

FEMALE PHILOSOPHERS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: A SELECTION

A DRL READING GROUP BNBLUEPRINT BY BJÖRN FRETER & MARC GWODOG

LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of women philosophers has often been confined to the margins of African philosophical historiography. This blueprint seeks to challenge and expand the traditional canon by foregrounding the philosophical reflections of African women. It aims to develop an alternative perspective that acknowledges and critically engages with the intellectual labor of women across diverse African contexts.

The selection of texts spans over three centuries, encompassing thinkers from varied geographical regions, linguistic traditions, and cultural backgrounds. These works demonstrate the depth and diversity of African women's philosophical engagement, addressing a range of critical issues such as the place of women in the African philosophical world, feminism in African societies, the politics of decolonization, and women's relationship to religion and spirituality.

By situating these texts at the center of philosophical inquiry rather than the periphery, this blueprint not only broadens the scope of African philosophy but also disrupts the gendered silences that have shaped its historiography. In doing so, it opens up a space for a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of Africa's rich intellectual traditions.

TOPICS

- Applied Ethics
- Culture
- Equality
- Ethics and Socio-Politics of Philosophy
- Ethics and Socio-Politics of Religion
- Gender, Sex, and Sexuality
- Justice
- Personal and Social Identity
- Race

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WEEK 1. INTRODUCTION: THE MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICAN WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS

EDET, MESEMBE ITA. WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE IMPERATIVE OF 'HER-STORICAL' PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

2018, in Chimakonam, J. and du Toit, L. (eds.), African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women. London, New York: Routledge.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.155-166

Abstract: The points this chapter labors to make are straight and simple. First, the documented reflections of women in contemporary African philosophy, of individuals such as Sophie Oluwole, Anke Graness, Wangari Maathai, Nkiru Nzegwu, Ebunoluwa Oduwole, Betty Wambui, Gail Presbey, and Louise du Toit, are impossible to deny or to ignore; the heritage they (and other female thinkers on the African condition, too numerous to do justice to here) have bequeathed to African philosophy and the world deserves the recognition denied it for so long, and current African philosophical historiography must remediate this epistemic injustice. Furthermore, I maintain that concepts are crucial in philosophical discourse, and this work has thrown up fresh concepts and keywords such as 'his-story', 'her-story', 'her-storycide', 'her-storacity', and 'Afro-herstoricism'. These concepts are pregnant with implications, consequences, and creative possibilities for African philosophy and her place in the philosophical world. These concepts encapsulate the idea that women's lives, experiences, deeds, contributions, voices, perceptions, representations, struggles, problems, expectations and participation in human affairs have been too long neglected or undervalued in standard historical narratives, and that serious cognizance must be taken of the creative works that women have produced in the development of knowledge and how these have affected the philosophic temper. Contemporary African philosophy cannot run away from honoring its 'debts and duties' to women in African philosophy.

Comment: Introducing the problem of women's marginalization in African philosophy via a rich historical exposition and explanation of new concepts such as his-story, her-story, her-storycide, her-storacity, and Afro-herstoricism.

AKIODE, OLAJUMOKE. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY, ITS QUESTIONS, THE PLACE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN, AND ITS DISCONNECT WITH ITS WORLD

2018, in Chimakonam, J. and du Toit, L. (eds.), African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women. London, New York: Routledge.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.57-73

Abstract: An African philosophy that excludes women despite its African cultural origin and DNA of complementarity, inclusion, interrelatedness, and interconnectedness, as highlighted by concepts like 'Ubuntu', is indeed an aberration. The excuse that the process of forging the African identity in an era of exclusion from rationality called for a blanket or block procedure that could not accommodate demographic disaggregation is untenable. Also, the assumption of gender neutrality is a farce. This African philosophical enterprise is essentially an exhibition of a colonized mentality. The hermeneutic analysis of the pre-colonial Yoruba African world-view, its concept of existence, being/self, governance, and eldership, has offered proof that ideas of interconnectedness, interrelatedness, being-with-others, inclusion, and complementarity are entrenched and inseparable from the African world-view. In conclusion, it is therefore a valid argument and conclusion that if African philosophy is based on African world-views of complementarity, inclusion, and being-with-others, then external (colonial) influence on thought and the socialization process is responsible for the contemporary marginalization of women. When a correct diagnosis has been made, a prescription can be made accurately, and the cure is at hand.

