

**AMST 629D - Feminist Cultural Criticism in Diasporic Texts**  
**THEME: Sustainability and Trauma**

Fall 2010

T – 4:00 – 6:40

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This course will examine how migrations, movement, etc. have shaped the meaning of social identities for women in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and a host of other variables. We will also examine how their lives as producers reflect and inflect their worlds as citizens and consumers. The global migrations that gives life to these products makes this discussion national and transnationalism inviting us to consider the politics of their cultural production. What are the ways in which women confront institutional, personal, and societal barriers in their daily lives and creative spaces as they re(defined) and/or self-defined.

Necessarily, this course places a special emphasis on cultural production—music, literature, visual and material culture, film, and English translations of literary fiction as interpretive frames to consider the lives of these female cultural workers and the broader society around them. Performative forms of narration such as incarceration theatre, storytelling, film, music and the Internet will be incorporated.

<b>Course Theme – Sustainability &amp; Trauma</b>
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At its core, the term sustainability is defined as “the capacity for being continued; to endure; renewable.” However, there are equally as many definitions that speak to sustainability as one of the most theoretically and practically vexing issues of our times. The definitions are various and expansive involving far more than simply turning off lights and recycling. The implications are more overarching including a question like the one posed for the 2009 American Studies Association—What is sustained [when discussing citizenship and belonging], and how is power enacted, in the rituals and practices of individuals and institutions? And what does sustainability mean when we think about how and what we produce and consume; how we treat the land, sea, air, and atmosphere; how we approach our health and well-being, and more? The challenge of sustainability is its profoundly crosscutting nature; none of these questions can be addressed without consideration of the others.

The prevailing theoretical model of sustainability defines it as the intersection of the social, the environmental, and the economic or the “triple bottom line.” We will consider this but also take up another prevailing point of view, a fourth pillar—cultural vitality. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) states “...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”; it becomes “one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.” Furthermore, mainstream thinking sees environmental studies as the primary discipline for studying sustainability. However, a fourth pillar allows a wider range of disciplines to have a voice including American Studies, which allows for a more

interdisciplinary undertaking contributing to a broader understanding of sustainability.

When we combine this vexing concept with that of trauma our discussion is further expanded, redefined, and made more complex. What is trauma? In what ways does memory—past and present—relive the traumatic experience? And, why are the prevailing theories of trauma studies concerned primarily with history rather than the present?

Drawing from a broad interdisciplinary theoretical base and the lens of feminist cultural criticism, this course will intervene on the prevailing discourses of terms like to “sustainability” and “trauma” to consider, among other things, resilience, justice, environments, hazards, transformation, and cultural/Earth work.

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### Readings

- ♣Abani, BECOMING ABIGAIL
- ♣Adichie, PURPLE HIBISCUS
- ♣Allen, SACRED HOOP
- ♣Brazier, DIASPORA
- ♣Dash, DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST
- ♣Diner, HUNGERING FOR AMERICA
- ♣Harper, SISTAH VEGAN
- ♣Simon, BETWEEN HOPE & DESPAIR
- ♣Foster, WOMEN FILMMAKERS OF THE AFRICAN.+ASIAN DIASPORA
- ♣Sturgeon, ENVIRONMENTALISM IN POPULAR CULTURE
- ♣Taylor, The ARCHIVE+REPertoire

### Assignments

Locavore Experiment/Blog Post	Nov. 23	(20 pts.)
Exhibition Review		(20 pts)
Seminar discussion leader		(15 pts.)
Research paper panel presentation	Dec 7 & 14	(10 pts.)
Research paper	Dec 19	(35 pts.)

