

## Gender, sexuality and the 'post-colonial' state

It would be important to explore what kinds of re-gendered processes took place after “*flag independence*”. There are diverse historical trajectories of different African nations, but perhaps one can approach the idea of the ‘*post-colonial state*’ by outlining a number of questions that facilitate analysis and comparison across nations. The first question is what kind of colonialism had existed prior to flag independence. British, French, Belgian and Portuguese colonialisms had conquered different geographical swathes of the continent, leaving varying legacies in their wake. Secondly, there is the question of what had happened after flag independence. This could be broken down into a number of more specific questions: what kind of state was in place - military, civilian, monarchical?; what kinds of societies existed - ‘*traditional*’, ‘*modern*’; what kinds of men were in power and what kinds were in the opposition; what were women’s relations to the state - resistant, autonomous, aligned e.g. in women’s wings affiliated to political parties. Finally, there is the question of how global forces - such as the international financial institutions, the UN Decades for Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as religious revivalism - have played out in particular national contexts. All these questions highlighted different kinds of forces impinging on the forms of masculinity and femininity and sexualities found in any given national context.

It is also critical to note the significance of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which influenced the shape and ideologies of many post-colonial states. While on the one hand, motherhood became part of much nationalist rhetoric about the new state, changing economic times brought with them changing male identities. Andrea Cornwall, in the context of Ado-Odo that she explored, suggests ideals of masculinity were shifting away from the notion of ‘*man as controller or provider*’. Instead, masculinity in certain instances was becoming reconfigured in ways that shunned authority and control, whilst notions of love and care were gaining ascendancy. Elsewhere, the linkages between love and money were the focus of attention, as in the reading by David Mills and Richard Ssewakiryanga. ‘*No Romance without Finance*’ explores the social power of money and the material power of love in intimate relations among students at the University of Makerere, pointing to the fluidity of gender in economies of dress, exchange and performance.

In a number of African contexts, unlike the North, issues of women’s rights were taken up in ways that did not partition political rights from organizing around violence against women, or the assertion of sexual freedom. In part this had to do with the fact that many post-colonial states

embarked on legislation reform around issues of gender equality. Pushed both by the criteria of the World Bank and the IMF for loans and, differently, by growing feminist and gender activism, the experiences of being gendered in ways that deprived women of access to land, rights, education, and safety propelled legal activism. This can be seen in the history of an organization such as WLSA (Women's Law in Southern Africa) which worked in seven SADC countries (excluding South Africa) for changes around the legal status of women. NGO's simultaneously began to work holistically on issues connecting gender, sexuality, violence, and the right to a public voice. Sister Namibia is an example of an organisation that did this, working in an integrated manner on all of these issues. The question of sexual rights or freedom, and what this meant, relied upon feminist analysis of women's bodies, processes of gendering as well as sexual and political liaisons. At the same time, the priorities for struggle were shaped by considerations of differences among women in their levels of education, religious affiliation and notions of morality.

The consideration of the postcolonial state also needs to take up certain other issues - questions of war and militarization, questions of development, and questions of globalization form part of what could be explored as critical dimensions of understanding the contemporary politics of gender and sexualities.