

VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM

# GENDERING AFRICA

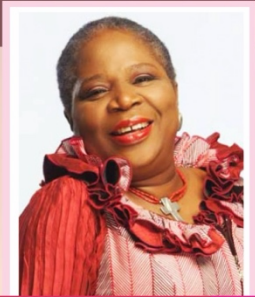
## *Musical Perspectives*

**Friday, March 4 2022**

“Gendering Africa: Musical Perspectives” is a day-long symposium featuring presentations from African and African-descended women ethnomusicologists and performers who center sub-Saharan Africa in the on-going conversation concerning gender and music.



### Presenters, Performers, and Panel Chairs



**Onyeka Onwenu**  
"Being a Woman, Singer, Activist, and Politician in Nigeria"



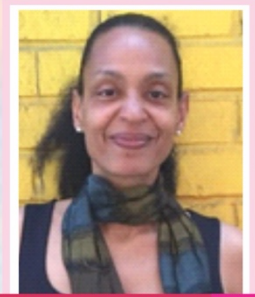
**Dr. Jean Ngoya Kidula**  
(Re) Presenting African Women in Music: Conventions and Paradoxes



**Dr. Ama Oforiwa**  
Walking with My Ancestors: In Search for Our Great Mothers' Gardens



**Dr. Stephanie Shonekan**  
"Bridge over Troubled Water": How Africana Women Artists Build Bridges across the Atlantic



**Dr. Marceline Saibou**  
Neutralizing Stigma: Gender, Disability, and Power in Religious Popular Music in Togo



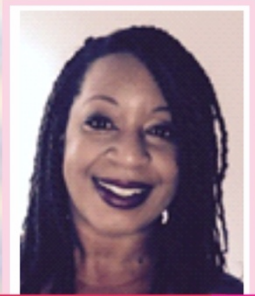
**Dr. Ruth Opara**  
Music and the African Girl Child: Persistence and Resistance in the Igbo, Nigerian Pot Drum Music



**Dr. Krystal Klingenberg**  
Daughtering in the Field: Research Deferred in a World Disrupted by Pandemic



**Althea SullyCole**  
Hearing Jinns: Intersections of Gender and Materialism in the Met's Historical Collection of Mandé Harps



**Laina Dawes**  
Panel Chair: Social Justice and Identity



**Shirley Chikukwa**  
The Contemporary, Christian Zimbabwean: Finding National Identity through Church Worship



**Amarachi Attamah**  
Igbo Chant Poetry



**Lauren Bernard**  
Panel Chair: Reflexivity, Movement, and Displacement

**Sponsors:**



# *Gendering Africa: Musical Perspectives*

Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2022

## *Symposium Information*

*“Gendering Africa: Musical Perspectives” is a day-long online symposium hosted by the Center for Ethnomusicology in the Department of Music at Columbia University. It will feature presentations from African and African-descended women ethnomusicologists and performers who center sub-Saharan Africa in the on-going conversation concerning gender and music. It is designed to locate, highlight and put in dialogue the perspectives and lived experiences of women of African descent in the discourse on gender and music in Africa. This focus resists both sub-Saharan Africa’s peripheral status within the discourse on gender and music and the neglect of gender perspectives within Africanist ethnomusicology on topics ranging from performance practices to musical instruments to music and identity. Topics covered also represent a broad geographical scope that clarify the depth and breadth of the African landscape in the conversation on music and gender.*

Registration is free but required. Register in advance for Symposium:

[https://columbiauniversity.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYudemrrzMrHnkmmqMxgP-TA\\_J0yA-XEh9g](https://columbiauniversity.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYudemrrzMrHnkmmqMxgP-TA_J0yA-XEh9g)

### *Organizers*

**Ruth Opara Ph.D.   Althea SullyCole   Shirley Chikukwa   Aaron A. Fox Ph.D.**

### *Sponsors*



### **Department of Art & Music Histories**



# *Gendering Africa: Musical Perspectives*

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## *Symposium Program (1/2)*

*All times are in Eastern Standard Time (EST)*

### **Morning**

- 10:15 AM    *Opening Remarks*  
Dr. Ruth Opara (Syracuse University)
- 10:30 AM    *Keynote Address*  
  
Dr. Jean Ngoya Kidula (University of Georgia) *(Re) Presenting African Women in Music: Conventions and Paradoxes* (introduced by Althea SullyCole)
- 11:30 AM    *Panel A: Reflexivity, Movement, and Displacement*  
  
