

RSOC18 Religion and Culture: Africa.

Spring 2009

Kenna 214

Tuesday/Thursday 11:50-1:35PM

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3-4 or by appointment

Course Description:

Culture can be defined as a *society's way of life*. It comprises the totality of a people's heritage of ideas, language, habits, beliefs, customs social organizations, symbols, crafts and material artifacts. Culture is the result of a people's efforts to define themselves in the world and to navigate it from the *particularities of their social, political and historical contexts*. Underlying and informing a people's culture is a system of *values and norms* which shape and influence people's perception of themselves, their relationships with each other and with the rest of the world. Religious *beliefs and ideas* are often part of the system of values and ideas embedded in culture. At one level then, culture is a *vehicle or a carrier of religion*. At the same time, religious beliefs ideas and values beliefs themselves have profound impact on a peoples efforts to define themselves and to navigate the world. Religion thus becomes a *major force in history* since it is intertwined with people's *identity formation* and also becomes a resource for people as they navigate life in its *dynamism and complexity*.

Moreover, since people are engaged in *constant* navigation and *negotiation* of the world through history, culture is necessarily *dynamic* rather than *static*, often changing as people respond to the contingencies of *time and history*.

Against this background, this course explores the *complex and multifaceted* relationship between religion and culture, focusing on Africa *as a case study*. Several themes will be explored as follows:

- Recognizing the role of culture as "a carrier of religion," and using specific examples from *across the African continent*, we will examine various ways in which religions of Africa find *expression in the cultures* of Africa. We shall for example explore how African religion is expressed through African *oratures, rituals and artistic forms* particularly music and dance...
- Recognizing also that *religious ideas inform and shape the ways people define* themselves in the world and with specific examples, we will examine how religions and cultures of Africa are implicated in the *construction of identity at the individual and collective level*.
- Recognizing the tremendous diversity of religio- cultural belief systems in Africa, we will examine the implications of *this diversity for the construction of identity* in Africa and examine African responses to the reality of "*many- nesses of religions and cultures* in the continent and beyond.
- Recognizing that religion is a major force in history, and with specific examples, we shall examine the *religious factor in African history* as we explore the role of religion in *shaping the social political and cultural lives* of African peoples.

- Recognizing that culture is a *dynamic* rather than static phenomenon, we shall examine how African peoples have *responded to the phenomenon of change* and consequently how, if at all, African religio- *cultural beliefs and ideas* have changed, in what directions and why.

Specific Goals (Intended Learning Outcomes)

Students who successfully complete this course will:

1. Master an *adequate content regarding African religions* and their specific *expression* through aspects of African cultures.
2. Be able *critically to distinguish* between *culture and religion* while at the same time understanding *the connections* between the two.
3. Become familiar with the *critical issues* surrounding religion, culture and its *formation transmission and transformation* in Africa and its Diasporas.
4. Be able *critically to analyze* the role of religion in identity formation and transformation in specific *historical contexts* in Africa and its Diasporas.
5. Be able to identify and critically analyze the role of religion in *African social -political history*.
6. Become aware of the *cultural and religious diversity* that characterizes Africa, in order critically to analyze the implications of responses *to this diversity for Africa and beyond*.
7. Be able *critically to explore their own responses* to issues of diversity and difference among human beings and analyze *the role of religion and culture* in the formation and transformation of these responses.
8. XXXX Students own intended learning outcome

Class texts:

Jean Marc Ela: *African Cry* (Special reprint: Wipf and Stock 2005)

Kenyatta J. Facing Mount Kenya (Vintage Books: 1965)

Hood Robert: *Must God Remain Greek*: (special reprint: Wipf and Stock, 2005) (excerpts will be placed on e-reserve)

Mbiti John: *African Religions and Philosophy* (Heinemann 1965)

Mosha Sambuli: *The Heart Beat of Indigenous Africa* (Garland Publishing House)

Oduyoye Mercy: *Daughters of Anowa*. Orbis Books, 1995

Keeley and Browne: *Asking the Right Questions*: Prentice Hall (8th edition)

Excerpts from other pertinent texts will be distributed in class or placed on e-reserve or on angel

