

Thinking and Doing Intersectionality in/from Africa

*Workshop organised by Junior Research Group-Intersectionality
Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence
University of Bayreuth*

October 17-19, 2022 Venue - Iwalewahauss (Wölfelstraße 2, 95444 Bayreuth)

Contact person serawit.debele@uni-bayreuth.de

Monday, October 17

9:30-10:00 AM: Opening and welcome

Rüdiger Seesemann, Dean of Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence

Sabelo Ndlovu Gatsheni, Vice Dean of Research in the Cluster and Chair of Epistemologies of the Global South

Serawit Debele, Junior Research Group Leader

10:00-12:00 AM: Africanising Intersectionality

Moderator: Diana Kisakye (*University of Bayreuth*)

Zethu Matebeni (*University of Fort Hare*): Translating Intersectionality: Possibilities for some Theoretical Revisions?

Hibist Kassa (*University of Cape Town, South Africa*): Interlinkage, Economic Process and African Ecofeminist Just Alternative

Sandra Manuel (*Eduardo Mondlane University*): Sexual Diversity: To What Extent Minoritizing and Labeling Allow for an Intersectional and Transformative Reading?

Break 11:00-11:15

Respondent: Azza Nubi (*Out Right Action International*)

Lunch 12:00-2:00

2:00-5:00 PM: Alliances and Solidarities

Moderator: **Isabelle Zundel** (*University of Bayreuth*)

Stella Nyanzi (*PEN-Zentrum Deutschland*): Ambivalences of Intersectional Partnerships with LGBTIQ+ in the #Pads4GirlsUG Campaign

Stephanie Lämmert (*Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung*): Motherhood and Women's Solidarity on the Copper Mines

S.N Nyeck (*University of Colorado Boulder*): Binding Flesh and Spirit: Queerness and the Making of Purposeful Intersectional Solidarities

Break 3:00-3:15

Respondent: **Bahiru G. Shewaye** (*House of Guramayle*)

6:00: Opening Photo Exhibition

Tuesday, October 18

10:00-12:00 AM: Matters of Categories/Categories Matter

Moderator: **Pinky P. Ndlovu** (*University of Bayreuth*)

Samah Khalaf Allah (*University of Bayreuth*): Reform or Revolution: Intersectionality in Sudan's Contemporary Feminist Movement

Monia Lachheb (*Université de la Manouba*): Negotiating Gay and Muslim Identity in Tunisia: An Intersectional Look

Jihad Sifa Alfakir (*University of Bayreuth*): Queer and Race Intersections in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

Break 11:00-11:15

Respondent: **Noor Sultan** (*Bedayaa Organization/Egypt*)

Lunch 12:00-2:00

2:00-5:00 PM: Doing Intersectionality

Moderator: **Samah Khalaf Allah** (*University of Bayreuth*)

Gibson Ncube (*University of Stellenbosch*): Intersectionality to Understand ‘Othered’ Bodies in an Institution of Higher Education in South Africa: A Self-Reflexive Study

Isabelle Zundel (*University of Bayreuth*): Intersectionality As Instrument to Claim the Protection of Sexual Minorities Through the African Human Rights System

Larissa Kojoue (*University of Buea/CEPED*): Intersectionality: Doing Without *Thinking*? A Case Study from Tassi Hangbè Interdisciplinary University in Burkina Faso

Break 3:00-3:15

Respondent: **Negede G. Gebremeskel** (*House of Guramayle*)

4:00-5:00 Mini Documentary (Sudan) and discussion

Wednesday, October 19

9:30-12:00 AM: Activism In and Out

Moderator: **Jihad Sifa Alfakir** (*University of Bayreuth*)

Tarek Shukrallah (*HU-Berlin*): Queering BIPOC Activist History in Germany - Reading “Along the Grain” in Queer Archives of Emotions?