Comment: Examines the intersections of African philosophy, gender, and colonialism and thus provides a good introduction to these issues. This is a rather easily accessible text to learn about a contemporary position on issues of African women philosophers.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Are women marginalized in philosophy, and are women marginalized in African philosophy?
2. What does it mean to be marginalized or to marginalize? Is there a purpose/plan/goal to marginalization?
3. If you are marginalized, what can you do to demarginalize yourself?
4. If you are someone who marginalizes (consciously or unconsciously), how can you overcome contributing to marginalization?
5. What does herstorycide mean, and do you think that this is a helpful concept?
6. What is the damage done to philosophy if women are excluded from it?
7. What are the suggestions of Edet and Akiode to address the problem of marginalization?
8. What is the relevance of colonization and decolonization in the area of marginalization of women?

WEEK 2. OYÈRÓNKÉ OYĚWÙMÍ

OYĚWÙMÍ, OYÈRÓNKÉ. VISUALIZING THE BODY: WESTERN THEORIES AND AFRICAN SUBJECTS

1997, in *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: pp.1-30

Abstract: The “woman question,” this book asserts, is a Western one, and not a proper lens for viewing African society. A work that rethinks gender as a Western construction, *The Invention of Women* offers a new way of understanding both Yoruban and Western cultures.

Author Oyeronke Oyewumi reveals an ideology of biological determinism at the heart of Western social categories-the idea that biology provides the rationale for organizing the social world. And yet, she writes, the concept of “woman,” central to this ideology and to Western gender discourses, simply did not exist in Yorubaland, where the body was not the basis of social roles.

Oyewumi traces the misapplication of Western, body-oriented concepts of gender through the history of gender discourses in Yoruba studies. Her analysis shows the paradoxical nature of two fundamental assumptions of feminist theory: that gender is socially constructed and that the subordination of women is universal. *The Invention of Women* demonstrates, to the contrary, that gender was not constructed in old Yoruba society, and that social organization was determined by relative age.

A meticulous historical and epistemological account of an African culture on its own terms, this book makes a persuasive argument for a cultural, context-dependent interpretation of social reality. It calls for a reconception of gender discourse and the categories on which such a study relies. More than that, the book lays bare the hidden assumptions in the ways these different cultures think. A truly comparative sociology of an African culture and the Western tradition, it will change the way African studies and gender studies proceed.

Comment: A foundational and controversial work of African (feminist) philosophy. OyĚwùmí introduces the idea of gender being a Western construct that has been imposed on African communities. OyĚwùmí provides a perspective on the Western discourse on sex and gender widely unknown within Western philosophical institutions.

OYĚWÙMÍ, OYÈRÓNKÉ. (RE)CONSTITUTING THE COSMOLOGY AND SOCIOCULTURAL INSTITUTIONS OF ÒYÓ-YORÙBA

1997, in *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: pp.31-79

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STUDY QUESTIONS:

For *Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects*

1. What is gender? What is sex?
2. Is "biology destiny" in Western thought, as Oyěwùmí claims?
3. Are gender and sex foundational human phenomena, or do they, as Oyěwùmí argues, only appear in certain societies?
4. What would be the damage if, as Oyěwùmí argues, it is true that gender is an imposed Western category?
5. What are the organizing structures of the Yoruba society?

For *(Re)constituting the Cosmology and Sociocultural Institutions of Ọ̀yọ́-Yorùbá*

1. What is the principle of seniority?
2. Can seniority explain the societal structures of the Yoruba?
3. Does seniority explain what gender could not?
4. What are the relevant societal participants?
5. What is meant by anafemale and anamale? Are these categories helpful?
6. What is ọ̀kọ́? In what way is ọ̀kọ́ important for the understanding of Yoruba social structure?
7. What is the difference between the Western and the Yoruba understanding of marriage?
8. What does marriage mean in a Yoruba context?
9. What are the ethical ties between members of the Yoruba society? Why is responsibility so important in this structure?