Althea SullyCole (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Columbia University) *Hearing Jinns: Intersections of Gender and Materialism in the Met's Historical Collection of Mandé Harps*  
  
Dr. Krystal Klingenberg (Smithsonian's National Museum of American History) *Daughtering in the Field: Research Deferred in a World Disrupted by Pandemic*  
  
Dr. Stephanie Shonekan (University of Missouri) *"Bridge over Troubled Water": How Africana Women Artists Build Bridges across the Atlantic*  
  
Chair: Lauren Bernard

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## *Symposium Program (2/2)*

*All times are in Eastern Standard Time (EST)*

### **Afternoon**

- 1:00 PM *Performance*
- “*Igbo Chant Poetry*” by Amarachi Attamah (Syracuse University) (introduced by Althea SullyCole)
- 1:30 PM *Artist Address*
- Onyeka Onwenu “*Being a Woman, Singer, Activist, and Politician in Nigeria*” (introduced by Dr. Ruth Opara)
- 2:30 PM *Panel B: Social Justice and Identity*
- Shirley Chikukwa (Columbia University) *Re-Constituting Home in the Diaspora: Mbira Music and Zimbabwean Identity in New York City*
- Dr. Ruth Opara (Syracuse University) *Music and the African Girl Child: Persistence and Resistance in the Igbo, Nigerian Pot Drum Music*
- Dr. Marceline Saibou (Bowdoin College) *Neutralizing Stigma: Gender, Disability, and Power in Religious Popular Music in Togo*
- Chair: Laina Dawes
- 4:00 PM *Performance*
- Dr. Ama Oforiwaa Aduonum (Illinois State University) “*Walking with My Ancestors: In Search for Our Great Mothers’ Gardens*” (introduced by Shirley Chikukwa)
- 5:00 PM *Closing Remarks*
- Dr. Aaron Fox (Director for the Center of Ethnomusicology, Columbia University)

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## *Symposium Presenter Biographies*



**Dr. Jean Kidula (Keynote Speaker)** (University of Georgia)

Jean Ngoya Kidula is Professor of Music (Ethnomusicology) at the University of Georgia in the USA. Her research has centered on ritual and religious music of Africa and its historic and present diaspora, centering on Christianity. Her award-winning book *Music in Kenyan Christianity: Logooli Religious Song* exemplifies her specific focus on Eastern Africa. Ngoya Kidula also interrogates traditional canons in music studies in Africa and the US.



**Onyeka Onwenu**

Onyeka Onwenu is a Nigerian singer, songwriter, actress, social activist, journalist and public administrator. She blends popular, folk, and gospel into what she calls development music. Onyeka Onwenu uses her art to address social issues of the time. Her recent book *My Father's Daughter*, has been described as “a riveting narration of Onyeka Onwenu’s enthralling journey through life. We are held captive as she takes us into her world -from the heart-warming affection of her father to living through the anguish of the Nigeria-Biafra war, from a remarkable mother’s love to family intrigues, from feminism to a career that has put her in the limelight for decades. Ma Onwenu is a graduate of Wellesley College, Wellesley Massachusetts and the New School for Social Research in New York.



**Dr. Ama Oforiwaa Aduonum** (Illinois State University)

Dr. Ama Oforiwaa Aduonum is a researcher, scholar, teacher, and performer of African and Black Atlantic music styles and traditions. Currently working on *Black People, Thank You!*, the third in the *Walking with My Ancestors* award-winning performance sequence, she is a professor of ethnomusicology at Illinois State University at Normal, IL. Aduonum’s methods blend creative expression, scholarship, and experimental performance; her teaching of undergraduate and graduate students is organic and original, often through call and response and creative activities. She employs decolonialist discursive frameworks to foreground experiential approaches and performative-scholarly discourse.

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**Dr. Stephanie Shonekan** (University of Missouri)

Stephanie Shonekan is Senior Associate Dean of the College of Arts & Science and Professor of Music at the University of Missouri. In 2003, she earned a PhD in Ethnomusicology and Folklore with a minor in African American Studies from Indiana University. From 2003-2011, she taught at Columbia College Chicago, and from 2011-2018, she was a faculty member at the University of Missouri in the Black Studies Department and the School of Music. From 2015-2018, she was chair of the Department of Black Studies at the University of Missouri. From 2018-2020, she was professor and chair of the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Shonekan's dual heritage combining West Africa with the West Indies allows her to straddle the black world comfortably. She has published articles on afrobeat, Fela Kuti, as well as American and Nigerian hip-hop. Her publications explore the nexus where identity, history, culture and music meet. Her books include *The Life of Camilla Williams, African American Classical Singer and Opera Diva* (2011), *Soul, Country, and the USA: Race and Identity in American Music Culture* (2015), *Black Lives Matter & Music* (2018), and *Black Resistance in the Americas* (2018).



