Unheard Voices: African Women’s Literature
WMST BC 3134
Thursdays 11:00 AM to 12:50 PM
502 Diana Center

Professor Yvette Christiansê
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Office Hours: Wed. 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM
Thurs: 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM & by appoint.

My great hope for African women is that one day they will come into their own. That is why I choose to write.” Sindiwe Magona

“My Lord Governor. I want to ask if you please sir to let me go back to see my parents for a short time and I will come back again I will not stop any longer. It is because I do desire to see my own land again I beg you to let me go to see my parents and if you do let me go I shall never for get your kindness. I should be pleased to see my Mother’s face again. I beg you do let me go my Governor of your kindness.”–Emma Sandile, 2 November 1860

Course Description
What do we mean by ‘unheard voices’? Think about the contexts and spaces in which someone can be heard, and what kinds of people or subjects are considered audible and legible. The question is important because it challenges how you might read the course title. Is there not a contradiction? If voices are unheard, how can they a) be understood to be ‘voices’ and, b) be considered as part of ‘African Women’s Literature’? By using the title of a course that has been offered in various forms for some years at Barnard, we therefore begin by asking how attitudes towards African women’s writing have shifted in the American academy. During this course we engage different types of contexts in which African women have been and are communicating their responses to the social, political, religious, and engendered conditions of their lives. While we do so through the unprecedented four-volume anthology series, Women Writing Africa, we will also consider music and visual art. We will also ask how women across the continent have used other vectors of communication (radio and, increasingly, the internet, but also cell phones).

Some further questions that we will ask: How does one talk of women in Africa without thinking of Africa as a ‘mythic unity’? What do African women and women in the African diaspora say to each other?

Our themes include the politics of canon formation, the challenges of language, and Third World and Western feminism. Thus, we consider the larger traditions into which African women’s writings have been absorbed, or which their writings resist, or change. We consider how non-African, non African-Diasporic writers, women and men, imagine Africans, particularly women in Africa. How, for example, has black female identity been defined historically—locally and internationally—and how do later 20th Century writers engage this same concern? Might one compare the writings of African American women with women writing in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal? We consider how some writers engaged gender issues that arose as their countries gained independence from external or internal colonialism. Our readings will also consider the assumption that all African women are black. In this, we consider how racialized gender concerns factor in writings by white African women writers. Does religion (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, for example) play any role in the way that some writers address their identity as women?

Books to purchase (ordered at Book Culture):

Podcasts: From time to time you will be directed to podcasts created for or relevant to this class.
Web: You will receive handouts with links to relevant websites (music, radio, interviews).
Primary Student Learning Objectives

Course objectives are to:

• Introduce students to, and/or expand their knowledge of the range and long history of women’s writing across Africa
• Facilitate students’ understanding about the relation and the differences between differently situated African women
• Expand students’ knowledge about the relation between gender, sexuality and nationalism in each of the selected readings
• Expand students’ critical vocabulary about representation, identity, and nationalism
• Expand students’ ability to think, speak and write critically about the collective term ‘women’
• Introduce students to the range of linguistic and cultural differences in Africa

Further Course Aims

This course aims to:

• Facilitate students’ understanding of what is meant by ‘voice’ and subjectivity and legibility
• Facilitate students’ understanding of misconceptions about African women as ‘silent’ or ‘unheard’
• Facilitate students’ awareness of market factors in ‘World Literature’ and ‘World Music’ and their impact on some writers and musicians, or the reception of some writers and musicians

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to make an appointment to see me as soon as possible. Disabled students who need test or classroom accommodations must be registered in advance with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in 105 Hewitt.
Course Requirements

Full participation. 10% of your grade. Of course, this means more than attending classes – the maximum number of unexplained, unsupported absences being three. Participation means that you come to class with all readings prepared, and ready to participate in class discussions. Full participation also means that you will have all assignments done on time.

Fortnightly summaries/definition. 6% x 6 exercises = 30% of Final Grade
A two-page (maximum) exercise in which you outline your understanding of a key term or key issue discussed in the previous two weeks of classes.