WEEK 3. ABOSEDE PRISCILLA IPADEOLA

IPADEOLA, ABOSEDE PRISCILLA. AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE SHACKLES OF ANDROCENTRISM

2022, in *Feminist African Philosophy. Women and the Politics of Difference*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.69-91

Abstract: The book argues that women's perspectives and gender issues must be mainstreamed across African philosophy in order for the discipline to truly represent the thoughts of Africans across the continent. African philosophy as an academic discipline emerged as a direct challenge to Western and Eurocentric hegemonies. It sought to actualize the project of decolonization and to contribute African perspectives to global discourses. There has, however, been a dominance of male perspectives in this field of human knowledge. This book argues that African philosophy cannot claim to have liberated people of African descent from marginalization until the androcentric nature of African philosophy is addressed. Key concepts such as Ujamaa, Negritude, Ubuntu, Consciencism, and African Socialism are explored as they relate to African women's lives or as models of inclusion or exclusion from politics. In addition to offering a feminist critique of African philosophy, the book also discusses topics that have been consistently overlooked in African philosophy. These topics include sex, sexuality, rape, motherhood, prostitution, and the low participation of women in politics. By highlighting the work of women feminist scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi, Nkiru Nzegwu, Ifi Amadiume, Amina Mama, and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, the book engages with African philosophy from an African feminist viewpoint. This book will be an essential resource for students and researchers of African philosophy and gender studies.

Comment: Ipadeola's work not only addresses the problem of the marginalization of African women philosophers but also allows us to understand that this problem has a massive impact on philosophy itself. Students can find in these two chapters (1) a solid overview of the androcentric problem and (2) an epistemological approach to how to solve not only the androcentric problem, but the problem of suppressive thought in general by claiming that whatever is used to suppress can no longer be understood as knowledge but as not-knowledge. This not-knowledge lacks any argumentative power. This is one of the most ingenious recent African ideas in philosophy.

IPADEOLA, ABOSEDE PRISCILLA. AFRICAN WOMEN, ILLOGICALITY AND EPISTEMIC TYRANNY

2022, in *Feminist African Philosophy. Women and the Politics of Difference*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.109-116

Abstract: The book argues that women's perspectives and gender issues must be mainstreamed across African philosophy in order for the discipline to truly represent the thoughts of Africans across the continent. African philosophy as an academic discipline emerged as a direct challenge to Western and Eurocentric hegemonies. It sought to actualize the project of decolonization and to contribute African perspectives to global discourses. There has, however, been a dominance of male perspectives in this field of human knowledge. This book argues that African philosophy cannot claim to have liberated people of African descent from marginalization until the androcentric nature of African philosophy is addressed. Key concepts such as Ujamaa, Negritude, Ubuntu, Consciencism, and African Socialism are explored as they relate to African women's lives or as models of inclusion or exclusion from politics. In addition to offering a feminist critique of African philosophy, the book also discusses topics that have been consistently overlooked in African philosophy. These topics include sex, sexuality, rape, motherhood, prostitution, and the low participation of women in politics. By highlighting the work of women feminist scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi, Nkiru Nzegwu, Ifi Amadiume, Amina Mama, and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, the book engages with African philosophy from an African feminist viewpoint. This book will be an essential resource for students and researchers of African philosophy and gender studies.

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as not-knowledge. This not-knowledge lacks any argumentative power. This is one of the most ingenious recent African ideas in philosophy.

FRETER, BJÖRN. ABOSEDE PRISCILLA IPADEOLA'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

2025, in Chimakonam, A. E. and Idika, C. (eds.), *Her-storical Perspectives in African Philosophy*. Cham: Springer.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Abstract: The book argues that women's perspectives and gender issues must be mainstreamed across African philosophy in order for the discipline to truly represent the thoughts of Africans across the continent. African philosophy as an academic discipline emerged as a direct challenge to Western and Eurocentric hegemonies. It sought to actualize the project of decolonization and to contribute African perspectives to global discourses. There has, however, been a dominance of male perspectives in this field of human knowledge. This book argues that African philosophy cannot claim to have liberated people of African descent from marginalization until the androcentric nature of African philosophy is addressed. Key concepts such as Ujamaa, Negritude, Ubuntu, Consciencism, and African Socialism are explored as they relate to African women's lives or as models of inclusion or exclusion from politics. In addition to offering a feminist critique of African philosophy, the book also discusses topics that have been consistently overlooked in African philosophy. These topics include sex, sexuality, rape, motherhood, prostitution, and the low participation of women in politics. By highlighting the work of women feminist scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi, Nkiru Nzegwu, Ifi Amadiume, Amina Mama, and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, the book engages with African philosophy from an African feminist viewpoint. This book will be an essential resource for students and researchers of African philosophy and gender studies.