Karam Aouini (*Mawjoudin/ We Exist-Tunisia*): Queer Artivism in Tunisia

Respondent: **Kal Demissie (Alias)** (*Negn Media, Ethiopia*)

Break 11:00-11:15

Mini Documentary (Tunisia) and discussion

Lunch 12:15-2:00

2:00-4:45: Reflections on Intersectional(ising) Activism: A Roundtable

Moderator: Tarek Shukrallah (HU-Berlin)

Azza Nubi (*Out Right Action International*)

Negede G. Gebremeskel (*House of Guramayle*)

Noor Sultan (*Bedayaa Organization/Egypt*)

Bahiru G. Shewaye (*House of Guramayle*)

Kal Demissie (*Alias*) (*Negn Media, Ethiopia*)

Karam Aouini (*Mawjoudin/ We Exist-Tunisia*)

Break 3:45-4:00

4:00-4:45 Final Discussion

About the Workshop

This workshop brings together activists and scholars to think about practices and theorisations of intersectionality in the African contexts and specifically among minoritised/marginalised groups. This three days workshop is a modest attempt at what some call “public facing scholarship” where activists and scholars enter into dialogue in anticipation of contributions for a radical political, social, cultural and economic transformation. The aim of the workshop is to exchange insights such as how knowledge production can translate into/shape activism and how scholars imagine the practicality of some of the work they do, as well as how activists’ inputs might be thought of to further scholarship that reflects the lived experience of those on the margins.

Owing to its history which is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of African American Women, we draw inspiration from intersectionality as a conceptual tool that cuts across academia and activism. We propose that intersectional lenses can help us challenge the wide held perception that regards the life and struggles of citizens existing outside of heteronormative prescriptions as a non-issue as far as broader fights for social justice are concerned. Through a serious consideration of intersectionality, we challenge the misguided idea that compares marginalised sexual and gender groups, who allegedly raise ‘luxury’ issues influenced by western cultural imperialism, with others who ‘genuinely’ suffer to suggest that scholars and activists could not afford to be distracted by less urgent problems. Intersectionality affords us the tools to debunk this “priority setting concerns”, as SN Nyeck calls them, where any attempt to engage these ‘less’ pressing queer concerns is regarded as tantamount to “the neglect of other timely issues” about the human condition (Nyeck 2021). We would critic the view that queer (broadly conceived) Africans’ struggles for justice, freedom and equality are seen as isolated matters, with no emancipatory potential to yield any substance for broader struggles on the continent and elsewhere in the world. In the workshop, we call out the prioritisation of intersecting forms of oppression as if we can understand any form of oppression without taking into account multiple others such as class, gender, sexuality, religious belief, ethnicity/race that shape one’s position in the world. These workshop can be seen as meaningful only if differently positioned actors come together to exchange thoughts, debate practices and in the process learn from each other. For this we made a deliberate effort to invite researchers and activists based both in Africa and the Diaspora. Because we want to problematise the

dichotomy of Africa north and south of the Sahara, we are joined by colleagues from across the continent- Cameroon, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Egypt, South Africa, Uganda, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

The questions we raise include but are by no means limited to

- What does the prioritisation of some human concerns over others mean to the struggle for social justice and equality in a capitalist world?
- How do we learn and improvise from the history of intersectionality as both a guideline for activism and a theoretical/conceptual lens to understand socio-economic inequalities?
- How might intersectionality, that is attentive to specific histories, geographies as well as social formations help us out of such prioritisation? How do specific histories of gender and sexual relations shape the struggle for the rights of queer Africans? What does it mean to domesticate intersectionality in the African context from both practice and theory angles? *Or is it even a worthy pursuit to import intersectionality to Africa?*
- What does it mean to work against existing within multiple forms of oppression and what is the potential of acknowledging the intersectional nature of these problems in both research and activism in the African context?
- What exactly are scholars saying when they say rights based liberal discourses limit the liberatory potential of activism and how might we cultivate a conversation that is aware of this trap?

These and other questions will be engaged in the workshop through presentation of papers, roundtables/group discussions, keynotes short documentaries and a photo exhibition. The keynote entitled **Intersectionality from the Margins: Historical Subjects/Subjectivation in the Global South** will be delivered by Lyn Ossome as part of the JRG lecture series **African FeminismS Past and Present** within the cluster's Knowledge Lab in a [hybrid format](#) (Meeting ID: 679 4833 0883 Passcode: 201486) on the 27th of October, 2022.

Abstracts

Zethu Matebeni

Translating intersectionality: possibilities for some theoretical revisions?

