

**Module Outline for Course Participants**

**Biopower & the Caribbean Situation**

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This adapted module was developed as part of the **Advanced Sexuality Studies Short Course**. The short course was adapted and developed by the Caribbean IRN (International Resource Network) and the University of West Indies St. Augustine (Trinidad and Tobago), *and* the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society.

The original module was developed as part of **‘Introduction to Advancing Sexuality Studies: a short course on sexuality theory and research methodologies’**. The short course was developed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, *and* the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society. **Funded by the Ford Foundation**

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This module was adapted by Dr. Alison Donnell and the Caribbean IRN in partnership with the University of the West Indies (2013). The original module was created by Dr. Mark Davis, Monash, University and adapted by the Advancing Sexuality Studies short course team at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia (2009).

**Abstract**

In the thinking of influential theorist Michel Foucault, the extension of power over biological life marked the emergence of modernity. Biopower thus ‘brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life’ (Foucault, 1978: 143). Biopolitics saw the creation of institutions, disciplines and regulatory controls to embody and enable the production and management of life itself according to apparently biological variability: race, gender, sexuality.

Biopolitics refer to any combination of politics and life, where the operations of biopower can be detected –often eugenics, genetic surveillance, psychiatric incarceration, public health management and extermination camps. The Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, connects biopower to the weakening of sovereignty and the creation of a state of exception/emergency in which this power reduces its victims to bare life. He views the concentration camp as the symbol of biopolitical modernity.

Thinking about Biopower in a Caribbean context necessitates thinking about systems that managed life and the human possibility of raced and enslaved peoples. There has not been much written directly about biopower and race but these sources help us to start thinking about what biopower might mean in a Caribbean context, how it might take shape and how it might be resisted.

**Module aims**

* To introduce participants to the concepts of biopower, governmentality and technologies of the self and how these might inform their own research or work.
* To encourage participants to apply these concepts in relation to discourses of race and ethnicity.
* To encourage participants to critically reflect upon how these concepts have been both understood and contested by Caribbean intellectuals and writers.

**Participants will:**

* Discuss the implications of biopower as a mode of regulating sexual behaviours and knowledge.
* Discuss the implications of self-regulation in sexual and reproductive health and HIV care.
* Apply Foucauldian approaches to the analysis of sexuality as it intersects with race issues in the Caribbean.
* Explore the possibilities for disrupting and contesting biopower in Caribbean expressive cultural forms.

**Required Pre-Readings**

* Gutting, G. (2005) Modern sex. In *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford, Oxford University Press, p 91-100.
* Wynter, S 2006. “PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter,” *PROUDFLESH: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness*: Issue 4. Interview by Greg Thomas.

http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/proudflesh/article/view/202

* Nourbese Phillip, M. 1989. “Discourse on the Logic of Language, *She Tries Her Tongue; Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Ragweed Press.

**Optional Pre-Readings**

“Biopower” Wikipedia entry <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biopower>

* Lauria Morgensen, S. (2011). “The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now,” *Settler Colonial Studies,*  Vol. 1 No.

<http://ojs.lib.swin.edu.au/index.php/settlercolonialstudies/article/view/241/225>

* Kerrigan, D. “Sexuality and the State,” *The Guardian,* 6 May 2013. [www.guardian.co.tt/columnist/2013-05-06/sexuality-and-state](http://www.guardian.co.tt/columnist/2013-05-06/sexuality-and-state)

**Session Preparation**

**In response to these readings, please make preparatory notes on:**

* How the concepts of embodied difference and power intersect.
* How the writings provoke a reconsideration of this intersection.
* What the political consequences are for understandings of sexuality?
* *And* underline four sentences in the Wynter interview that were particularly compelling, that you did not understand, or that you disagreed with.

Overview

**Introduction**

Participants will be given a brief description of the module approach, schedule, and aims.

**Session 1. Biopower, governmentality and technologies of the self**

This session introduces participants to the key concepts informing the module and encourages them to apply these concepts to aspects of their own experience in relation to sexual health messages.

**Session 2. Biopower and Postcoloniality: Intersecting Sex, Race and Ethnicity**

In this session participants are asked to work in pairs to analyse extracts of a Channel 4 documentary on black sexuality and read an interview with Sylvia Wynter that discusses how race has been mapped onto the idea of the human.

**Session 3. Contesting Biopower: Caribbean expressive culture**

In this session participants consider how expressive cultural discourses might offer a privileged space for reorganizing understandings and technologies of the self and of groups/populations.

**Concluding activity**

Participants are invited to identify a key learning point from the module and to reflect upon how the ideas contained in the module might inform their own research or professional practice.

**Further reading (includes lecture bibliography)**

Edwards, Nadi.  "'Talking About a Little Culture': Sylvia Wynter's Early Essays."  Journal of West Indian Literature 10.1-2 (2001): 12-38.

Forbes, Curdella Forbes (2011) ‘This Space/Dis/Place Between: The Poetics and Philosophy of Body, Voice and Silence in the Work of Marlene NourbeSe Philip’ in *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* edited by Alison Donnell and Michael A. Bucknor London: Routledge

Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

---. (1982 [1977]) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

---. (1988) Technologies of the self. In L. Martin, H. Gutman & P. Hutton (Eds) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press.

---M. (1991) The repressive hypothesis. In P. Rabinow (Ed) *The Foucault Reader* London, Penguin, p 301-329.

Gutting, G. (2005) Modern sex. In *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford, Oxford University Press, p 91-100.

Halperin, D. (2007) What do gay men want? In *What Do Gay Men Want? An Essay on Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity* Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, p 1-10.

Achille Mbembe’s work on “Necropolitics,”

McNay, L. (2003) Foucault: aesthetics and ethics. In J. Weeks, J. Holland & M. Waites (Eds) *Sexualities and Society: A Reader* Cambridge, Polity, p 245-25

Philip, M.N. (1997) *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*. Toronto: The Mercury Press.

# Stoler, A. (1995) *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Wynter, S. (1976) “Ethno or Socio Poetics”, *Alcheringa/Ethnopoetics*, 2: 78-94.

-- (1984) “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism”, *Boundary 2*, 12:3 & 13:1: 19-70.

-- (1990a) “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/Silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s Women”, in C. Boyce-Davies and E. S. Fido (eds) *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton: Africa World Press.

--(2000) “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with David Scott.” *Small Axe* 8:119-207.