Comment: There are virtually no explicit and extended secondary sources on Ipadeola; this paper will allow students to develop an overview of her ethical and epistemological thought.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the problem with androcentrism, according to Ipadeola? What is the damage philosophy suffered from androcentrism?
2. Is African androcentrism different from Western androcentrism?
3. What is freedom? What is epistemic freedom?
4. What is, in Ipadeola's understanding, knowledge, and what is not-knowledge? What are the dangers of the philosophical discipline of epistemology?
5. How do we have to understand *Ìmọ̀*, *ẹ̀rí*, *ẹlẹ́ẹ̀rí*, *ọmọlúàbí*?
6. How are knowledge and community connected?
7. What is the relationship between academic and non-specialized knowledge?
8. What helps against the androcentrist suppression?

WEEK 4. SOPHIE BỌSẸDÉ OLÚWỌLÉ

OLÚWỌLÉ, SOPHIE BỌSẸDÉ. THE RATIONAL BASIS OF YORUBA ETHICAL THINKING

1992, in *Witchcraft, Reincarnation and the God-Head* (Issues in African Philosophy). Lagos: Excel Publishers.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: pp.55-72

Abstract: An explanation of the Yoruba understanding of rationality, its immediate connection to practical ethics, and its roots in oral Yoruba traditions.

Comment: By studying Olúwọlé, students can learn this week that African women philosophers have not worked on feminist issues alone. Olúwọlé allows one to learn about a different rationale than the commonly known Western one. This can nicely be juxtaposed with philosophers like Descartes or Kant. Olúwọlé's philosophy of rationality and the connection of this philosophy with Yoruba culture, esp. with Yoruba oral traditions of philosophy, allows us to re-evaluate the (seemingly) undeniable evidence of Western philosophy. Furthermore, it also shows some commonalities that were denied in later Western philosophical history (for instance, that at the inception of Western philosophy, we do find in Socrates another oral philosopher).

OLÚWỌLÉ, SOPHIE BỌSẸDÉ. PHILOSOPHY AND ORAL TRADITION

1999, in *Philosophy and Oral Tradition*. Lagos: African Research Konsultancy (ARK).

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: pp.1-38

Abstract: From: Sophie Oluwolé: *Celebrating the Radical Spirit of African Philosophy*, By Tunji Olaopa. In *Philosophy and Oral Tradition* (1997), Sophie Oluwolé urges us to return to Africa's oral tradition as the source of excavating an authentic foundation of Africa's intellectual culture which the West has tried so hard to undermine and destroy. One argument that underlies the relevance of Africa's oral tradition is that the traditional and cultural practices of the past must have been guided by some form of logic and rational principles which not only predate the Western scientific canon, but which cannot also be subsumed totally under it.

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FRETER, BJÖRN. SOPHIE BỌSẸDÉ OLÚWỌLÉ ON YORUBA PHILOSOPHY, KNOWING, NOT-KNOWING AND THE PAIN OF LETTING GO

2024, in Agada, A., Ofuasia, E. and Ikuli, B. Y. (eds.), *Contemporary African Metaphysical Thought*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Difficulty: Intermediate

Fragment: pp.105-129

Abstract: This contribution will outline some important aspects of Sophie Bọsẹdẹ Olúwọlés' groundbreaking work on Yorùbá oral philosophy. Using the Yorùbá story 'The Toothless Queen' as a vehicle, we will outline her understanding of oral philosophy as philosophy proper and investigate her radically inclusive, non-absolutist, anti-nihilist conception of philosophy as well as the fundamental onto-epistemological axioms of Yorùbá thought. We will especially focus on Olúwọlés' radical and revolutionary philosophical approach to rationality and rational conjectures. We will finish our paper with Olúwọlés' reflections on some of the obstacles that must be overcome to make her revolution a reality in the global philosophical community, that is, the pain of letting theories, ideas, and principles dear to us go.