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance and active participation:** This will be monitored and will comprise 10% of your final grade.
2. **Adequate preparation** for the classes by a **critical reading** of the required materials. Evidence of preparation should be manifested in the students' ability to respond to questions, both oral and written. In-order to monitor this preparedness, students may at *random intervals during the session be asked to submit written responses* to specific questions based on the readings. This request could be made in class. (10%)
NB: Questions to Guide the readings will be distributed before hand... in class or Electronically .I will indicate in the *question sheet which* of the questions You would need to *submit in writing and when*.
3. **(Midterm Learning outcomes exercise: modalities TBA 10%**

4. **2 Response papers** minimum 3, maximum 5 double-spaced typewritten pages these should reveal your *critical engagement* with an issue or issues arising out of the readings or class discussions. This should be the opportunity to explore an issue or issues raised in or through the readings or class discussion that intrigues you by analytically commenting on or questioning the issue/s (see class schedule below for due dates) 10% each Total 20%
5. **Group (connecting the dots) project:** Students will work in groups on a pertinent project designed to help them connect what is studied and discussed in the classroom with the idea of religion and culture as a “*lived*” reality. (Suggested Projects TBA by end of week 1). Guidance as to what is expected here will be provided in class along with suggested resources for the project. (25%).
6. **One final in class exam** (Format TBA 25%)

Criteria for Grading:

Please note that your grade is cumulative and is based on how well you do on the various course requirements. Grades will be computed as follows:

“**A**” Will be given for **outstanding** work both in class and written assignments. An “A” student presents his or her work coherently, clearly and *critically*. His or her Written work is systematic, relevant and well articulated addressing themselves Adequately to the issues at stake

“**B**” Will be given for work that is of **high quality**, which adequately addresses Itself to **the issues and** is relatively well, articulated.

“**C**”. Will be given for work which barely **meets the minimal requirements** of the Course.

“**D**”. Poorly presented work; **barely relevant**, incoherent and ill articulated.

F. Irrelevant, incoherent work that dose not meet the requirements of the course at all.

NB: A total of 100 points are possible for the course as a whole. A **final letter grade** will be assigned according to the following percentile scale:

90%-100%	A
80%-89%	B
70%-79%	C
60%-69%	D
Below 69%	F

NB: The **bottom 2** numbers within each grade category respectively corresponds to **plus or minus grade designations**: e.g. 80%-82% =B, 88%-89%= B+ etc

Policy on Plagiarism and academic integrity :

Students in this course are reminded that **plagiarism**, i.e. the use of other people’s ideas words and work without properly acknowledging them is a **serious offence** and stands to be penalized. If proven, charges of plagiarism could result in **an automatic F**. Consequently, students are encouraged to develop a strong sense of the need for *academic honesty* at all times, a fact that is self-rewarding both in the short and long run.

Policy on Attendance:

Class attendance is **mandatory** except for emergencies, which should be explained to me preferably in writing and if possible before hand and with appropriate documentation . Only those students with *excused absences* will be allowed to do make up assignments. Please note that frequent absences (more than 2) will invite a lowering of your grade by at least one letter grade . 4 or more absences will invite an F for the class.

If you need accommodation due to special circumstances (eg Sports events for those who are athletes) please request accommodation through the office of student advising and submit your paper work requesting such accommodation to me by 1st day of class in week 2.

Class Procedures:

The course will be presented through a *combination of lectures and discussion* in order to achieve that stated goals: *Audiovisual material* where possible and applicable will also be used. Other learning activities, *including group discussions/projects designed to meet the needs of the class as these become apparent will be used.* Students are *encouraged to cultivate an inquiring mind, bold enough* to raise **appropriate** questions for discussion. However, this should be done with a spirit of **sensitivity and respect** for all involved in the learning situation. To this end, students are encouraged to cultivate a **spirit of collegiality and accountability to the whole class at all times to ensure success of the class. Students' initiative** in reading *around and beyond the assigned readings*, sharing information pertinent to the course, and a general sense of *responsibility for the success of the class over and above the minimum requirements of the class is highly encouraged and is self-rewarding.* Active participation and involvement in the class is also specifically rewarded in the final grade. See grading criteria above.

Specific guidelines fro group projects will be distributed along with topics on 2nd April.

