Ch.9

1. How did colonialism affect women's and men's "domestic" roles?
2. Was marriage the most important social structure for African women?

\*Paper topic: How did Western education affect African women? Note, even women who have not gone to Western-type schools have been affected by Western education in various ways.

Recommended sources: relevant Hansen articles; Robertson article in *Comparative Education Review* 28 (Nov., 1984); McSweeney/Freedman and Yates articles in G.P. Kelly and C. Elliott, eds., *Women's Education in the Third World*.

**Oct. 18 No class. Work on Emeheta.****Oct. 23 Marital Transitions**

Emeheta, entire

Discussion questions (use 2 pages instead of 1 for this exercise):

1. What were the "joys of motherhood" for Nnu Ego? Why were they ironic?

2. Analyze the changes Nnu Ego experienced by migrating from her village to Lagos.

**Oct. 25 Women in the Anti-colonial Struggle**

Video: *You Have Struck a Rock*

Hay & Stichter, Ch.10;  
Reader: Van Allen, Johnson  
or Matsepe (in class choice)

Discussion questions:

1. In what ways did colonialist oppression most specifically affect women and how did they resist?
2. What kinds of structures did women have that helped them to resist colonialism?

\*Paper topics: How did West African women's resistance to colonialism differ from that of women in East Africa?

Recommended sources: Santilli article in *Ufahamu* 7,1 (1976); Mutunhu article in *Ufahamu* 8,1 (1977); Wipper article in *Africa* 58,4 (1989). Or

How was the oppression of women in South Africa related to the capitalist economy?

Recommended sources: E. Schmidt, *Decoding Corporate Camouflage*; H. Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears*; I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*.

**Oct. 30 Women in the Contemporary Rural Economy**

Hay and Stichter, Ch.2;

Discussion questions:

Mikell, Ch.10

1. How have the lives of rural women changed? Their workload?
2. What changes have taken place in the rural gender division of labor?

\*Paper topic: How has urban migration affected rural women's economic activities?

Recommended sources: H. Sibisi article in *Signs* 3,1 (1977); Hemmings-Gapihan and Fortmann articles in E. Bay, ed., *Women and Work in Africa*; Jean Davison and Women, *Women of Mutira*.

**Nov. 1 Berida: Rural-urban Experiences**

Ndambuki/Robertson,

Video: *Second Face*

*Struggle*, entire.

Discussion questions (use 2 pages for this one):

1. Do you consider Berida Ndambuki's life to be a success story? Why (not)?
2. What advantages or disadvantages do you see deriving from Berida's commuting lifestyle?
3. List and describe the impact of the socioeconomic problems facing Berida and her solutions for them. Are they effective?

\*Paper topic: How have the laws changed regarding marriage and family with respect to women? What has been the impact of new laws on customary laws? Have practices changed accordingly?

Recommended sources: M.J. Hay and M. Wright, eds., *African Women and the Law*; Mikell, chs. by Toungara and Manuh.

**Nov. 6 Women in Contemporary Urban Society**

Hay and Stichter, Ch.3;

Video: *Mama Benz*

Reader: Hansen, Ch.11

Discussion questions:

1. Are women's lives easier in town than in the country? Why do they move to town?
2. How do Mozambican women cope with childrearing?

\*Paper topics: What has been the effect of African urban living on women's childrearing and fertility?

Recommended sources: Robertson portraits, *Sharing the Same Bowl*; Lewis article in E. Bay, *Women and Work in Africa*; F. Mernissi article in *Studies in Family Planning* 6,12 (1975). Or, How has involvement in trade affected/changed women's lives?

Recommended sources: Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husband*; C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way*; Nancy Horn's book on women traders in Harare, Zimbabwe

### Nov. 8 Women and Politics

Hay/Stichter: Chs.9, 11

Discussion questions:

1. How far has nationalist liberation ideology addressed gender inequality?
2. What are the goals of the different kinds in of women's organizations in Africa?  
Specify which kind.

\*Paper topic: What are the impediments to women's solidarity in southern Africa and why is it necessary?

Recommended sources: L. Manicom article in *Journal of African History* 33 (1992); G. Geisler article in *African Affairs* 94 (1995); B. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*.

### Nov. 13 Persecution of Women

Reader: Wilson, Hoch-Smith, Robertson

Discussion questions:

1. Why do women make good victims? What benefits do African governments (and others) get out of scapegoating women?
2. How do Yoruba concepts about women's sexuality relate to witchcraft notions?

\*Paper topic: What changes have allowed women to be persecuted (include ideological as well as political, social and economic)? Compare with the precolonial/colonial situation.

Recommended sources: readings for April 3, May 3-10; Seidman article in *Feminist Studies* 10,3 (1984).

### Nov. 15 Health issues: Healing, Female Genital Cutting

Hay/Stichter, Chs.13-14;

Video: *Rites*

Reader: James/Robertson

Discussion questions:

1. Why does female genital cutting continue? Are all African women included in the practice? What ideology supports it? (Caution-blind tradition is not an accurate or adequate answer here.)
2. Are African women primarily responsible for Africa's population growth? How do the reasons men and women have for wanting children differ?

\*Paper topic: Compare and contrast different practices of female genital cutting (their physical and symbolic aspects) and where they occur. What are the implications of the variations for efforts to eradicate them?

Recommended sources: R.O. Hayes article in *American Ethnologist* 2,4 (1985); A. Cloudsley, *Women of Omdurman*; R. Abdalla, *Sisters in Affliction*; Efua Dorkenoo, *Cutting the Rose*; M. Turshen, ed. *Women and Health in Africa*.

### Nov. 20 Moral Issues? Prostitution? AIDS?

Mikell, Ch.13;

Discussion questions:

Reader: White, Hunt

1. How did Nairobi prostitution differ from the usual stereotype about U.S. prostitution?
2. What do changes in Nairobi prostitution indicate about changes in the position of women?
3. How is AIDS in Africa a moral issue in Africa?
4. What has been the economic impact of AIDS in Africa?

Paper topics: What factors explain the rapid spread of AIDS in Africa? Or, Analyze the consequences of the AIDS epidemic in one African country of your choice (recommendation: Zambia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zaire or Nigeria).

Recommended sources: works of Brooke Schoepf, M. Turshen, ed. *Women and Health in Africa*.

**Nov. 27** Women, the State and Development

Hay/Stichter, Ch.12;

Video: *Femmes aux Yeux Ouverts*

Mikell, Ch. 7

Discussion questions:

1. How can African women best fight economic oppression?
2. What impact does Western sexism have on African economies?
3. How can American feminists relate to African women's development efforts most appropriately?

\*Paper topic: What relationship does the state have to African women's development efforts?

Select one country to study.

Recommended sources: N. J. Hafkin and E. Bay, eds. *Women in Africa*, article by J. Brain; J.L. Parpart and K. Staudt, eds., *Women and the State in Africa*; S. Stichter and J. L. Parpart, eds. *Patriarchy and Class in Africa*.

**Nov. 29** African Feminisms

Mikell, Chs. 9,

Discussion questions and paper topics:

Conclusion

1. What fundamental differences are there between African and Western feminisms? What accounts for the differences?
2. What priorities do African feminists claim and why?

Recommended sources: F. Steady, ed. *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*; Obioma Nnaemeka, ed. *Sisterhood Feminisms and Power*