WEEK 5. AMINA MAMA

MAMA, AMINA. ENSLAVING THE SOUL OF THE OTHER

1995, in *Beyond the Masks. Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.27-53

Abstract: Psychology has had a number of things to say about black and coloured people, none of them favourable, and most of which have reinforced stereotyped and derogatory images. *Beyond the Masks* is a readable account of black psychology, exploring key theoretical issues in race and gender. In it, Amina Mama examines the history of racist psychology, and of the implicit racism throughout the discipline. *Beyond the Masks* also offers an important theoretical perspective, and will appeal to all those involved with ethnic minorities, gender politics and questions of identity.

Comment: The study of Amina Mama allows for the development of an understanding of black women's multiple subjectivities and their experience of racism and sexism, while at the same time showing that the black individual cannot be defined only via racism. She unveils the absurd effects of anti-black thought in psychology and how black psychologists have worked on developing non-racist theories of black identity.

MAMA, AMINA. INVENTING BLACK IDENTITY

1995, in *Beyond the Masks. Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis Group.

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DE LA REY, CHERYL, MAMA, AMINA, MAGUBANE, ZINE. BEYOND THE MASKS [A DISCUSSION WITH AMINA MAMA]

1997, *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 32, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.17-23

Abstract: CHERYL DE LA REY leads a discussion with AMINA MAMA about the writer's groundbreaking work on black subjectivity. ZINE MAGUBANE presents some of the highlights of the conversation on the book *BEYOND THE MASKS*, held at the African Gender Institute in Cape Town.

Comment: This conversation with Amina Mama on some of the core elements of her book provides an excellent guide to some of her ideas and allows to place them within the larger context.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is black identity? What is black female identity?
2. What is oppression? How does oppression change one's understanding of oneself?
3. Can a non-oppressed person ever understand an oppressed person?
4. Can a woman oppressed for being a woman ever be understood by a man not oppressed for being a man?

5. What does subjectivity mean? What does it mean to have multiple subjectivities?
6. What is anti-black psychology? How is it even possible to develop something like anti-black psychology?
7. What could be foundational ideas of a non-racist psychology of black identity?
8. What is anti-black racism?
9. Why did Western psychologists develop anti-black psychology even though it contradicted all scientific evidence and (seemingly) all moral axioms of Western thought?

WEEK 6. IFI AMADIUME

AMADIUME, IFI. GENDER AND THE ECONOMY

1987, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London/New Jersey: Zed Books.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.27-41

Abstract: In 1987, more than a decade before the dawn of queer theory, Ifi Amadiume published the groundbreaking 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands' to critical acclaim. This compelling, enduring, and highly original book argues that gender, as constructed in Western feminist discourse, did not exist in Africa before the colonial imposition of a dichotomous understanding of sexual difference. Amadiume examines the African societal structures that enabled people to achieve power within fluid masculine and feminine roles. At a time when gender and queer theory is viewed by many as overly focused on identity politics, this apt text not only warns against the danger of projecting Western notions of difference onto other cultures, but also questions the very concept of gender itself.

Comment: Amadiume explains the institutional and ideological power of women in the pre-colonial 19th century, the downfall of this power during colonialism, and the continuation of women's marginalization in society. This study allows to develop an understanding of the highly complex sex/gender understanding in African (here: Igbo) societies. It will show that the Western understanding of sex and gender might be fruitfully applicable for certain (Western) societies, but is only of limited (if not detrimental) use within African spaces. The book is thus not only a lesson in African philosophy, African feminism, or Igbo thought, it also teaches an important caveat with regard to the cultural relativity of concepts (like sex and gender).

AMADIUME, IFI. WOMEN, WEALTH, TITLES AND POWER

1987, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London/New Jersey: Zed Books.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.42-50

Abstract: In 1987, more than a decade before the dawn of queer theory, Ifi Amadiume published the groundbreaking 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands' to critical acclaim. This compelling, enduring, and highly original book argues that gender, as constructed in Western feminist discourse, did not exist in Africa before the colonial imposition of a dichotomous understanding of sexual difference. Amadiume examines the African societal structures that enabled people to achieve power within fluid masculine and feminine roles. At a time when gender and queer theory is viewed by many as overly focused on identity politics, this apt text not only warns against the danger of projecting Western notions of difference onto other cultures, but also questions the very concept of gender itself.

