

Gender Institute workshop final report

*“The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house”:
Radically engaging with International human rights, intersectional advocacy and
embodied sexuality and sexual practice*

Organiser: Christina Kenny (PhD Candidate, SSGM)

This workshop went ahead as scheduled on Wednesday 28 October in Coombes Extension 1.04. Fadzai Muparutsa and Jules Kim both gave stimulating presentations, discussing diverse but complimentary issues to do with bodily autonomy, sexuality, sexual practice and ethnicity (the third speaker, Stephen Lyndsay Ross was unable to attend at the last moment due to family illness but notified us too late to refund his flights).

The workshop attracted 18 participants, including a range of academics and students from across the ANU, as well as professionals working in social justice outside academia. Participants also presented and discussed their own work in response to the keynote addresses. A key aim of this event was to create a space where students and academics can participate in learning about the ways sexuality impacts broader academic debates, as well as appreciating the impact of sexual diversity on wider public policy and advocacy debates. Many participants noted they appreciated the open and collegial environment which allowed the group to explore issues which may have been new to them in their work, or to test contentious or difficult ideas in a safe environment. As a PhD student myself, I also very much appreciated this opportunity, and one of the most valuable discussions for me was interrogating the legitimacy of the authorial voice in anthropological work. As both Fadzai and Jules were policy specialists and advocates, as well as members of the communities they represent in their work, the group was able to explore the intersections between policy, academic research and personal experience.

Participants explored the methodological challenges of their research, including working with Aboriginal communities as non-Indigenous researchers; and advocating on behalf of disadvantaged or marginalised populations including sex workers or members of LGBTI communities. Participants tested the legitimacy of their work through examining the possible benefit to the community in which they were working; the contribution to the literature; and the wider policy implications of their research.

Fadzai and Jules were generous in their commentary and supported participants to work through their uncertainties around speaking of, or for Others, and assessing the value and limitations of (re)presenting cultures other than our own in our work.

I am grateful for the support of both the Gender Institute who supported the flights and catering budget for the event, and the Program for State, Society and Governance in Melanesia who provided logistical and organisational support.

Participants were encouraged to join the Gender Institute mailing list where they were not already members and this list was handed back to the GI at the close of the day.