**Dr. Marceline Saibou** (Bowdoin College)

Dr. Marceline Saibou is an Assistant Professor of music at Bowdoin College. Her research focuses on popular music in postcolonial Togo, in particular on articulations between music and state power. Her more recent work engages questions of music and disability in West Africa. She earned her doctorate in ethnomusicology from Columbia University.



**Dr. Krystal Klingenberg** (Smithsonian's National Museum of American History)

Dr. Krystal Klingenberg is a curator of music in the division of Cultural and Community Life at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Previously she held professorial positions at Swarthmore College and the University of Hartford. She received her PhD in May 2019 from the Music Department of Harvard University, with a secondary field in African and African American Studies. Her dissertation-turned-book project is on the creation and distribution of Ugandan mainstream popular music.

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**Dr. Ruth Opara** (Syracuse University)

Dr. Ruth Opara is an Assistant Professor of Music Histories and Cultures in the Department of Art and Music Histories at Syracuse University. Her research interests include African and African diasporic music traditions and the production of knowledge; women in music and the decolonial discourse; music and gender; African music and transnational encounters.



**Althea SullyCole** (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Columbia University)

Althea SullyCole is an ethnomusicologist and multi-instrumentalist from New York City. She has studied her primary instrument, the kora, a 21-stringed harp from the Mandé region of West Africa, for 10 years, 3 of which were spent in Dakar, Senegal. She is currently a doctoral candidate in Ethnomusicology at Columbia University. She is also a Sylvan C. and Pam Coleman Memorial Fellow in the Musical Instrument Department at the MET, where she is conducting an interdisciplinary study of the MET's collection of musical instruments from the Mandé region of West Africa. She is particularly interested in how a detailed, comparative study of these instruments might help address questions regarding cultural belonging and identity formation both within the Mandé context and the larger African diaspora.



**Shirley (Ratidzai) Chikukwa** (Columbia University)

Shirley (Ratidzai) Chikukwa is a Zimbabwean-born ethnomusicologist and a third-year PhD student at Columbia University. Shirley's research interests include worship practices in Zimbabwe Pentecostal churches, Zimbabwean choral music traditions, the development of Zimbabwean hymn traditions, and contemporary Christian musical repertoires in Pentecostal Zimbabwean churches. She currently serves as a Core Curriculum instructor at Columbia University, teaching Music Humanities. Shirley received her Bachelor of Arts in Music History and Theory from California State University, Fullerton.

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**Amarachi Attamah** (Syracuse University)

Amarachi Attamah is a Graduate student in the Department of Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Preservation at Syracuse University, New York State. She is a Chant Performer, Poet, Broadcaster, and a Mother-Tongue Advocate. Her core interests are indigenous language sustainability, culture curation, and intangible heritage preservation. She has performed in Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, the United Kingdom (where she recently completed a four-month performance fellowship with the British Royal National Theatre), and the USA.



**Laina Dawes** (Columbia University)

Laina Dawes is an ethnomusicologist and the author of *What Are You Doing Here? A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* (Bazillion Points, 2012). She is also a music and cultural critic whose writing can be found in print and online magazines, such as *Hazlitt*, *Bitch*, *SPIN*, *Cuepoint*, *Wondering Sound*, *Flavorwire*, *Refinery29*, *MTV Iggy*, *MySpace*, *The Wire UK*, *NPR*, *Toronto Star* and *Exclaim! Canada*.



**Lauren Bernard** (Columbia University)

Lauren Bernard is a PhD student in Historical Musicology at Columbia University. Her current research interests include the perception of race in timbre and sound, musical constructions of alterity and identity, and Afrofuturism.

*Symposium Abstracts (in order of appearance)*



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**Dr. Jean Kidula** (University of Georgia),  
*(Re) Presenting African Women in Music:  
Conventions and Paradoxes*

African women's presence and involvement in public music production, education and consumption is ubiquitous. However, there is little recognition of women's participation in the music academy at large through instruments used by governments and other institutions to celebrate what are considered consequential achievements in their respective societies. On the other hand, there is an abundance of (re)presentations of African women in popular music that are little analyzed for their presentations, messages, stereotypes and critiques of women. Drawing on examples about African women music educators and from portrayals of females in the popular music world, I hope to stimulate vibrant discussions, and subsequently generate literature and resources in other media on the accomplishments of women in music as well as the paradoxes presented in popular song about women.

