

Workshop Program Point Sud 2021  
**Reproduction and Natality in Africa**

4 to 8 April 2022

Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa

**Conveners**

Prof. Richard Rottenburg, MLU Halle, Germany

Prof. Nolwazi Mkhwanazi, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

**Abstract**

Africa has the fastest growing population in the world. At the same time, the continent has some of the highest rates of infertility. Despite diverse, difficult situations and taut family configurations, most people desire children for human security, labour needs, affective longings, religious obligations and safe futures. Those unable to have children, whether rich or poor, seek ways to improve their chances of conceiving. Once children are born, they require care that puts them in relationships with others.

Compared to other living beings, humans are incomplete and underdetermined, they are more dependent on permanently re-creating their world to secure their survival. At birth this difference is particularly striking. To thrive, children must be made into kinsfolk – members of collectives who live together and care for each other. A great deal of work is necessary to install infants in society and to create and preserve a world in which they can become what and who they are meant to be.

Reproduction and the absence of it are existential and political phenomena that are misrepresented when conceived as purely biological. Reproduction is situated in a multiplicity of meanings, practices, and technologies meant to create, preserve and nurture individual and collective life. The aim of the workshop is to move beyond conceiving of reproduction and the absence of it as primarily biological processes. It is also to move beyond conceiving it mainly as shaping children through socialization and enculturation.

Both conceptions of reproduction can be interrogated as forms of “natality” (Arendt 1958). The notion of natality signifies that birth, love and care include a quest for freedom and future-making and together are inextricably entangled, interdependent and co-constitutive. “Doing natality” is about exploring the ways in which biological and social reproduction are connected to caring for the future.

The interdisciplinary workshop brings together established, mid and early career scholars as well as doctoral candidates from around the globe. Our *empirical objective* is a nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of African women and men, couples, and extended families in relation to reproduction and doing natality. The workshop will focus both on the attempts to manipulate the biology of reproduction (vernacular and techno-scientifically assisted) and on all forms of social reproduction paying close attention to the vast inequalities – social, medical, infrastructural and health – that underpin conception, birth and bringing up babies. The papers in the workshop will explore experiences and perceptions of conception, gestation and kinning of babies.