At the height of student activism in SA higher education institutions in 2015/16, intersectionality became a buzz word and a rallying call for understanding students' struggles. Very little effort was put towards translating Intersectionality into everyday realities and this suggested that the concept, while useful, may have limited reach to communities outside the academy. In this small intervention I explore the possibilities of translating Intersectionality so as to engage with the term's relevance beyond the English language while also posing questions for new theoretical and practical shifts for queer activism.

Hibist Kassa

Interlinkage, Economic process and African Ecofeminist Just Alternative

As a feminist rooted in historical materialist traditions in Africa, I have adopted an approach that deploys interlinkages to understand the condition of persistent and multiple crises and focuses on economic process to understand its trajectory. This is an older tradition that preceded the popular focus on intersectionality to understand how inequalities are reproduced. Interlinkage, for the past forty years, has laid the foundation that is of relevance to social movements and mass-based organisations that can intervene in the political realm to contest and advance just alternatives from a transformative standpoint. A foundational text is Gita Sen and

Caren Grown, (1987) *Development Crises, Alternative Visions and Marketisation of Governance* by Vivienne Taylor (2000). In a period of ecocide, faced with the uneven impact of climate crisis on global South countries and commodity price volatilities, with the Ukraine war amplifying these trends, African economies are being further entrenched into primary commodity dependence. I have turned to engaging with ecofeminism rooted in African experiences of building alternatives, to redefine how to navigate this period. Therefore, as I forge ahead to think through the contemporary economic, social and ecological challenges arising, I want to reflect on the past approaches to interlinkage, and look forward to the challenges in the contemporary period. I will draw upon my reflections based on research and or organising I am developing with Maasai women in Tanzania dealing with natural resource extraction, and on work I hope to do with Awra Amba community in Ethiopia. This will form part of a book project on African Ecofeminism.

Sandra Manuel

Sexual diversity: to what extent minoritizing and labeling allow for an intersectional and transformative reading?

For this workshop we were invited to engage and contribute to a radical political, social, cultural and economic transformation specifically regarding categories of citizens existing outside of heteronormative prescriptions.

I was drawn for the concept of “minoritized/marginalized groups” highlighted in the concept note to reflect on how such concepts negates intersectionality as it standardizes the categories of citizens existing outside of heteronormative prescriptions as uniform and universal. Plus, to what extent aren’t such concepts disempowering as they rob the possibility of agency?

Reflecting on the agenda of radical transformation, I was inspired by Judith Lorber’s call for “degendering” (2000) and imagined a vision of utopia in which gender (sexual) polarization has been completely dismantled in ways that it no longer organizes culture and the psyche (Sandra Bem 1993: 192) thus, doing away with gender and sexual divisions that continue to reproduce inequalities.

In particular, when reflection on categories existing outside the heteronormative prescriptions, the issue of labeling raised a number of issues that I consider worth discussing. To what extent does labelling:

- emphasizes people as a sexual category rather than their humanity
- forces people to be considered a minority
- creates constraints as certain groups do not consider belonging to some labels even if their practices are similar to the ones used to define such labeled categories. Is there a possibility to democratize the identification of sexual diversity? Isn’t labeling an oppressing exercise?

Stella Nyanzi

Ambivalences of Intersectional Partnerships with LGBTIQ+ in the #Pads4GirlsUG Campaign

What are the multiple (mis)interpretations of queer partnerships and solidarities forged during political contestation against misogynistic patrimonial dictatorship in Uganda? In this chapter, I describe and analyse the grassroots #Pads4GirlsUG campaign in which I led and organised individuals and groups to contest against president Yoweri Museveni’s failed elections promise to provide free menstrual hygiene products to poor Ugandan schoolgirls who miss school during their menstruation because they lack sanitary protection. Drawing from Leigh-Ann Naidoo’s (2021) conceptualisation of the simultaneous necessity and difficulty of transnational solidarity – particularly because of power differentials, I explore and examine the critical roles played by my queer allies, as well as the homophobic misinterpretations that were publicly applied to our campaign by public officers, religious leaders and journalists. In homophobic heterosexist patriarchal countries,

the multiple benefits of intersectional partnerships of solidarity with queers can be misconstrued, misinterpreted and misrepresented in order to fail social justice campaigns addressing critical gaps in public services.