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AMADIUME, IFI. THE IDEOLOGY OF GENDER

1987, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London/New Jersey: Zed Books.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.69-88

Abstract: In 1987, more than a decade before the dawn of queer theory, Ifi Amadiume published the groundbreaking 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands' to critical acclaim. This compelling, enduring, and highly original book argues that gender, as constructed in Western feminist discourse, did not exist in Africa before the colonial imposition of a dichotomous understanding of sexual difference. Amadiume examines the African

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STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is gender? What is sex?
2. Are gender and sex foundational human phenomena?
3. What are, according to Amadiume, the principles that structure Igbo society? What is a male daughter? What is a female husband?
4. What can we learn from the flexible Igbo gender understanding for the further development of tolerance towards different gender conceptions?
5. Is the Igbo gender system a moral problem? If so, why? And, if not, why not?
6. What does it mean to 'become' male or female in Igbo thought?
7. What can we learn from Igbo gender/sex discourse for the Western gender/sex discourse?
8. What are the similarities/differences between Amadiume and Oyěwùmí?

WEEK 7. NANA ASMA'U

ASMA'U, NANA. THE PATH OF TRUTH

1997, in Boyd, J. and Mack B. B. (eds.), *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u*, Daughter of Usman Dan Fodiyo, (1793-1864). East Lansing: MSU Press.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.178-188

Abstract: This manuscript is from a collection of poems written by Nana Asma'u Bint Usman 'dan Fodiyo, a nineteenth-century Muslim scholar, who lived in the region now known as northern Nigeria and was an eyewitness to battles of the largest of the West-African jihads of the era. The preparation and conduct of the jihad provide the topics for Nana Asma'u's poetry. Her work also includes treatises on history, law, mysticism, theology, and politics, and was heavily influenced by the Arabic poetic tradition. Asma'u rallied public opinion behind a movement devoted to the revival of Islam in West Africa and organized a public education system for women.

Comment: The work of Nana Asma'u is an example of the contribution of women scholars to the Sufi intellectual tradition in the Sokoto Caliphate. The selected poems (1) emphasize the importance of acting rightly, and (2) offer a reflection on the relation between the moral/religious order and the political order. In the theocratic social structure she defends, she sets civil and religious responsibilities on an equal footing and insists on the duties and obligations imposed on those who govern as a guarantee of social justice.

ASMA'U, NANA. BE SURE OF GOD'S TRUTH

1997, in Boyd, J. and Mack B. B. (eds.), *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u*, Daughter of Usman Dan Fodiyo, (1793-1864). East Lansing: MSU Press.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.47-57

Abstract: This manuscript is from a collection of poems written by Nana Asma'u Bint Usman 'dan Fodiyo, a nineteenth-century Muslim scholar, who lived in the region now known as northern Nigeria and was an eyewitness to battles of the largest of the West-African jihads of the era. The preparation and conduct of the jihad provide the topics for Nana Asma'u's poetry. Her work also includes treatises on history, law, mysticism, theology, and politics, and was heavily influenced by the Arabic poetic tradition. Asma'u rallied public opinion behind a movement devoted to the revival of Islam in West Africa and organized a public education system for women.

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STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Does following religious rules prevent you from doing wrong?
2. Are wrongdoing and injustice caused by ignorance?
3. What is the basis of a just society?
4. What are the obligations of the governed towards the rulers? And those of the rulers towards the governed?
5. Can institutions find legitimacy in a moral or religious order?
6. What is the purpose of assuming a compensatory system of retribution and punishment in an afterworld?
7. Are religious principles indispensable to achieve justice in a society?

WEEK 8. TANELLA BONI

BONI, TANELLA. FEMINISM, PHILOSOPHY, AND CULTURE IN AFRICA

2017, in Garry, A., Khader, S. J. and Stone, A. (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.49-59

Abstract: African feminisms emerge out of a heterogeneous context. Because Africa's globalization has been ongoing for centuries now, African women pay a steep price for it, all while the patriarchal order remains firmly in place. The many African feminisms, however, cannot be boiled down to "gender" or a "gendered approach", since that word does not mean much if it is not being applied to a set of facts. Indeed, it seems that "gender" serves to unravel the causes of the inequalities, injustices and harms that women must face. While there is, among African women, a desire to throw off the colonial yoke by thinking of ourselves through the paradigms of a pre-colonial past, it is also worrisome that theoretical reflection is often too far away from the situations in which most African women find themselves. A language barrier separates African feminists from one another.

