

The 19th Annual Begemann – Gordon Lecture Series

Counter History: Reproducing Archival Omissions Through the Use of Fabula

A Special Talk with Ukamaka Olisakwe

Wednesday, Oct 27, 2021

5pm-6pm

Via Zoom

<https://bit.ly/3mUm13X>

This talk explores the efforts Igbo and Black writers have made to reproduce parts of our history that were omitted from the archives, as well as the feminist discussions about the violence of colonial patriarchy that determines what constitutes womanhood. It explores the social and cultural usefulness of creative writing in Igbo communities where stories about motherhood and womanhood are governed by the phallogocentric order that also polices gender. The primary texts discussed—Saidiya Hartman’s “Venus in Two Acts,” Hortense Spillers’ “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” and Ifi Amadiume’s *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*—show how gender norms are tightly linked to class and race difference; how a woman is patriarchalized by the same system that excludes her from the hierarchy of power, and how a woman must constantly negotiate the social dynamics in her society to be able to write and to subvert censorship. This talk also underlines how historical archive, as Hartman puts it, is “inseparable from the play of power” that subjugated the woman and ennobled the man. It asks: who was historically privileged by the archives? What is at stake when a woman eschews the normative and decide to interrogate the history of the women who came before her? How do women control language and their place in their society? The aim of this talk is not to erase history but interrogate it and imagine what we can no longer verify. By focusing on a diverse text, and samples from my work and the work of other women, this talk aims to track how creative and critical productions can work together to reimagine the life of the precolonial Igbo woman. The cross-cultural nature of this study underlines the overlap between the historical realities of the Igbo and the African American woman.



Ukamaka Olisakwe grew up in Kano, Nigeria, and now lives in Vermillion, South Dakota at University of South Dakota. In 2014, she was named one of the continent’s most promising writers under the age of 40 by the UNESCO World Book Capital for the Africa39 project. In 2016, she was awarded an honorary fellowship in Writing from the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. In 2018, she won the Vermont College of Fine Arts’ Emerging Writer Scholarship for the MFA in Writing and Publishing program. Ukamaka, a finalist for the Miles Morland Writing Scholarship, has had her works appear in the New York Times, Granta, Longreads, The Rumpus, Catapult, Rattle, Waxwing, Jalada, Brittle Paper, Hunger Mountain, Sampsonia Way, and more. Her books include *Eyes of a Goddess* (2012) and *Ogadinma* (2020). She is currently working on her third book.

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