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***JACKETED WOMEN: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES ON
SEXUALITIES AND GENDER IN AFRICA***

**By Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira. New York; United Nations University Press, 2013.
Pp x+198. ISBN 978-92-808-7196-8 (ebook)**

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Introduction

Jacketed Women, written in seven chapters, explores key issues in the politics of qualitative research on gender and sexualities in Africa. The book is written and compiled by women who themselves fall within particular “jackets.” Anchored on an understanding of self-identification as researchers emerging within highly politicised arenas comprised of the “jackets” of what is considered acceptable or not, this book provides invaluable insights into their personal experiences and from findings of research work within the various connotations of the “jacket” as feminist researchers in local environments. Bennett and Pereira offer an excellent analysis of the jacket-based treatment afforded women generally and a basis for the generation of transformative and progressive policy, legislative and cultural as well as traditional systems to curtail gender divides that disadvantage women.

Jacketed Women represents an important contribution to the discourse on gender and sexuality in Africa. The authors of the seven chapters in the book reecho an existing paradigm of a jacket influenced by patriarchy in Africa. They note that patriarchy sits at the centre of sexuality and gender divide between men and women. Observably, the “jackets” of status, constraint, and culture concerning respectability dictate the concept of gender disparity. Women suffer unpopularity when they do not align with jackets that inspire respectability (16). This is true of feminist researchers working on the politics of gender and sexuality who often face resistance to acceptable projections about “respectable” research. Feminist researchers within the prohibited jacket of gender and women sexuality have to embrace the methodologies as politics.

This book amplifies the voices of women in Africa and employs a broad scope in its analysis. The case study strategies enriched by participatory approaches adopted by the researchers provide a platform upon which detailed and in-depth local perspectives as well as lived experiences of the women are gleaned.¹ These approaches also serve to challenge the underlining gender and sexuality biases that disadvantage women generally. Rich data is thus qualitatively collected with the resulting useful insights into the subject of gender and sexuality in Africa. Observably, the book covers a broad range of topics on gender and sexuality related issues including gender roles and the effects of colonisation and globalisation on sexual roles. It also discusses the current trending issues of homosexuality and lesbianism within the discourse on gender and sexuality.

¹ John Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2018).

The diversity of the methodologies such as participatory approaches adopted by different authors of the chapters provides a profound understanding of the complexity of gender and sexuality in Africa. In Africa women's sexuality is a sensitive topical issue for discussion and the conservative nature of the African society is informed by patriarchal norms.² Therefore, the need for ethical consideration becomes important. The book deals with ethical issues relevant in qualitative research on topics as sensitive as women's sexuality. Each author provides the methodology used clearly demonstrating the ethical challenges encountered during the studies and how they managed to circumvent them.

Jacketed Women represents an important addition in the fields of gender and sexuality and methodologies in African Studies, nevertheless, a few gaps are identifiable. Firstly, the presence of thematic grouping of similar topics could have resulted in a logical read of the entire book. Themes would help to cater for all relevant aspects relating to Gender and Sexuality. Placing all the women under a single category of gender limits the understanding of the different divisions within the group such as age, race, religion, and disability. This broad generalisation of the topics covered in the book limits the depth of the analysis within the cases studies.

Secondly, the book does not explain the criterion for the selection of the case studies. The studies in the collection are not representative of all regions in Africa yet the title speaks of Africa without qualification. A representative sample of the population being studied is key in authenticating the findings as being a reflection of the entire population.³ Case study method which the book adopts has the deficiency of generalisation. Inclusion of case studies from other regions such as North Africa and Central Africa which are not part of the collection would add to the comprehensiveness of the conclusions drawn for Africa as a continent.

² Patricia A. Cain, "Feminist Jurisprudence: Grounding the Theories," *Berkeley Journal of Gender* 4, no 2 (2013): 4.

³ John Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2014).