Stephanie Lämmert

Motherhood and women's solidarity on the copper mines

Motherhood and what it meant to be a good mother were hotly debated in the late 1950s/early 1960s in the central African copperbelt among the communities who lived on the mines – both in the Northern Rhodesian/Zambian copperbelt and in Haut-Katanga in the Belgian Congo/Katanga. The mining companies, especially in Katanga, intervened heavily in the family lives of their workers. They promoted and policed a family model based on the Christian nuclear family, resting on women's domesticity, respectability and, especially, a motherhood confined to the private realm. Copperbelt women challenged this model in various ways. Most women refused to be stay-at-home mothers. More importantly, many copperbelt women invested in networks of female solidarity that had the potential to dissolve social hierarchies and class lines as well as ethnicity. In an environment that was heavily stratified by the mining companies (wives of white collar workers, wives of boss-boys, wives of "ordinary" workers, "unattached" women and so called *ndumbas* (sex workers)), such practices of solidarity were a testament to the goal of thinking together various forms of oppression experienced by women on the mines. While contested by many men and some women, those who sought to invoke solidary networks did so by addressing communities living on the highly policed mine compounds and those in the wider urban neighborhoods of the copper towns. I am tracing their voices in the company newspapers *Mwana Shaba* and *The African Roan Antelope* respectively.

S.N. Nyeck

Binding Flesh and Spirit: Queerness and the Making of Purposeful Intersectional Solidarities

How can queerness design (a) purpose(s) that bind(s) and steer(s) the trajectories of Africana collective values and histories away from narcissistic ends? In my recent work, I demonstrated that queerness, defined as that which is out of order, lies at the intersection of larger histories and struggles within the Africana worldly experience. Additionally, I charted a path toward an ethical approach of the work of making individual and collective selves out of order without reifying negation in the process of negotiating presence within society. Thus, at this intersection where queerness meets larger histories and struggles it is necessarily transmuted from a condition of singularity into visions of transformation for a people. This presentation is an analysis of *Madame Brouette* (Madame Wheelbarrow), a film (2004) by Moussa Sène Absa to unpack this process of transmutation, or the conversion of the subject into purposeful agency or into the art of binding flesh to spirit in the imagination and making of a queerly inclusive Africana presence. It is argued that purpose is an ethical conditionality that transmutes intersectional spaces into reconfigured agential possibilities for manifested queerness.

Samah Khalaf Allah

Reform or Revolution: Intersectionality in Sudan's contemporary feminist movement

In this presentation, I will dwell on two issues: first what it means to battle against numerous, yet overlapping, types of oppression that already exist in the Sudanese specific context, and second how the notion of "reform or revolution" is being taken up by the feminist movement in Sudan across generations. My argument is based on ethnographic fieldwork and archival research I conducted during my fieldwork (May-October 2022). My finding shows that there is a disagreement among

Sudanese feminists when it comes to naming “priorities”. Also, the formulation of these “priorities” or “issues” is contingent upon intersectional dimensions and who is taking the decision. There seem to be two camps of feminists in Sudan (young and senior), formed along the revolution/reform divide. One strand of the feminist agenda is animated by a discourse of revolution for liberation from all forms and systematic oppression even within the feminist movement and calls for the establishment of a solid feminist discourse that recognizes marginalized groups of those who do not enjoy the same level of privileges and rights. This is mostly advocated by young/queer feminists. Their position is contrasted by an assertion that opposes such a radical agenda but rather calls for a “reform” of the existing systems and institutions. This is mostly propounded by senior feminists. Part of the work I want to do in this talk is to interrogate this intergenerational gap in order to understand how priorities are defined by different groups and explore whether these divides and priority setting moves are tenable in the struggle for a more meaningful social transformation.