Due Dates: 3 February 2011
17 February 2011
3 March 2011
24 March 2011
7 April 2011
21 April 2011

Mid-Term Essay.
EIGHT to TEN pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt).
This paper is worth 20% of final grade.
Due Date: 7 March 2011

Final Essay.
TEN to TWELVE pages long (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt).
This paper is worth 40% of final grade.
Due Date: Last Class

Summary Breakdown of Grades:
Participation: 10% of final grade
Fortnightly summaries: 30% of final grade
Mid-Term Essay: 20% of final grade
Final Essay: 40% of final grade
Syllabus

Please note: Subject to change

Week 1: Thurs. 20 January—Views from the Outside
Introductions


Required further Reading
Week 2: Thurs. 27 January—Early Writings, Views from the Inside
Anonymous. ‘Song of the Afflicted,’ in Daymond et al, pp. 85-86.

Djedja, Béatrice. ‘Maïéto, or the Battle of the Sexes.’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 91-92. Côte d’Ivoire (Bété)


1. Uganda (Bemba)
_______ `Love Song of a Girl.’ In Busby, p. 1. South Africa (isiXhosa)
_______ ‘Girls’ Secret Love Song.’ In Busby, p. 2. Kenya (Kipsigi)
_______ ‘Song for Dance of Young Girls.’ In Busby, p. 2. Uganda (Didinga)
_______ ‘A Woman Sings of Her Love.’ In Busby, p. 3 Somalia (Somali)
_______ ‘I Am Your Betrothed.’ In Busby, p. 3. South Africa (Tswana-Gkatla)
_______ ‘A Mother to Her First-born.’ In Busby, pp. 4-5. Sudan (Arabic)
_______ ‘Lullaby.’ In Busby, p. 5. Ghana (Akan)
_______ ‘Household Song.’ In Busby, p. 7. Ethiopia (Amhara)

Msham, Mwana Kupona. From ‘A Mother’s Advice and Prayer: An Epic Poem.’ Lihamba et al, pp. 72-80. Kenya (Kiswahili)


Required further reading
Week 3: Thurs. 3 Feb—Are All (African) Women Equal?


De Melo, Ana. ‘Escaping the Inquisition.’ Sadiqi et al, pp. 97. Morocco (Portuguese)

Hatshpsut. ‘My Falcon Rises High.’ Sadiqi et al, p. 63. Egypt (Hieroglyphic)

Heyah, Astour. ‘Freeing a Slave Woman.’ Sadiqi et al, p. 91. Egypt (Arabic)

Kupona binti Msham, Mwana. ‘A Mother’s Advice and Prayer: An Epic Poem.’ Lihamba et al, pp. 73-80. Kenya (Kiswahili)

Makeda, Queen of Sheba. ‘On the Wisdom of Solomon,’ in Busby, pp. 15-16. Sheba, present-day Iritrea/Ethiopia (South Semetic)


Week 4: Thurs. 10 Feb—Epistles and Petitions


Bengu, Susiwe. ‘Testimony of a School Girl,’ in Daymond, pp. 134-135. Cape Colony (Xhosa)

Bonette, Sarah Forbes. ‘Letters.’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 138-142. Benin/Nigeria/London (English)

Davies, Victoria. ‘Letters.’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 142-145. Benin/Nigeria/London (English)


Makina, Om. ‘Letter to a Woman Friend.’ Sadiqi et al, pp. 87-88. Egypt (Arabic)

Nieuwveldt, Kaatje. ‘Testimony,’ in Daymond, pp. 86-91. Cape Colony (Dutch/Afrikaans)

Sandile, Emma. ‘Letters and Land Submissions.’ Daymond et al, pp. 91-96. South Africa (English/Xhosa)

Yoko, Mame. ‘Letter From the Women of Senehun.’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 145-47. Sierra Leone (English)

Suggested Further Reading


Week 5: Thurs. 17 Feb—“Strange Untutored Creature[s]” Write Back


Amponsa, Yaa. ‘To Miss Bridget Thomas.’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 174-176. Ghana (English)

Chadwick, Jane and Eva Chadwick, ‘My Students.’ Lihamba et al, pp. 103-106. Kenya (English)

Feilden, Eliza. ‘Portrait of Louisa.’ Daymond et al, pp. 128-131. Cape Colony (English)

Mabile, Adéle. ‘Penelope Lienguane.’ Daymond et al, pp. 132-134.