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**Please note that the syllabus might change from time to time. You should consult email and ELMS regularly for updates**

### Syllabus

Aug 31

#### Introduction and Overview

- Feminist Cultural Criticism, Diasporas, Cultural Production, Trauma, and Sustainability,
- Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story.” TED.com

Sept. 7

#### Frameworks: Feminist Cultural Criticism and Diasporas

- Visit the website **Voices from the Gaps** - <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/>
- During, “Introduction to Cultural Studies” (ELMS)
- Lennox, “Feminism and Cultural Studies” (ELMS)
- Smith and Murfin, “What is Feminist Cultural Criticism” (ELMS)
- McDowell, “New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism,” [Black American Literary Forum](#)

- Clifford, "Diasporas" – Cultural Anthropology, 9. 3
- Braziel, Diaspora (Preface – p. 84 and pp. 128-157)
- Diner, Hungering for America (Chaps. 1, and 6-8)

Sept. 14

Frameworks: **Feminist Cultural Production, Remembrance of Traumatic History, and the Complications of Sustainability**

- Special issue: ""Feminist Cultural Production: Critical Debates and Practices—A [critical introduction to feminist cultural production](#)," Resources for Feminist Research, Fall 2002, 29. 3-4.
- Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics" Paragraph, (March 2007), 30.1
- Simon, et al, eds. Between Hope and Despair (chaps 1-4)
- American Studies Association, Newsletters, "Practices of Citizenship, Sustainability and Belonging" – (December 2008) 36.4 and (June 2009), 36.2. (ELMS)

Sept. 21

Applications: **To write Female, Creative and Socially Constructive Literature**

Literature

- Braziel, "Global Traffic" in Diaspora
- Brogan, "American Tales of Cultural Haunting," College English (Feb. 1995), 57.2.
- Craps and Buelens. "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels." Studies in the Novel 40.1 (2008): 1-12.
- Mukherjee, "The Management of Grief" - (ELMS)
- Bowen, "Spaces of Translation... "The Management of Grief" - (ELMS)
- Abani, Becoming Abigail
- Dawson, "Cargo Culture: Literature in an Age of Mass Displacement," Women's Studies Quarterly, (Spring/Summer 2010): 38.1 & 2.

Sept. 28

Literature

- Adichie, Purple Hibiscus
- Mabura, "Breaking Gods: An African Postcolonial Gothic Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun," Research in African Literature 39.1 (Spring 2008): 203-222.
- Hewett, "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation," English in Africa, 32.1 (May2005): 73-97.
- Braziel, "Transnational Activism, Diasporic Arts of Resistance" in Diaspora

Oct 5

Performing Meaning and Memory

- Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire
- Coco Fusco - <http://www.thing.net/~cocofusco/performance.htm>
- Exhibition Review – Please be sure you get to Montpelier Mansion (Muirkirk Rd, Laurel, Maryland on or after September 19 to see the new Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit "Between Fences" - Artifacts that exemplify local stories about borders, bridges and boundaries and programs that focus on local fences, both physical and psychological, will ground the national exhibit in each community. Topics might include settlement

patterns, town architecture, transportation systems, civil rights and civility among neighbors. [http://www.pgparks.com/between\\_fences](http://www.pgparks.com/between_fences)

- Shapiro, "A Haven on the Block: Do gated alleys help or hurt neighborhood communities?" Washington Post, Sunday, May 30, 2010; W24. Please access this link to look at the photo gallery - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/21/AR2010052103335.html>
- In Class Viewing: Good Fences or Michael Glaser, Poet Laureate – Maryland Humanities Council

Oct 12

**Moving Image – Popular Culture**

- Foster, Women Filmmakers of the African and the Asian Diaspora
- McRuer and Wilkerson, "Introduction: Desiring Disability: Queer Theory Meets Disability Studies," GLQ, (2003), 9(1-2): 1-23

A Powerful Thang, Zeinabu Irene Davis

Compensation, Zeinabu Davis

Liebe Perla, Shahar Rozen

U People, Hanifah Walidah's - <http://www.logotv.com/video/u-people/1604443/playlist.jhtml>

Jays Dreams, Catherine Pancake

Oct 19

**Moving Image – Popular Culture, cont.**

- Dash, Daughters of the Dust: The Making of An African American Woman's Film
- Brazier, "Queer Diasporas," in Diasporas
- Outside class Video : Daughter's of the Dust
- In class viewing: Sisters of the Screen: African Women on Screen