Comment: This text is interesting in highlighting the challenges of feminism in the African context. In this text, Tanella Boni explains the discomfort caused by the use of the term "feminism" and analyzes how the language gap in Africa affects the way women-related issues are addressed.

BONI, TANELLA. WHAT DOES BEING IN THE WORLD MEAN? THINKING LIFE AND DOMESTIC BONDS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY AFRICA

2021, in Bidima, J. G. and Hengehold, L. (eds.), *African Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century: Acts of Transition*. 1st ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.17-34

Abstract: This paper explores the mutations of the domestic bonds in contemporary Africa. Tanella Boni argues that the economic and social globalization led to a transformation of familial relations. These changes have forced a redefinition of the nature of positions and relationships within families. The desire to cope with these changes has led to the implementation of adaptive strategies, producing familial entities characterized by more complex relationships but still retaining their hierarchical structures and inequalities.

Comment: In this paper, Tanella Boni provides an analysis of the social dynamics in Africa based on its smallest unit, the family. She explains how bonds and positions within families are reinterpreted to adapt to changes in African societies.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

For *Feminism, Philosophy, and Culture in Africa*

1. What explains the reluctance of African writers to use the term feminism?
2. Why does life experience matter to the feminist struggle?
3. How does the language gap affect the debate on feminism in Africa?
4. According to Tanella Boni, why doesn't gender designate a two-pole relation of domination between man (the dominant) and woman (the dominated)?
5. How do the women collaborate in the reproduction of the patriarchal ideology?

For *What Does Being in the World Mean? Thinking Life and Domestic Bonds in the Twenty-First-Century Africa*

1. What is the African conception of family? How does it differ from the Western conception?
2. What can explain the changes in the domestic bonds undergone by the African family?
3. Why is individuality a paradoxical notion in the African context?
4. Can understanding women's position in the family help to understand their place in society?

5. How do the traditional practices and power relations survive social changes and mutations of the domestic bonds?

WEEK 9. FATIMA MERNISSI

MERNISSI, FATIMA. THE MUSLIM CONCEPT OF ACTIVE FEMALE SEXUALITY

2011, in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. London: Saqi Books.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.27-45

Abstract: From the writing of her first book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* in 1975, Mernissi has sought to reclaim the ideological discourse on women and sexuality from the stranglehold of patriarchy. She critically examines the classical corpus of religious-juristic texts, including the Hadith, and reinterprets them from a feminist perspective. In her view, the Muslim ideal of the silent, passive, obedient woman has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam. Rather, it is a construction of the 'ulama', the male jurists-theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system. Mernissi's work explores the relationship between sexual ideology, gender identity, sociopolitical organization, and the status of women in Islam; her special focus, however, is Moroccan society and culture. As a feminist, her work represents an attempt to undermine the ideological and political systems that silence and oppress Muslim women.

Comment: Fatima Mernissi's works provide an insight into the debate on the place of women in Muslim societies. This book is interesting in that it shows how the male-female dynamic was built on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an and how this ideology organized and regulated social roles according to gender. It also provides an understanding of how male-female interactions are affected by the processes of modernization in Muslim societies.

MERNISSI, FATIMA. WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES

2011, in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. London: Saqi Books.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.165-178

Abstract: From the writing of her first book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* in 1975, Mernissi has sought to reclaim the ideological discourse on women and sexuality from the stranglehold of patriarchy. She critically examines the classical corpus of religious-juristic texts, including the Hadith, and reinterprets them from a feminist perspective. In her view, the Muslim ideal of the silent, passive, obedient woman has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam. Rather, it is a construction of the 'ulama', the male jurists-theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system. Mernissi's work explores the relationship between sexual ideology, gender identity, sociopolitical organization, and the status of women in Islam; her special focus, however, is Moroccan society and culture. As a feminist, her work represents an attempt to undermine the ideological and political systems that silence and oppress Muslim women.

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STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is the antagonism between sexual desire and social order in the Muslim conception?
2. In which ways are sexual instincts supposed to serve the divine order?
3. What is passive sexuality? What is active sexuality?
4. Why does Fatima Mernissi consider muslim women to have an active sexuality? Why are men fearing women's active sexuality?
5. How does the double theory (the explicit and the implicit) of sexual dynamics hide the reality of men's passive and women's active sexuality?