Monia Lachheb

Negotiating Gay and Muslim Identity in Tunisia An intersectional look

Tunisia is a society where Islam is the dominant religion. According to a predominant interpretation of the precepts of Islam, homosexuality is a major sin. In addition to the religious dimension, there is a legal dimension according to which homosexuality is punishable by up to three years in prison. The present contribution focuses on the relationship between Islam and homosexuality in Tunisian society. It thus differs from works on the experience of Muslim homosexuals in migration (Chbat, 2017; Fassin, 2019; Lachheb, 2021) and attempts to account for the negotiations between homosexual identity and Muslim identity. On the basis of semi-directive interviews with a group of young gays and lesbians, it is a question of shedding light on the antinomies that underlie the identity constructions of young people, the strategies they develop to combine a Muslim identity with a homosexual identity. Within this framework, intersectional analysis aims to highlight a "political intersectionality" (Crenshaw and Bonis, 2005) that sheds light on the experiences of homosexuals because of their religiosity and their sexual orientation.

Jihad Sifa Alfakir

Queer and race intersections in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

Since its emergence and visibility after the revolution of 2011, Queer activism in Tunisia seems to be predominantly state-centered and focused on the questions of gender and sexual identity or orientation. Most of the work seems to respond to the colonial domination and postcolonial nationalism which imposed an exclusive heteronormative/heterosexual imagination of Tunisian national identity. The questions of race and racism, for example, are generally less considered in queer activism because of an imagined homogenous Tunisia. This study seeks to challenge the idea of homogeneous Tunisia, a nation where the question of race and racism are not prevalent. Yet in my ethnographic fieldwork and observations, interviews and archival work, I found that some Black Queer persons face not only homophobia but also racism. While implementing an intersectional perspective, this current reflection shows the importance of considering the category of race in the study of everyday life oppressions of queer Tunisians and broadly the North African context.

Isabelle Zundel

Intersectionality as instrument to claim the protection of sexual minorities through the African human rights system

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights gives an important promise to the African peoples. The promise is that “every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the Charter without distinction of any kind [...]”. Logically, this also includes sexual minorities.

Despite this enshrined right on equality and non-discrimination, sexual minorities lack the full recognition and protection of their rights through the legal and procedural mechanisms of the African human rights system. However, a comprehensive framework of protection can be achieved by systematically claiming the expansion of the current scope of this normative framework. One instrument available to demand this gradual expansion is the utilization of intersectionality. The discrimination and oppression sexual minorities experience is not but must be seen in the context of other intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression, such as age, class and gender. Conversely, solutions sought to close this gap of protection can be advanced through an intersectional lens. For example, the provisions of the Maputo Protocol actively reflect the lived realities of women being exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women with disabilities. In relation to sexual minorities, the Protocol could serve as legal basis for the introduction of protective measures that transcend the binary understanding of sex and gender thus be utilized to promote the protection of sexual minorities. Efforts to adopt intersectional realities in the framework are so far falling short in relation to sexual minorities. This paper will analyse the normative and procedural frameworks of the African human rights system to identify where intersectionality as an instrument can be used to claim the protection of sexual minorities and realise the mandate to protect every individual without distinction of any kind.

Gibson Ncube

Intersectionality to understand ‘othered’ bodies in an institution of higher education in south Africa: A self-reflexive study

This paper is based on self-reflexive experiences during an early career fellowship programme called Iso Lomso at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study. A year or so ago, I took part in a three-day workshop for all the fellows in this programme. On one day, we worked on improving public speaking techniques. After each of the fellows gave a 5-minute talk about their work, they got feedback from fellow fellows on how to improve our techniques. A fellow commented, quite jokingly, that I needed to work on reducing “queer” bodily deployment and gestures. Innocent as this comment might have been, it got me thinking of what “queer” bodily deployment meant and implied. This self-reflective paper thinks through this anecdotal experience and examines the centrality of intersectionality in making sense of corporeality and embodiment in negotiating academic spaces. I am interested particularly in how a black body, such as my own, negotiates predominantly white academic spaces as is the case in Stellenbosch in South Africa. I take my black body, especially one that does not perform “correct” scripts of masculinity, as a site of queering institutional normativity. I ponder on whether academic spaces are as safe as we have come to imagine them. In racialized and gendered/gendering academic institutions, how do “othered” bodies navigate and create productive intellectual spaces? However, in considering the whiteness of academic spaces in Stellenbosch, I do not wish to ignore “blackness”, especially considering the fact the comment I refer to above was made by a black fellow. How do white spaces also shape how black bodies relate to each other?

