This part of our review essays covers an introduction to the broad area of gender-based violence for teaching.

Introduction

One of the most proactive and engaged areas of feminist and women's activism in African contexts involves gender-based violence. There are diverse layers of this activism - legal advocacy and reform, the establishment of organizations offering support, resources, and education, the establishment of shelters for abused women and children, educational campaigns, movement building, trainings for police and judicial officers, provision of medical resources, marches and demonstrations, research on the links between gender-based violence and many other issues (such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and conflict). Across the continent, this activism forms one of the richest resources of experience on what it means to tackle patriarchies, social and economic injustice, and on how to describe and analyse daily realities of brutality, state indifference, and community-based tolerances for particular forms of abuse, usually targeted at women and girls.

Despite this, there is relatively little space in most syllabuses on '*gender and development*' or '*gender and society*' for in-depth exploration of the histories and theorization of gender-based violences. Even in educational curricula in psychology, social work, or the law, it is difficult to find concentrated attention on the multiplicity of questions which arise when gender-based violence is taken seriously as a critical zone of African feminist thought and work.

At a glance, it would be possible to thematize the area of gender-based violence in the following way:

- The place of gender-based violence under colonialism, and the legacies of this
- The ways in which post-colonial states engaged with gender, and how forms of gender-based violence have emerged in different contexts
- Debates and theories about the underlying causes of gender-based violence and its connections with other forms of institutional, political, cultural, economic and social realities
- The interactions between the North, and international dialogue on gender-based violence, with different African-based actors
- The emergence of diverse meanings for the term "*gender-based violence*"
- Theories about violence based on gender-dynamics of sexuality, and focused on women, from African-based thinkers, writers, and activists
- Engagement with the multiple forms of abuse now contained within the umbrella term '*gender-based violence*': multiple forms of rape; sexual harassment; domestic violence; child sexual abuse; trafficking; abduction; '*harmful traditional practices*'; defilement; incest; sexual assault; coercive sexual transactions; sexual corruption;femicide; sexual violence during war
- The voices of victims and survivors - what it means to try and represent the autobiographical experience of gender-based violence
- Debates about the impacts and effects of gender-based violence, and discussions on healing, empowerment and justice at different levels
- Strategies drawn on the combat gender-based violence (legal strategies would deserve a lot of attention here)
- Activism which is '*hard to categorize*' - new alliances, innovative projects, cultural work, cross-national projects, and others
- Ideas about '*successes*" in contextual struggles against gender-based violences

This review will touch on each of these, in order to offer the teacher of gender-based violence a way of framing an approach to an area which is one of the most complex in gender studies.

Words of caution and courage

As with all areas of gender studies teaching, the subject material relevant to understanding gender-based violence is, by definition, full of pain. It is also, of course, full of the courage of activists, survivors, researchers, and women and men who have, in diverse ways, challenged social norms in which sexual and gendered violence against women is accepted. However, it is useful for a teacher to be aware that given the reality that gender-based violence takes many different forms and that survivors are still, on the whole, very reluctant to speak openly about their experiences, it is more than possible that the teacher him/herself has close connections to the topics under discussion and that the students also do. This means that the material is volatile, and that the information and discussions may open wounds for people or raise questions that are hard to answer. It is rarely a good idea to introduce very brutal descriptions of trauma into the classroom, or to force students to read too much material on how women in a particular context (such as, for example, a war) have suffered. This usually creates only a sense of horror and impotence into the classroom. While students must have access to figures and realities that are accurate portraits of what may have happened, we would suggest that teachers find creative ways to present this material, and avoid '*shocking*' students in order for them to pay attention to the severity of the issues. We believe that shock may result in renewed attention or even a commitment to activism, but it can also create dissociation, helplessness, and internal trauma. It is also almost inevitable that if a teacher opens up the area of gender-based violence for discussion and debate, at some point, a student will seek him/her out to disclose abuse. This means that the teacher needs to be prepared to listen to the student, and be willing to help the student find the resources and support needed.

Definitions

Gender-based violence has been defined by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as '*any act…that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life…violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, the community, including battery, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence against women perpetrated and condoned by the state*'.

This definition is explicit about the range of abuses concerned, and explicit too about the gender of the survivors/victims involved.

Implicit in the definition are the ideas that:

- the environments in which people become most vulnerable to gender-based violence involve situations in which being gendered as '*a woman*' or as '*a man*' is extremely significant. Heterosexual relations in which the distinction between '*men*'-people and '*women*'-people is very important often become sites of gender-based violence. So do environments in which work-roles rely on clear, and usually hierarchically-organized, perceptions of men and women.
- Gender affects the way the particular abuse happens - who gets hurt, who does the injury, what forms of weapons are used, and what kinds of rationalizations allow the abuse to exist.

Although many feminist organizations working as allies to survivors of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and so on, have long identified economic issues as a potential site of violence against women, the CEDAW definition here excludes the notion of '*economic violence*' as an independent sub-category of gender-based violence. It is also careful to avoid explicit identification of perpetrators of gender-based violence as '*men*', partly because it attempts to give responsibility for the violence to the state and/or '*traditional practices*'.