6. What are the implications of recognizing active female sexuality in the social order?
7. What are the consequences of denying the similarity of male and female sexualities in the social order?
8. What does Arab sexuality have in common with bourgeois sexuality?
9. Why has the Westernization of women fueled men's fears in the Arab world?
10. Why is there a contradiction between the ideology promoted in the political sphere and the economic reality of modern Arab societies?
11. Is the muslim system equally oppressive for both men and women? Is male privilege an illusion in this system?
12. Why does Fatima Mernissi consider the liberation of women to be a material problem and not only a spiritual one? Which changes does this imply for society?

WEEK 10. LOUISE DU TOIT

DU TOIT, LOUISE, COETZEE, AZILLE. GENDERING AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY, OR: AFRICAN FEMINISM AS DECOLONIZING FORCE

2017, in Afolayan, A. and Falola, T. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.333-348

Abstract: Although feminist authors and publications abound in other disciplines on the continent, professional African philosophy is overwhelmingly male dominated, with a conspicuous absence of feminist and gender themes. To redress the situation, du Toit and Coetzee consider the choice between applying globally dominant feminist frameworks to issues and debates in the African context or outright immersion in the masculine field of African philosophy in order to open up spaces for feminist questions in dialogue with indigenous worldviews and philosophical positions. In this chapter the authors focus on the second option, in line with recent calls to more authentically contextualize philosophical practice on the continent. The chapter examines the themes of sexual agency and motherhood. Grounded in this way, African feminist philosophy emerges as a potentially powerful source of critique and partner in dialogue with the more established strands of feminist thought.

Comment: The interest of this article lies in the way it addresses the question of decolonization. It offers an analysis of the mechanisms that have allowed the memory of colonized peoples to remain under the influence of the colonial narrative and shows how feminist studies can contribute to a real emancipation of African memories and identities.

DU TOIT, LOUISE. OLD WIVES' TALES AND PHILOSOPHICAL DELUSIONS: ON 'THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN AND AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY'

2008, in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27(4), Taylor & Francis.

Difficulty: Easy-Intermediate

Fragment: pp.413-429

Abstract: This article represents a response to 'the problem of women and African philosophy', which refers mainly to the absence of strong women's and feminist voices within the discipline of African philosophy. I investigate the possibility that African women are not so much excluded from the institutionalized discipline of philosophy, as preferring fiction as a genre for intellectual expression. This hypothesis can be supported by some feminists who read the absolute prioritisation of abstraction and generalization over the concrete and the particular as a masculine and western oppressive strategy. Attention to the concrete and the unique which is made possible by literature more readily than by philosophy, could thus operate as a form of political resistance in certain contexts. If fiction is currently the preferred form of intellectual expression of African women, it is crucial that the community of professional philosophers in a context like South Africa should come to terms with the relevance of such a preference for philosophy's self-conception, and it should work to make these intellectual contributions philosophically fruitful. In the process, we may entertain the hope that philosophy itself will move closer to its root or source as 'love of wisdom'.

Comment: This paper is interesting because it addresses the question of the representation of women in philosophy. It contrasts the underrepresentation of women in philosophy with their representation in literature and explains this difference by a deliberate choice consistent with the struggles of African women.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

For *Gendering African Philosophy, or: African Feminism as Decolonizing Force*

1. What was the aim of the colonial project? What is the purpose of decolonization?
2. Why is feminism suspected to be a colonizing force in Africa?
3. What is the problem with the temptation of nostalgia?
4. How did colonization bring out a biased African memory?
5. Why is addressing the question of sex and gender indispensable to achieving decolonization?

For *Old Wives' Tales and Philosophical Delusions: On 'the Problem of Women and African Philosophy'*

1. What is the evidence of the underrepresentation of women in African philosophy?
2. Is the absence of strong female voices in African philosophy the result of an exclusion?
3. According to Louise du Toit, what are the reasons for women to resist entering philosophy? What explains the preference of engaged women for literature?
4. What is the difference between intellectual and popular African feminism? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each one?
5. Why can philosophy be considered an obstacle to women's resistance strategies?
6. What challenges are raised for philosophy by African women's fiction?