Larissa Kojoue

Intersectionality. Doing without *thinking*? A case study from Tassi Hangbè Interdisciplinary University in Burkina Faso

From my experience as queer feminist in various national and regional networks in West and Central Africa, sensitivity to the multiple dimensions of oppression is stronger in queer organizing circles, specifically in queer organizations led by women. Leadership practices, as well as the way activities are designed, simultaneously take into account gender, sexual orientation, educational or social level, and other identity markers in a conscious take for inclusivity. I would like to discuss some of these practices, drawing from the first edition of Tassi Hangbè interdisciplinary university which was held in Burkina Faso from 9 to 30 July 2022. Tassi Hangbè interdisciplinary university is the first organized space in French speaking West and Central Africa dedicated to learning and unlearning on gender, sexuality, african identities, leadership, advocacy, resources mobilizations, etc. Opened to 50 social justice advocates regardless of their level of education, the University aimed at honoring Tassi Hangbè, the neglected Queen of Dahomey in XVIII th century, and train activists in transformational leadership rooted in feminist

principles and values. In the light of the ongoing discussions on the translation of intersectionality into action within human rights organizations, the first observations show an ability to understand the different systems that work to exclude certain bodies, and to ensure that they are not reproduced internally. Intersectionality is something that is done in a pragmatic way without naming it. By applying intersectionality framework to understanding African feminist and queer organizing, we realized how limited the concern is among Francophone african based scholars. In former French colonies in West and Central Africa in particular, gender focus in academic work is embryonic, and sometimes rely on individual efforts rather than on a conscious process conducted by university officials. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge production and theoretical contributions to gender issues and their challenges in French speaking African countries. The gap with English speaking academic communities is considerable. Therefore, concepts such as intersectionality, one of the most important theoretical contributions in feminist studies, still have difficulty penetrating the academic space, hence its weak articulation in gender and human rights discourse. But it is not because the theoretical work is lacking that it doesn't shape activism, and specifically queer activism. This does not only suggest that we need more queer voices in the academia, but how important queer studies are in encapsulating the articulation between structural intersectionality (lived experience of oppressions) and political intersectionality (translation of these social experiences into specific political claims and/or practices).

Tarek Shukrallah M.A.

Queering BIPOC activist history in Germany – reading “along the grain” in queer archives of emotions?

Queer migrant, Black and People of Color histories of struggles in Germany are largely unwritten. They remain in a marginal position within the canon of queer public memory or find no place within it at all. However, traces of queer migrant and BIPOC struggles exist within the archives of predominantly *white* gay, lesbian and feminist movements in Germany. The presentation draws on a research project that attempts to bring visibility to queer migrant and BIPOC struggles histories as a tool for contemporary political activism. It reflects the project against the background of Ann Stoler's call to read the colonial archive “along the grain” in discussion with Ann Cvetkovich's conceptualization of the queer archive as an “archive of emotions”. How can we provincialise the dominance of whiteness in queer memory?

Samia al-Nagar (co-authors Liv Tønnessen, Samah Khalaf Allah and Hamada)

Activism from the Closet: Fear of a Double Backlash Against a Nascent Queer Movement in Sudan

The presentation explores the significant legal changes to the rights and status of LGBTQ+ persons in the country introduced by the transitional government, which is mainly the repeal of the state level public order laws and the specialized public order police and the strategy of queer to support their rights without being exposed. The legal reforms, therefore, did not come about because of queer lawfare as the queer organizations are fearful of a double backlash which is defined in this paper as a violent retrograde response or reaction aiming to revert to an imagined heteronormative social order (definition would be helpful). Still in their nascent stage after decades of political oppression, they have engaged in what El Menyawi has termed “activism from the closet” by supporting women's groups particularly in their efforts to repeal the public order laws. This involves the strategy of not explicitly advocating for queer rights, but rather advocating for human rights that will greatly benefit LGBTQ+ persons. In addition, they are working within the queer community to create self-acceptance in a context of widespread (and internalized) homophobia where queerness is religiously rejected and culturally tabooed.