

Rutgers Spring Symposium April 29, 2005: African Immigrant Literature: Negotiating Identities Post 9-11

GUEST SPEAKERS:

Paul Zeleza, a Zimbabwean short-story writer and novelist was born in Salisbury, now Harare, and educated at the University of Malawi (BA), the University of London (MA), and Dalhousie University, Canada (Ph.D.). He is currently a professor of history at Penn State. In 1994 he won the prestigious Noma Award for his book *A Modern Economic History of Africa* (1993). Zeleza's early short-story collection, *Night of Darkness* (1976), blurs the boundaries between history and literature. In 1992 he published his first novel, *Smouldering Charcoal*, about post-colonial Malawi, and then in 1994 a second collection of short stories entitled *The Joys of Exile*.

J. Nozipo Maraire was born in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1966 during the transition of the country from colonial Rhodesia under Britain to the independent country now called Zimbabwe. She lived and went to school in Canada, the United States, and Jamaica. Maraire returned to Zimbabwe before the war ended during the height of racism and fear. Despite their small numbers, the white inhabitants of Zimbabwe governed over the country and over the black majority. Life during this time period became extremely difficult for the blacks living in the country because they had to gain their freedom from Britain as well as from the white inhabitants of Zimbabwe. Maraire stayed in Zimbabwe until she was 18 when she moved to Boston to study at Harvard University. While growing up she had dreamed about studying medicine in America. However, her plan is to return to Zimbabwe as a doctor who can help improve Africa's health care and economy. Maraire's dream came true when she went to Columbia Medical School after receiving an undergraduate degree from Harvard and doing her residency in Neurosurgery at Yale University. Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter* despite modest intentions was an extremely successful novel & the New York Times Notable Book of the Year in 1996. Maraire used this novel as an opportunity to express her perspective on Africa's promising culture as a young Zimbabwean woman.

Manthia Diawara is the editor-in-chief of *Black Renaissance / Renaissance Noire*, a journal of arts, culture and politics, as well as an author and filmmaker whose areas of specialization include Africa, the United States, and the Black Diaspora in Europe. He has written more than fifty articles on Black film and culture. His published works include *We Won't Budge: An African Exile in the World* (2003), *In Search of Africa* (1998), *Black American Cinema* (1993), and *African Cinema: Politics and Culture* (1992). His film credits include *Bamako Sigi Kan* (2002), *Diaspora Conversation* (2000), *In Search of Africa* (1999), *Rough in Reverse* (1995), and *Sembene Ousmane: The Making of African Cinema* (1993, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Co-Director).

Akosua Busia was born into the Royal House of Wenchi in Ghana, West Africa, the youngest daughter of former Prime Minister of Ghana the Right Honorable Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia, and of Mrs. Naa Morkor Busia, fashion designer, teacher and qualified mid-wife. Busia is an accomplished actress with a genius for writing. Her debut novel, *The Seasons Of Beento Blackbird* (1996), is a captivating story about the complexities of life and relationships. The novel follows the journey of Solomon Wilberforce, a magnetic and brilliant man, on his international search for home, love, and a sense of belonging. The best seller was a Book of the Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club selection. Of her numerous roles in front of the camera, Busia is perhaps best known for her portrayal of "Nettie" opposite Whoopie Goldberg's "Celie", in *The Color Purple*,

directed by Steven Spielberg and in Europe her starring role as "Puppet" in the French film *Saxo*. Her most recent acting role is as "Patience" in the 2003 film *Tears of the Sun* starring Bruce Willis. A Women in Film International Award recipient, Busia credits her continuous blessings and joy in life, to the nurturing of her parents and Almighty God. Busia will read from her novel in progress *Amazing Grace*. The story of Grace, a brilliant, young girl from a small town in central Ghana whose family cannot afford an education for her, who dreams of traveling the world to become the Time magazine "Miss World, The Face of The Millennium." *Amazing Grace* is a story about dreams and the reality and perception of "The West" from an African perspective.

Meena Alexander was born in Allahabad and divided her childhood between India and the Sudan. From her cross-cultural perspective, Alexander writes in *Raw Silk* with moving intensity of post September 11 events as she evokes violence, civil strife, love, despair, and hard-won hope. She is the author of several books of poetry including *Illiterate Heart* which won the 2002 PEN Open Book Award. Her memoir, *Fault Lines*, was chosen as Best Book of 1993 by Publishers Weekly. She lives in New York City where she is a Distinguished Professor of English at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the University of New York.

Born in Tangier, Morocco **Anouar Majid** earned his Ph.D. from Syracuse University; his M.A. from City College, City University of New York; and his B.A. from the University of Fez, Morocco. He has become a leading figure in examining the place of religion and Islam in postcolonial theory and the culture of globalization. He also writes fiction and has published a novel, *Si Yussef*. Majid's book, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World*, published by Duke University Press in 2000, was recommended by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) as a book for understanding the context of 9/11. In 2004, Stanford University Press published Majid's *Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age*, a book that looks at half a millennium of history and cultural contact to trace the evolving roots of discord and extremism. In late 2003, Majid co-founded and started editing *Tingis*, the first Moroccan-American magazine of ideas and culture.

Ghanaian poet **Abena P. A. Busia** is an Associate Professor in the Departments of English and Women's Studies at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Born in Accra, Ghana, she spent the first years of her childhood at home, as well as in Holland and Mexico, before her family finally settled in Oxford, England, where she read for a B.A. in English Language and Literature at St. Anne's College, Oxford, in 1976, and a D.Phil in Social Anthropology (Race Relations) at St. Antony's College in 1984. She has published widely, lectured extensively, and taught workshops and master-classes on curriculum transformation, around the world, in the areas of gender, race, and multi-cultural studies. She is co-editor, with Stanlie James, of *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, and of *Beyond Survival: African Literature & the Search for New Life*. Proceedings of the African Literature Association Conference, with Kofi Anyidoho and Anne Adams. She is also coordinating, with Tuzyline Jita Allan, and Florence Howe of the Feminist Press, Women Writing Africa, a multi-volume continent wide publishing project of cultural reconstruction. Her poetry also has been published in various magazines and anthologies in West Africa, North America, and Europe and her volume of poems, *Testimonies of Exile* was published by Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, in March 1990.