Although popular media often stigmatizes "South African women and men" as being poor and economically victimized, the reality is that the post-apartheid years since 1994 have seen an extraordinary set of ideas about how to think about the past in an era of ‘new democracy,” and about how to imagine and bring into life initiatives capable of ensuring deep decolonization. The last country on the African continent to achieve political independence, South Africa is simultaneously the first to be governed by a constitution whose Bill of Rights guarantees protection from multiple forms of violence and discrimination. The last country on the African continent to fight successfully against apartheid-based legislative control of economic injustice, South Africa also remains – with Brazil – first in the world in terms of the size of the gap between its richest and poorest citizens. It is a country of contradiction and vibrancies, one inextricably linked to histories of the Atlantic and Indian oceans as much as to histories of the rest of the continent. And it is also in tenuous, yet wildly energetic and self-referential, debate on what it might mean to “be South African.”

Within all these dynamics, questions of gender and sexualities complicate the shape of what the past, present, and future might mean within South Africa. While at one level, 1994 saw dramatic shifts in the numbers of women in parliament and other formal institutions, at another, the leading profession for urban poor and working class black women remains domestic service. Similarly, while new possibilities of imagining femininities and masculinities play themselves across media, art, and web-spaces, conservative gender norms concerning ‘gendered respectability’ haunt young people’s options, and lead directly to violence against gender non-conformity. “Seeing” the dynamics of gender and sexualities in the contemporary South African world organically leads to new ways of asking questions
about history, and of making connections between South African spaces and others, differently located but equally perplexed by the project of “becoming human” in economically and politically changing places.

The course is especially designed for juniors and seniors in a range of majors who want to forge new linkages between their knowledges of global political change, gender and sexuality, and feminist theory and activism. An interest in African contexts will clearly be essential, but there is no expectation in the curriculum that participants will already have spent a lot of time studying these contexts. The course will focus on South Africa, but will also include some discussion on colonial pasts and legacies throughout the continent, as these have had a profound impact on the contemporary politics of gender and sexualities in South Africa.

Given the fact that the course will be hosted by the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, in Cape Town, South Africa, the course will open by asking questions about ‘reading a South African context’ from within the Cape Town city space, and then spend sessions focusing on broader South African realities. Intellectually, we will be interested in several theoretical questions. The first concerns the difficulty of “reading” space and history from the perspective of the “outsider,” and we will draw on theories of transnational knowledges and positionality to develop discussion. The second question asks about the location of the politics of gender and sexuality within hegemonic narratives of oppression, liberation, and democracy, phases of South Africa history typically generated within popular discourse. As we will discover, such phases may not be helpful in coming to terms with questions of embodiment, violence, reproduction and desire and intimacy. A final theoretical question concerns the value of diverse forms of “text” in encounter with contemporary South African debates on African feminism, race and racialization, class mobility and sexualities.

The course will include visual, spatial, written (archival, theoretical, historical, imaginative), and ‘embodied’ texts, and will require in-depth participant engagement with these.

Because the African Gender Institute is located in a city saturated in the meaning of slavery, colonial machinery, the culture of the liberation struggles, and the experiences of diverse forms of feminist and anti-imperialist organizing, the course will include visits to different spaces in the city and engage with activists, artists, community-based leaders and activists.
The course will be designed by Prof Jane Bennett (African Gender Institute, University of Cape Town) and Prof Yvette Christianse (Dept of Africana Studies, Barnard College), and co-taught by Profs Bennett and Christianse, Additional guest lecturers based in the Cape Town contexts will contribute to particular sessions.

**SHAPE OF CURRICULUM**

The course is designed to cover ten full days of engagement with textual and visual material, lectures, participant-based input, interaction with a wide range of sites (such as art galleries, activist NGOs), and with students based at the University of Cape Town. A typical day will include travel to at least one site of interest, formal input by the course lecturers and/or a guest lecturer, visual material, intensive discussion, and the opportunity for personal reflection and exploration.

Participants will be asked to create writing, in a numbers of genres, engaging the course materials and discussions, and this will form a key part of the curriculum.

The curriculum is structured through four themes

*Theme One: Taking the politics of gender and sexuality seriously: reading “liberation”*

This theme will orient participants to the concept of working with the politics of gender and sexualities as a way of exploring new contexts. It will also introduce them to the possibility of reading South Africa’s political liberation from apartheid through intensive engagement with Cape Town as an city-space, marked by the legacies of slavery, apartheid legislation, and the struggle for South African liberation.