The politics of identifying perpetrators of gender-based violence as unequivocally '*male*' are complex. On the one hand it is true that the perpetrators' gender does, with overwhelming regularity, differ critically from the gender of their victims. On the other hand, identifying perpetrators solely by their gender is an inadequate route towards a full explanation of the myriad forms of behaviour that can be called '*gender-based violence*', and cannot explain the facts that women are differently vulnerable to gender-based violence, and that men are in diverse relations to its perpetuation. In addition, in many countries men experience sexual assault in various contexts: sexually abusive homes, gang warfare, gaol, and at the hands of abusive male authority figures.

The term gender-based violence is perhaps most useful for reminding us that the violences we are concerned with arise primarily through the dynamics of '*being gendered*'. In one light, the rape of a woman in the workplace, the school-teacher's sexual coercion of a girl student, and a wife's hand held down onto a hot-plate by her husband look like very different acts of violence. The institutional contexts are different, the '*damage*' caused differs, the relationship between victim and assailant differs, and ways of addressing the situation legally and therapeutically differ.

What the assaults have in common is the fuel of gender relations. Noting this takes us beyond an analysis which says women are vulnerable to men. It suggests that both women and men are vulnerable to the way dominant norms of gender relation, within their contexts, are working. Within South Africa, men are as likely to become blunt assailants of women (and, often, of men) as women are to become victims of sexual abuse, domestic battery, economic abuse, and incest. Clearly, those who actively assault retain responsibility for their violence - that is a matter of principle and law. But the challenge for South Africans committed to the transformation of oppressive social norms is to untangle both '*victim*' and '*perpetrator*' from their terrible interlock of violence, no matter how shocking the '*perpetration*' or how resonant the '*victimhood/survivorship*'.

It is safe to say that research and activism has shown that gender-based violence exists in every community, in millions of households, in every form of institution, within all public spaces, in short wherever people interact. Despite the inevitable difficulties of '*counting assaults*' it is widely accepted that gender-based violence in African contexts is high. Because of this, and because of the many different shapes particular incidents of gender-based violence can take, understanding context becomes very important to developing strategies to combat gender-based violence.

Aside from the realities of gender-based violence, there are currently three themes that would dominate any analysis. The first of these is the prevalence of poverty. Although it would be absurd to suggest that poverty '*causes*' gender-based violence (see later subsection), it is true that poverty creates an environment of vulnerability for women in which escape from violence is much more difficult than it is in better-resourced environments. Poverty is also characterized by poor access to education, health services, and NGO outreach, and this may contribute to the normalization of gender roles in which legitimacy for gender-based violence is increased. This by no means suggests that gender-based violence in well-resourced environments does not occur - it certainly does. The majority of Africa's women, however, do live in poverty, and thus it is important to take poverty as a condition in which gender-based violence may be impossible to escape, when it occurs, and where the challenges of subsistence may overcome the need to tackle sexual and/or domestic violence, so that survivors '*choose*' the personal violence against themselves and/or their sons/daughters over starvation and indigence.

The second theme involves familiarity with violence. In many post-democracy settings, the legacies of institutionalized violence remain in the treatment of many prisoners and '*illegal aliens*', and in the acceptance of violence as a legitimate, and immediate, means of settling disputes. The combination of escalating unemployment, more permeable boundaries between countries and between neighbourhoods, the depletion of police resources, heightened ethnic and/or religion-based tensions, and the lack of effective and inspirational engagement of youth into political movements has facilitated violence within criminal activities, and the experience of violent interaction as a modus vivendi for many.

Emerging democratization and the flow of conflict and wars is a third theme. On the one hand, much of the legislation that held colonial cultures in place has been formally

dismantled and new policies aimed at the redress of poverty and national democracies have been initiated. On the other hand, in the face of newly accessible TV images of middle class wealth and national rhetoric about rights, freedom, and redress, many constituencies continue to endure enormous hardships. The tension between ideological - and some legal - commitment to change and the tenacity of old inequities contributes to Africans' difficult negotiation of day-to-day reality. The shape of this shifts radically from one country to the next, but tensions about gender, identity, and the meaning of citizenship haunt African contexts in ways that frequently spark intense violence of many kinds.

A final issue concerns the meaning of '*gender*' itself. It has been argued that '*gender*' as a socio-political category which organizes power between and among '*men*' and '*women*' is an exceptionally violent force in itself. Human beings are forced to access '*identity*' through becoming gendered (usually first at birth, and then as a life-long process of direct and indirect initiation), and work on the lives of trans-gendered people suggest that this process is not benign, and limits the potential of all human beings through the proscription of roles, norms, and options for life (GenderDynamiX). This is a very important idea, suggesting that, like '*racialization*'; under colonialism, or '*ethnicization*' as a route to political power under many current political regimes, '*becoming gendered*' could be seen as a violence itself, creating powerful and painful divisions between human beings as a condition for their survival as '*people*'. This idea will not be explored further in this review, but is worth noting.

The next 9 sections of this review will present brief ideas relevant to each section, without a claim that these ideas are comprehensive. The area of gender-based violence has been an arena of decades of activism, writing, and research on the continent, and it would be foolhardy to attempt more than a sketch of what is possible to teach and study under its umbrella. The focus throughout will be (**a**) on presenting contemporary debates and ideas (**b**) suggesting African-based resources for these debates and ideas (**c**) providing links to articles and websites which can offer more information. These sections are included in a separate review document.