D I V E R S I T Y L E C T U R E

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Studying and Teaching Sexuality in African Literature:
Stories of Being Young, a Woman and a Teacher

Thu, 19 April 2018, 7 pm
Iwalewahaus, conference room

This public lecture is part of the BIGSAS Gender and Diversity Programme.
Having to study and teach sexuality in/using African literature is not the easiest of things to do in Nigeria, or anywhere else in Africa for that matter. Yet, there is a need to approach sexuality with an open mind in the country. There lies the importance of what I do – using literary texts to address uncomfortable sexual topics. How is sexuality in its myriads of manifestations in African literature presented and received in the classroom and other academic circles? How does a country (and the continent) that seems not to “do” sex, going by the scant attention given to sex and sexuality in its literary criticism, navigate the dreaded/uncomfortable topic? How does the symbiotic relationship enjoyed by African literature with history, anthropology and sociology affect its reception in the area of sexuality?

I draw on personal experiences (as a student, researcher and teacher) to chart the discussion of the questions raised. Reminding a conservative (?) people that they are sexual beings whose very existence is a proof that sex exists/happened and that literary texts capture this essence as much as they do other aspects of life generates mixed reactions and in many cases, ostracism/marginalisation. But, I love and take what I am doing serious – the fun and adventure, the risks and challenges, the labelling and (mis)(re)presentations, and the rewards (that look on the students’ or colleagues’ faces that says thank you for providing the space where we can talk about this, the shift in the perception of sexuality, and getting others comfortable enough to study sexuality).

Ifeyinwa Okolo