*Monday August 3: the story of islands*
9.00 - 10.30: Welcome, introduction; unpack participants’ own understandings of their ‘gender/sexualities/political context’ stories

**Readings**


Excerpts from Emma Mashanini (*Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*), Zoe Wiccomb (*You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*), Lauretta Ngcobo (*And They Didn’t Die*)

10.30 – 10.45: Teabreak

10.45 – 12.00: Screening of short movie (*Difficult Love*: Zanele Muholi): we will draw on the movie to ask questions about what it may mean to live in a ‘post-liberation’ context for South Africans

12.00-12.30: *Lunchbreak*

**Readings:**


1.00 – 4.30 pm: Trip to Robben Island

*Debriefing and meal together on return*

**Tuesday August 4: what’s in a “text”?**

9.00 – 10.30: Discussion about meaning of ‘grand stories of struggle and freedom’; reading about histories of the Island, and questions about location of gender and sexualities

**Readings:**


10.30-10.45: *Teabreak*

10.45 – 12.30 The colonial archive: voicing “gender”
Excerpts: film: “Proteus,” Jack Lewis and John Greyson

Reading:

Noa Ben-Ascher, “Screening Historical Sexualities: A Roundtable on Sodomy, South Africa and Proteus,” GLQ, 11: 3, 2005

12.30- 1.45 Lunchbreak

Visiting Colonial Archives

Readings:

Excerpts:

Yvette Christianse, Unconfessed

Wednesday August 5: liberation/war

9.00 – 10.30: Engagement with writing/reading (exercise) on Unconfessed

10.30- 10:45: Teabreak

10.45 – 12.30: Screening: John Kani: Nothing But the Truth

1.00 – 2.00: lunchbreak

Readings:

2.00-3.00: Discussion of issues raised by Kani’s film

Readings:

Fiona Ross:

Nthabiseng Motsemme, “

Khulumani Women’s Support Group materials; visit with Khulumani Women, Western Cape

Screening: Zulu Love Letter (Ramedan Suleman)

Theme two: contemporary constructions

This theme will focus on contemporary constructions of gender in South Africa. We will explored dominant debates on “e-masculinization,” “hypersexualized femininities,” and “transgender identities.” The period of transition between ‘colonialism’ and ‘flag-
democracy’ (sometimes called ‘independence), is a period often marked by major forms of militarism, and a period in which ideas about gender and sexuality play a key role in notions of what ‘the old’ and ‘the new’ look like.

Thursday August 6:

9.00 -10.00:  Debriefing/discussion/where are we?

10.00 – 1.00 : Genders and “new democracy”: Masculinities

Readings:

Screening: Room 201 (or: excerpts from Jerusalema)


Excerpt from Thando Mqolozana, A Man Who is Not a Man

1.00-2.00 Lunchbreak

2.00 – 4.30: Transgender identities/cross-border (visit to Gender Dynamix, or Tshepiso visits course

Readings:


5.00: Gender Queer installation: Dean Hutton

Friday, August 7

9.00 – 10.00: Debriefings

10.00 – 12.30: “hypersexual” femininities -- media, race, and class: guest lecturer: Nadia Sanger

Readings
12.30: Lunch at Mzoli’s

Weekend plans to include Solms/Delta wine-farm…. Farmworkers/enslaved people’s museum

**Theme Three: Activist spaces**

This theme explores the meaning of ‘activism’ around questions of gender and sexualities in spaces both explicitly self-identifying as “feminist” and those arising within development-oriented contexts which seek to offer support to people in struggle

**Monday, August 10**

The day will be spent in Khayelitsha, working with an HIV/AIDS project and considering questions of ‘health, ‘democracy,’ and ‘gender.’

**Readings: to be assigned**

**Tuesday, August 11**

The day will be spent with SWEAT, Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce, thinking through the politics of sex work in Cape Town, and of national debates on decriminalization

**Readings: to be assigned**

**Theme Four Location and activism**

This theme will explore the possible connections between participants’ locations/contexts and the notion of transnational/transcontextual work (research, activism, writing). 1.30 – 4.00: Meaning of ‘transnational learning and movement-building”

**Wednesday 12 and Thursday 13:**

**Readings: to be discussed**

**Friday August 14:**

**Discussion and evaluation**

Closer to the time, more lunchtime, and evening events can be scheduled; many of these are not yet advertised, but the beginning of the new semester will see many exciting possibilities driven by student and city-based events and activisms