**Althea SullyCole** (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Columbia University), *Hearing Jinns: Intersections of Gender and Materialism in the Met's Historical Collection of Mandé Harps*

Inquiries into the origins of musical instruments from the Mandé region of West Africa—present-day Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and the Gambia—inevitably lead to jinns, or spirits. In one iteration of the origin story of the kora, for example, Jali Mady Wuleng is said to have run into a cave chasing after his betrothed—a jinn—and come out with a kora. As a result, the kora, like other Mandé instruments, both houses and channels a jinn that is gendered female. In this paper, I explore questions that arise in

the context of historical museum collections when viewed with a sensitivity for the female spirits that inhabit Mandé instruments. Drawing from a few examples from the nineteenth century in the Crosby Brown collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I demonstrate how acute analysis of the morphological elements of Mandé instruments not only reveal their roles as tools through which musicians wield nyama, or dangerous forces, but also how they contain within them certain spiritual agencies in their own right. Using Mandé cosmologies as a lens through which to examine these instruments, their display in museum collections, and their relationship to contemporary performance brings to the fore the oft-overlooked element of gender in conversations concerning the ethical convergences and differences between performance, ritual and museological practice with respect to African musical instruments.

**Dr. Krystal Klingenberg** (Smithsonian's National Museum of American History), *Daughtering in the Field: Research Deferred in a World Disrupted by Pandemic*

As a member of the contemporary African diaspora, "home" is always far away and near at hand simultaneously. Uganda has been one of my "homes" as long as I could remember, but never more so than when I conducted my doctoral research on popular music in its capital, Kampala, between 2015 and 2018. In the Spring of 2020, as I prepared for my first research visit, until after the completion of the dissertation, renewed concerns about the political situation in Uganda and its particular impact on musicians were squarely in my mind. The arrival of Covid-19 in the United States and later in Sub-Saharan Africa would force the cancellation of the trip, but also a

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reevaluation of my work in Uganda, and of the ethics of fieldwork overall. In this talk, I contemplate research in the Post-Covid moment on Ugandan Popular music and the ethics arising in doing field work at "home." How has the pandemic changed the way we might frame the fieldwork process and what does reciprocity and an ethics of care mean as we emerge from this global crisis?

**Dr. Stephanie Shonekan** (University of Missouri), *"Bridge over Troubled Water": How Africana Women Artists Build Bridges across the Atlantic*

When Aretha Franklin covered Paul Simon's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," we imagine the bridges in Aretha's life as both personal and collective, about love and activism. With Aretha's performance as a springboard, this presentation will consider two formidable musical bridge-building efforts that stretched across the Black world – Miriam Makeba's appearance at FESTAC 77 in Lagos Nigeria and Beyonce Knowles' "Black is King" visual album released in 2020. Separated by over four decades and situated in different moments of black struggle, Makeba and Knowles attempted to build a bridge across the troubled waters by serving as a critical locus for diverse and collective expressions of what it means to be black in an Africana/Black world setting. This presentation will consider the historical context for Makeba and Knowles, and will examine their performative and political strategies towards making an impact in a world where Black lives have struggled to matter.

**Shirley (Ratidzai) Chikukwa** (Columbia University), *Re-Constituting Home in the Diaspora: Mbira Music and Zimbabwean Identity in New York City*

*What does it mean to be Zimbabwean?*  
Faced with a multiplicity of identities in New York City, I was drawn to *mbira* as a cultural symbol which could fortify my image of being Zimbabwean. The significance of *mbira* music to the conception of Zimbabwean identity within the American academy cannot be overstated. Further investigations into the concept of identification as defined by Stuart Hall, have brought forward questions of representation: why did I identify the *mbira* as a significant marker of Zimbabwean-ness? Where was this idea born? Taking into account the political, social, and historical significance of *mbira* and *mbira* music, this paper explores the importance of music as a representative symbol and its use as a marker of difference within Zimbabwean postcolonial discourse and how these assertions are influenced by *mbira's* circulation within New York City. Beyond that, his project utilizes *mbira* music as a reference point to critique the uses of so-called unique cultural practices to represent, signify, stabilize and assert specific identities. This paper traces the evolution of this question of Zimbabwean-ness and how it responds when confronted with American conceptions of race, blackness, Africanity as determined in the global north, the Afro-diasporic community, migration, and gender.