Collegiality :Please Note: In the interest of *collegiality and respect to all in this learning community*, All should refrain from disruptive behavior. This includes but is not limited tardiness in arrival or abrupt premature departures from class. It also include to leaving cell phones on, using laptops and other electronic devises in a distracting manner (distracting yourself and those around you) , For this reason, electronic devises including laptops are not allowed . You any however use the latter legitimately particularly during group presentations.

Policy on Food: Please note also: That since this class happens during lunch hour, it may be wise for you to budget for some time for your **snack before class**. Eating **will not be permitted during class** (Water and juices OK)

Keeping connected:.....

Since this is a large class and very new subject matter for many of you, it is recommended that at least twice during the quarter, you touch base with me during office hours. This quarter the office hours will be **Tuesdays 3-4PM** . You can also make an appointment(individually or as a group .. perhaps to brainstorm regarding group work etc)... The goal here is to keep connected and to ensure that questions and issues related to the class that you may have along the way are *addressed in a timely manner*. Plan for such an office hour session (15minutes per session) at least once before week 6... Periodically , I will let you know when I would be available for "Extra Office hours " *beyond the scheduled Tuesday one.....*

Connecting the dots....

As indicated in the course goals, a major objective of the course beyond introducing the students to African religions and cultures (a complete goal itself) is to facilitate and nurture

the students' capacity to *make connections* between in-class discussions and text book information with the world beyond the classroom. You are encouraged, therefore, to try and make such connections and even to find ways of sharing the connections you make. While scheduled opportunities for such connection of dots are available through the response papers and the group project, you are not limited to these scheduled venues and are encouraged to find creative ways of "applying" insights gained in and through the class throughout the quarter.

There may be opportunities through public lectures that are pertinent and or offer pertinent insights into matters of interest to our class determined as we are to understand the interface between Religion, culture and society in Africa. . One such pertinent event is Professor Abdulahhi An'Naim's Lecture on 22nd April (7pm) on Islam the State and Human Rights (He teaches at Emory but is from the Sudan where the issue of the state, Islam and human rights is major one) . A second one is the Panel on Uwem Akpan's Book: *Say You are One of Them* (*Spring quarter campus wide reading: panel at Noon on 15th April*). Please take full advantage of such opportunities to maximize your learning in and through this class. If you attend any of the pertinent events, submitting a reflective/analytical statement (*not more than 2 pages, single space*) indicating the connection with the class will earn you points at my discretion towards the participation grade (see above)

Make the most out of these opportunities as you navigate your way from "echo to voice" regarding the subject of *religion, culture and society in Africa and beyond*.

Schedule of Classes: These could Change to reflect any changes in class demographics or other unpredictables....

Week 1: Introductory Background

March 31st

- a) *Introducing the course*
- b) Defining key terms : i) Critical Thinking an Overview ii) Introducing Africa.
Lecture discussions: no readings
(Possible Video Excerpts from Basil Davidson : Africa, Voyage of Discovery:
(Caravans f Gold)

April 2nd (self introductory page due)

Defining Key terms continued:

- a) The "Idea of Africa" in historical context
- b) The idea of culture; c.) The idea of religion

Lecture/discussion:

Readings: Keeley: *Asking the Right Questions: Chapters 1&2*

Excerpts from Kurtis (*Mistaking Africa*)

Bratlinger: *Victorians and Africans : The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent*

Video Excerpts: Africa: Voyage of Discovery: (Caravans of Gold Continued)

Week 2: Mapping the African religio-cultural landscape:

April 7th *African Religion as a Belief Systems: An Introductory Overview*

Readings: Mbiti: Preface and Introduction

Mosha: Introduction and chapter 1: pages 7-15

Keeley Chapters 3&4

April 9th *African Cosmologies, African Oratures and religio-cultural Imagination*

Readings: Mbiti Chapter 3 & 9; Oduyoye: Chapters 1&2

Kenyatta Chapter :Kenya Chapter 1

Video Excerpts: From Mazrui: *The Africans* :

Week 3: Key Aspects of African Beliefs: (2 examples)

- April 14th *God-talk in Afro- cultures*
 Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 4-8;
 Video Excerpts: Mami Water
- April 16th : *African God- talk (Continued)*
 Readings: Hood: Chapter 5, Mbiti chapter 15 Kenyatta chapter 10 On E-reserve)
Group 1: On African Cosmologies and Afro-God talk and implications for society
1st Response paper due.