Required Further Reading

Week 6: Thurs. 24 Feb—Resistance/s
Afiq, Miririda N’Ayt. ‘‘Miriida.’’ Sadiqi et al, pp. 132-133. **Morocco (Berber)**
Labiba, Hashim. ‘‘The Eastern Woman: How She Is and How She Should Be.’’ Sadiqi et al, pp. 13-115. **Egypt (Arabic)**
Sokhmnan, Tagrat Walt Assia N’Ayt. ‘Resistance.’ Sadiqi et al, pp. 124. **Morocco (Berber)**

Bojang, Binita. ‘‘Kanyeleng, or Childless.’’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 107-110. **Gambia (Malinke)**
Ba, Nditi. ‘‘Makori, or the Triumph of Slaves.’’ Sutherland-Addy et al, pp. 130-133. **Senegal (Fuldide)**
Kulibali, Nawa. ‘Nawa’s Lament.’ Sutherland-Addy, pp. 318-322. **Côte d’Ivoire (Senufo)**

Required further reading:

Week 7: Thurs. 4 March—Further Resistance/s
Communal. ‘‘Song of the Coffee Girls.’’ Lihamba et al, pp. 111-112. **Kenya (Gikuyu)**

Required further reading:

Week 8: Thurs. 10 March—NO CLASS

Week 9: Thurs. 17 March—*SPRING BREAK*
Week 10: Thurs. 17 March—Epistolary Friendship

*Senegal (French—English translation)*

**Required Further Reading**

Week 11: Thurs. 24 March—Writing Singing
Fassie, Brenda (‘Madonna of the Townships’). ‘lala-kakuhle’
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB-Z75iuXU0Y&mode=related&search=________. ‘Ama-gents’ (Performing for Mandela),
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrinswnda3Q&mode=related&search=________. ‘Too Late For Mama’
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bo-vUvIyY________. ‘Touch Somebody’
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sE2xsSSkqA South Africa/Xhosa
See also ‘La Mali en Fete.’ Maimouna Dembele, Djeneba Seck, Nainy Diabate, Paye Camara, Jah Youssoufou, Amadou Yalomba, Tata Bambo, and Sekou Kouyate:
http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8893010306410506001&q=Mali&total=6106&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=1
Makeba, Miriam. ‘Khawuleza’/‘Hurry’ (Swedish TV, 1966/67)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V74f9eI9c0&mode=related&search=________. ‘Click Song’/‘Qongqothwane’ (Swedish TV, 1968)
http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8059408312002144530&q=Miriam+Makeba&total=69&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=0 South Africa/Xhosa

**Required Further Reading:**

Week 12: Thurs. 31 March—“building a stairway...stars...why I write”
Sutherland, Efua. *The Roadmakers*. Excerpt. In Sutherland-Addy et al (Eds.), pp. 219-220 [first published 1961; Accra]. Ghana (English)

**Required further reading**
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Week 13: Thurs 7 April—Home & Away: Two Women Look at War
Arac de Nyeko, Monica. ‘Strange Fruit.’ http://www.author-me.com/fict04/strangefruit.htm.
Uganda (Acholi/English)
Goretti Kyomuhendo, ‘Rwanda: In the Shadow of God,’ in Lihamba et al, pp. 398-401. Uganda (English)

Required Further Reading/Research

Week 14: Thurs 14 April—The Alphabet Changes Direction: A-I-D-S
Communal. ‘One Blanket.’ Lihamba et al, pp. 351-352. Uganda (Lango)
South Africa (English)
Dow, Unity. ‘Caring for the Dying.’ In Daymond et al, pp. 520-522. Botswana (Setswana)
Lema, Elieshie. ‘Tryst With Peril.’ Lihamba et al, pp. 324-330. Tanzania (English)

Required Further Reading/Research
Keys, Alicia. ‘Help Save Africa,’ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzZ0D45HeSQ America (English)
, ‘Keep a Child Alive,’ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_W_x83gcotM
Keys, Alicia and Bono, ‘Don’t Give Up Africa,’ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSaOye4wVtg&mode=related&search= America&England (English)

Week 15: Thurs 21 April—Thinking Self
Azagury, Yaëlle. ‘A Jewish Moroccan Childhood.’ Sadiqi et al, 389-394. Morocco (English)
South Africa (English)

Week 16: Thurs 28 April—Visuals
Visual Images by contemporary African Women. Selection TBA.
Suggested Further Reading


_______. ‘Cultural Roots.’ In *Imagined Communities*, pp. 9-36.


Fanon, Frantz. ‘On Violence.’ In *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 2005 [First Published 1961]


Harrow, Kenneth W. ‘Introduction.’ *Research in African Literatures—Special Issue on Nationalism.* Vol. 32. No. 3 (Fall 2001), pp. 33-44.