**Dr. Ruth Opara** (Syracuse University), *Music and the African Girl Child: Persistence and Resistance in the Igbo, Nigerian Pot Drum Music*

Growing up in Southeastern Nigeria, music and dance was an integral part of our girlhood. As most of our training and activities are geared towards molding us into better women, desirable maidens for marriage, and subsequently good wives, the girl's dances also serve these purposes. However, gender violence affects this

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process in music performance spaces. By examining the Avu Udu—a pot drum dance among Owerri, Igbo girls in southeastern Nigeria, this paper argues that girls utilize music to resist traditional gender norms and protect themselves from a society that ignores their psychological well-being and fails to protect them from gender-based violence. Due to the complexity of the girls’ performances and lived experiences, this paper further addresses a range of issues. The analyses of selected songs, dances, bodily gestures, and lived experiences of the girl dancers (between ages six to fifteen) show that the viability and sustainability of Avu Udu depend on the Igbo conventional archetypes of patriarchy. Narratives, history, and existing scholarship account for changes in Avu udu dance that are due to transformations in Nigeria’s social, political, and economic conditions. The roles music play in shaping the girl child and her response informs the intersections of music, gender, and resistance, in Igbo, Nigerian culture. This research places the African girl child at the center of the timely issues concerning social justice.

**Dr. Marceline Saibou** (Bowdoin College), *Neutralizing Stigma: Gender, Disability, and Power in Religious Popular Music in Togo*

In the West African country of Togo, professional pop musicians have long been subjected to social stigmatization. Female musicians, especially, have confronted derogatory stereotypes associating their musical aspirations and activities with lax sexual morals. The sub-genre of religious popular music, however, whose popularity rapidly grew alongside the proliferation of charismatic churches in Togo since the turn of the millennium, appears to have offered a space within which female musicians could publicly engage with music, while enjoying

some immunity from the widespread social stigmas. My paper examines this phenomenon in the context of the career of Madame Pasteur Abitor Makafui, a 20-year veteran in the world of Togolese religious pop, whose public perception has been further complicated by a visible physical disability – Madame Abitor is a wheelchair user. In Togo, perceptions of disability are often deeply prejudiced, with disability frequently viewed as the outcome of a curse. Yet, the socially disabling effects commonly resulting from such views have not prevented Madame Abitor from becoming locally the leading voice of the musical genre. Praised for her virtuousness and celebrated as “noble” and “blessed,” her success fits the popular script of the “heroic overcomer,” a script that invites questions of agency and empowerment, in this case of both women and people with disabilities. This paper engages with these questions by investigating the complex dynamics at the intersections of music, gender, disability, and religion, in which fundamentally disempowering images of people with disability appear to counterbalance some of the stigmas associated with female musicianship. By examining these dynamics, this research constitutes a first attempt to put music and gender studies in dialogue with the evolving field of African disability studies in a Togolese context.

**Dr. Ama Oforiwaa Aduonum** (Illinois State University), *Walking with My Ancestors: In Search for Our Great Mothers’ Gardens*

What stories did women imprisoned at former dungeons for enslaved African tell? What songs did they sing? What scars did they have on their bodies, minds, souls, DNA? If humans have specific needs, how did women satisfy their needs? How can a nuanced analysis of the former dungeons

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inform Black feminist /Africana womanist creativity and theorizing? In this award-winning and nationally recognized performance, *Walking with My Ancestors*: Cape Coast Castle, the scholar-artist portrays a mother's search for guidance from the spirits of her Ancestors in the dungeons for enslaved Africans. On that journey, she offers fresh perspectives on the experiences of the nameless and forgotten African women who languished in the dungeons of West Africa and suffered the agony of the middle passage. Through live drumming, singing, dancing, and acting the performer explores how today's racial and cultural problems connect with truths of our shared and painful pasts. *Walking with My Ancestors* is based on original research and takes the audience through a ritual journey leads to revelation, reconciliation, and rebirth. It provides platforms for deepened conversations about women's stories, identities, homeland and diaspora, and the "ghosts of slavery." Ultimately, *Walking with My Ancestors* is a human story about triumph over adversity, hope, resilience, emotional justice, and survival. This presentation contributes to inquiry and scholarship on Black feminist/Africana womanist thought and creativity.