Week 4: Transmitting Culture: the Phenomenon of “Ipvunda”

- April 21st : The “Ipvunda” process: Its means and ends:
 Readings: Mosha: Chapters 1 pp 15-30, Chapters 2&3; Mbiti Chapter 10;
 Kenyatta 5; Keeley: Chapters 4&5
- April 23rd : Gender and Religio _cultural formation:
 Readings: Mosha Chapter 4; Oduyoye: Chapters, 3 &4; Kenyatta Chapter 5
Group 2: On the Ipvunda Process in Comparative /gendered perspective

Week 5: Religion, Ritual and Society in Africa: (2 Examples)

- April 28th : *Understanding African Rituals of Becoming:*
 Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 11, &12
 Mosha: (revisit) Chapter 2: pages 68-78
 Kenyatta: chapters 6&8
 Video on Rituals of Becoming
- April 30th *Religion ,Ritual, and/as Ethical Practice:*
 Readings: Mbiti Chapters 16, 17
Group 3: The Rituals Dimensions of African Religion as promise and Challenge in African

Week 6 African Religion and Cross- Cultural Encounter:

- May 5th : Colonialism Missionary Ambiguity and African Reponses.
 a) The Ambiguity of Mission: Readings: Jean Marc Ela: Chapter 2, Hood: Introduction (On e-reserve).
 b) *African religions Navigating the Colonial Impact: The case of Independent Churches:*
 Readings Marc Ela chapter 4, Hood Chapter 1 (On E-reserve)
 Video: Excerpts: Zulu Zion
- May 7th : *Religion, Culture and the Search for Political Freedoms:*
 Case study: Afro-theologies of Liberation South Africa and African Diaspora Readings: Hood Chapter 3 (On E-reserve)
 Marc Ela Chapter 3
Group 4: On the social political role of Black Theologies of Liberation (Midterm) Learning outcomes exercise Due

Week 7: Religion and Quest for Ubuntu (Some-bodiness) in Africa and its Diasporas

- May 12th : *Quest of Ubuntu : The Role of Music and dance*
 Readings: excerpts from Kenyatti: Thunder From the Mountains (on E-reserve
 Excerpts from Cone: The Spirituals and The Blues: (on E-reserve)
 Revisit: Mosha (chapter2) on role of Music and dance in Ipvunda.

Group 5: On music and dance in Pan African history (*possible resources Video Amandla, Sarafina*)

May 14th : *Women and their Quest for Ubuntu and Gender Justice*
Oduyoye Chapters 4, 5, & 7, 8, &9
Keeley Chapter 8&9
(Possible video Resource: To Be a Woman)

Week 8: Religion and African's Quest for Belonging :

May 19th : *Inculturation and the Quest for Authenticity*
Readings: Marc Ela: chapters 7&, preface and chapter 1 (In That Order)
Hood Chapter 6 (On E- reserve); Keeley Chapters 10&11
Video Excerpts: Misa Luba (or equivalent)

Second Response paper due

May 21st *Quest for Belonging Concluded :*
Authenticity, Alienation and Religio- cultural Hybridity in Africa and its
Readings: Marc Ela: Chapters 8, Hood: Chapter 2: (Caribbean Indigenous Religions)
Group 6: Religion and the Navigation of Hyphenated identity in
Africa and Its Diaspora ; (*Possible Video Resource: Lost Boys of Sudan*)

Week 9: Rekindling hope , Transforming Culture, Towards an African Renaissance :

May 26th Towards an African Renaissance
Reading: Mosha Chapter 5, Marc Ela chapters 5&6 Oduyoye, Chapters 10,
Group 7: On African Renaissance :navigating the intersection of
religions, modernity and tradition

May 29: *Transforming culture, Making the world home....*

Readings :Oduyoye chapter 10

Video Excerpts: Ali Mazrui: Legacy of lifestyles

Week 10:Conclusions and Course synthesis

June 2nd:

- a) Any *unfinished business* from week 9
- b) Reviews, Revisions and preps for final exam

June 4th: Last Day of class

- a) Students questions; b) Course wrap up