Sexuality: An African Perspective. The politics of self and cultural beliefs is intended to be a response to: 1) strong urges within the writers to respond, explain, question, and contribute to an inventory of socio-cultural understandings and misunderstandings that both African and western anthropologists may have created, ignored, erred, and/or missed; 2) recommendations and insights generated by research on sexuality in general, and reproductive health and rights in particular (Abd El-Salaam 2003; Aghacy 2003; Allan Guttmacher Institute 2003; Ashford 2003; Dialmy 2003; Lempey et al. 2002; Luke and Kurz 2000; Rao Gupta 2000, 2003; CARE International 2002; Niang 1996; UNIFEM 2001), and 3) a call to Africans (ourselves) to join the debate on their social life by engaging in self-critique as products of the unfolding socio-political history.

There are two main themes throughout the articles. First, culture manifests itself differently in every ethnic group and consequently each group has a unique way of understanding the world (life), divinity, and being human and a different way of communicating that understanding to each other and the world. An indigenous African's way of life, forms an interface with modern ways through the assimilation of whatever belief system one has adopted and continues to embrace in the long journey of life. Shared norms and an underlying belief system also are (re)packaged and/or cushioned within global and commercial cultures introduced and absorbed through schooling and the mass media.

Second, points of view and norms relating to sexual practices are dynamic and largely influenced by social, religious, economic, and political changes in diverse ways. Globalization and foreign "cultures" introduced and absorbed through formal education, religion, and the mass media play an important role in the construction of sexuality. Subsequently moving away, conformity, and/or resistance to societal norms mold the constructions, understandings and

meanings of sexuality and gender identity, control sexual practices, create, preserve or erode communities and subcultures. These reactions also structure social life. As such, the chapters in this book offer a historical context are explorative, contemporary, and self-reflective.

This book is designed to contribute to the knowledge base on sexual norms and practices among Africans with regard to: lived experiences and the context that enabled certain defining experiences to emerge; marking of the place of departure from (un)justified cultural practices; challenging and perhaps destroying stereotypical thinking about ethnic groups as intact units who mass produce and imprint values and associated practices in a conveyor belt fashion; and providing the space for critique of taken-for-granted phenomena.

In most of the cases, the writers are writing about their experiences as informed by many "educators" in the formal and informal settings. These experiences are in no way representative of an ethnic group's experiences or an African male or female experience. What is represented here are meanings and interpretations of multilayered experiences overt and covert, obvious and not so obvious sent to us from multiple sources and received and interpreted through multiple lenses. Gender, social, economic, and political undercurrents though subtle, powerfully create boundaries/limits of how the writers see the world. For example, some of the authors are privileged women and men who, even though they were born and raised in rural settings, went to privileged high schools that opened up a world of educational opportunities that was closed to most of their counterparts in the village. The writers could be categorized as belonging to a sub-culture constituted of an amalgamated, hybrid and contemporary African which is different. The difference spells their departure from traditions and at the same time subscribes them to new norms and subsequent practices as this book highlights. Such a process of social interaction, Bakhtin (in Iswolsky 1984) argues "leads to the interaction of different social values...". He also argued that though the powerful in the society would want to force a single discourse (monologic)

as the only way of understanding the world, the subaltern often subvert this "monologic closure" (p. 1). Hence the amalgamated African depicts a subaltern in her/his cultural practices, including sexuality.

The writings are reflective because the writers have engaged their personal histories as a way of developing, reinforcing, and challenging taken-for-granted viewpoints. The writing is also direct and provides numerous examples: individual critique of lived experiences born out of the socialization processes that were/are structured within the bearings of education, class, religion, ethnic base, and gender; illustrations of many rituals, phenomena; and socializing agents and institutions that have influenced the writers constructs, experiences, and observations with regard to sexual practices and sexuality in general. The work of changing the culture of sexual relations relies on (1) a critical mass of positive information, positive images around men's and women's experiences with value based sexual relations, and (2) the cross-cultural dimensions relating to sexual practices-hence a dialogue around the contexts of sexuality mediated by customary laws, family, religion, media, class, curiosity, and oh love!

This book will make a useful text on society and culture in general, African studies, anthropology, literature, sociology at both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Those in development literature, and qualitative research classes will also find it invaluable. A section on glossary of terms is