Surname Viêt, Given Name Nam, Trinh T. Minh-ha

Roudtrip, Shahar Rozen

Monsoon Wedding, Mira Nair

Oct 26

**Bearing Witness to Family Trauma – Between Hope and Despair**

- Simon, et al, eds. Between Hope and Despair (chaps 6-10)
- Ball, "Trauma and It's Institutional Destinies," Cultural Critique 46 (Fall 2000)
- Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics," Paragraph 30.1, (March 2007): 9-29
- Gilfus, "The Price of the Ticket: A Survivor-Centered Appraisal of Trauma Theory" Violence Against Women (November 1999) 5: 1238-1257.
- Shoos, "Representing Domestic Violence: Ambivalence and Difference in What's Love Got to Do with It." NWSA Journal 15.2 (2003): 57-77
- Sheppard, "Lion and Lamb—The Strong Black Woman Gets Abused: "Afflictions of Specialness" in Post-Feminist and Post-Civil Rights Film," Thinking Gender Papers, UCLA Center for the Study of Women, UC Los Angeles, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/79r8n31q>

Madea's Family Reunion, Tyler Perry

Fire, Deepa Mehta

Nov 2

**Bearing witness through Sustainability – Environmentalism and Ecocriticism**

- “Defining Sustainability” (ELMS)
- Sustainability,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>
- Warren, “Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective” and Smith, “Ecofeminism through an Anticolonial Framework” [ELMS](#)
- Braziel, “Postface: Diasporic Shifts Post 9/11” in [Diasporas](#)
- Sturgeon, [Environmentalism in Popular Culture](#)

Nov 9 Sustaining Culture—

- Allen, SACRED HOOP
- Purdy, “And Then, Twenty Years Later . . .”: A Conversation with Paula Gunn Allen - <http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/paula/PGA-int.html>
- Babb, “Paula Gunn Allen’s Grandmothers...” [American Indian Quarterly](#) (1997): 21.2
- Outside class Video: [Tuya’s Marriage](#)

Nov 16 Feminist Epistemologies and Cultural/EarthWork

- Hope, “Editorial: The Places of Earthwork: Women and Environments,” [Women's Studies Quarterly](#) 29, No. 1-2(Spring - Summer, 2001), pp. 6-11
- Zauditu-Selassie, “Women Who Know Things: African Epistemologies, Ecocriticism, and Female Spiritual Authority in the Novels of Toni Morrison” [ELMS](#)
- Stanley, “The Three Faces in Eve’s Bayou: Recalling the Conjure Woman in Contemporary Black Cinema,” [ELMS](#)
- Brandt, “On the Move for Food: Three Women Behind the Tomato’s Journey” [WSQ](#) 29, No. 1-2(Spring - Summer, 2001), 131-143
- Engelhardt, “Beating the Biscuits in Appalachia: Race, Class, and Gender Politics of Women Baking Bread” and McGregor, “The real ‘Food Revolution’ starts with healthy Appalachian cornbread” (Blogpost)  
<http://www.grist.org/article/2010-04-08-jamie-oliver-food-revolution-appalachian>
- Edna Lewis, “Fried Chicken and Sweet Potato Pie,  
”<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cl6JVMoMN44>

Outside class Video: [The Songcatcher](#)

[Begin Locavore experiment](#)

Nov. 23 Feminist Cultural Criticism of Food

[End Locavore experiment](#)

- Harper, Sistah Vegan
- Black, “The Feminist Food Revolution,” [Ms. Magazine](#)
- [Curve Magazine](#) – (July/Aug 2010) - “Lesbian Localvores”
- <http://vegetarianstar.com/2009/03/14/dana-goldberg-confirms-vegan-lesbian-stereotype/>
- Gibbs, “Watering the Food Desert,” [Ebony](#)
- Diner, [Hungering for America](#) (Chaps. 2-5)

Nov 30	No class
Dec 7	Paper Presentations & commentaries
Dec 14	Paper Presentations & commentaries

**Final Paper Due December 19**