

RSOC18 Religion and Culture: Africa.

Winter 2009

O'Connor 215

Tuesday/Thursday 11:50-1:35PM

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Office Hours :Tuesdays 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 norms 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 themselves have a profound impact on a people's efforts to define themselves and to navigate the world. Religion therefore 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 a *constant* navigation and *negotiation* of the world throughout 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 and its impact on society, 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*. (We shall consider for example the role of *transformative rituals of passage in the construction of gendered identity*)

- 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.* (Here we will examine the various ways Africa has responded to the cross-cultural encounter particularly through 19th century Missionary activities
- 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. (Eg Religion in the quest for political liberation in South Africa)
- 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. (eg *theme of hybridity and Creolization of African religions/cultures particularly in the African diaspora will be examined as an example*)

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 society including the question of *identity formation and transformation* in Africa and its Diasporas.
4. Be able *critically to analyze* the role of religion in navigation of social transformation in specific *historical contexts* in Africa and its Diasporas.
5. Be able to identify and critically analyze from a role of religion in *African social - political history* and the quest for justice including gender justice.
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)

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

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

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance and active participation:** This will be monitored and will comprise 5% of your final grade.

NB Since this is a small class, everybody's attendance and active participation will be expected and will be crucial for the progress of the class. Be prepared to participate and take initiative as if the is a "seminar" which *defacto* seems to be the case ; Let turn this demographic reality into an asset.

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, or submit. I will also routinely expect ~~submit~~ a synthesized summary of the assigned readings accompanied with "a conversation starter "comment /question regarding the theme and readings for each session. Be prepared to be called upon to share your analytical thoughts always (10%) (Use of Index cards here)

NB: Questions to Guide the readings will be distributed before hand...

3. **"Customized "Research and Presentation** (Religion and Society in a named African Country) 15% : Details TBA

Rationale: One of the enduring problems with regards to the study of Africa is the rather Generic and generalized, often skewed ideas of Africa. Such skewed ideas and generalizations have had far reaching consequences for the continent and its people in history. . The "Customized" study of Africa is designed to help you gain a more nuanced understanding of the continent as you negotiate your path , way from "echo to voice in regards to continent and the role of religion and culture within it.

4. Learning outcomes Statement (5%) (due week 6) Modalities TBA
5. **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%

6. **Group 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. (20%) Who is who in groups will be confirmed 8th January
7. **One final exam** (Format TBA 25%)

Please note that your grade is cumulative that the above requirements are multiplicative and complementary to one another as you negotiate success in this class. Success in the class depends on how well you do on all the above in a cumulative rather than selective manner.

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 and top 2 numbers within each grade category corresponds to **plus or minus grade designations respectively**: 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. 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.

Given the seminar size of this class, each persons attendance and participation becomes particularly vital.

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 for group projects will be distributed along with the Topics on

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 .

February (*African History Month*) and March (*Women's History Month*) will provide ample opportunity for such connection of dots through events and discussions surrounding these topics both of which are directly pertinent for our class. One such Pertinent event is Professor Cahill's Lecture due on 15th January. Please take full advantage of these 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)

The "customized" research and presentation exercise described above are also part of the various paths to an "applied" study of religion in Africa. Make the most out of these opportunities as you navigate your way from "echo to voice" regarding the subject of religion and, culture and society in Africa

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

Week 1: Introductory Background

January 6th

- a) Introducing the course
 - b) Defining key terms : i) Critical Thinking an Overview
 - c) Introducing the African continent
- Lecture discussions: no readings
(Possible Video Excerpts from Basil Davidson : Africa, Voyage of Discovery)

January 8th (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) Distributed in clas.

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

Viewing: Excerpts: Africa: Voyage of Discovery: (Caravans of Gold)

Week 2: Mapping the African religio-cultural landscape:

January 13th

- a) African Religion as Belief Systems: An Introductory Overview

Readings: Mbiti: Preface and Introduction

Mosha: Introduction and chapter 1: pages 7-15

Keeley Chapters 3&4

January 15th African Cosmologies: African Oratures and religio-cultural Imagination

Readings: Mbiti Chapter 3 & 9

Oduyoye: Chapter 1&2

(Highly recommended connecting the dots possibility: Lecture by Lisa

Cahill: A Feminist Ethicist: 7:30PM Ray Mayer Theater

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

- January 20th God-talk in Afro- cultures
Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 4-8
Pertinent Video Excerpts :TBA)
- January 22nd: African God- talk (Continued)
Readings: Hood: Chapter 5&7 (On E-reserve)
Video Excerpts: From Ali Mazrui's: The Africans
1st Response paper due

Group 1: On Gendered perspectives on African Cosmologies and Afro-God talk

Week 4: Transmitting Culture: the Phenomenon of "Ipvunda"

- January 27th
The "Ipvunda" process: Its means and ends:
Readings: Mosha: Chapters 1 pp 15-30, Chapters 2&3
Mbiti Chapter 10
- January 29th
Gender and Religio _cultural formation:
Readings: Mosha Chapter 4
Oduyoye: Chapters, 5&6

Group 2: On the Ipvunda Process in Comparative /gendered perspective

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

- February 3rd:** Understanding African Rituals of Becoming:
Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 11, &12
Mosha: (revisit) Chapter 2: pages 68-78
Video on Rituals of Becoming
Keeley Chapter 5
- February 5th** Ritual, and Ethical Practice:
Readings: Mbiti Chapters 15, 16, 17
Video Excerpts: "Mami Water"

Group 3: The Ritual Dimensions of African Religion as promise and Challenge in Africa.

Keeley Chapter 7

Week 6 African Religion and Cross- Cultural Encounter:

- February 10th :**
- a) Colonialism and Missionary Ambiguity :
Readings: Jean Marc Ela: Chapter 2, 4
Hood: Introduction
 - b) African religions Navigating the Colonial Impact: The case of
Independent Churches:
Readings Marc Ela chapter 4

Hood Chapter 1

Video: Excerpts: Zulu Zion

February 12th: 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
Learning outcomes statement due

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

17th February: The Role of Music and dance)

Group 5: On music and dance in the Pan African history

Readings: excerpts from Kenyatti: Thunder From the Mountains (on E-reserve)

Excerpts from Cone: The Spirituals and The Blues: (on E-reserve)

Revisit: Mosha On Role of Music and dance

Possible Video Resource: Amandla

19th February

Women and their Quest for Ubuntu and Gender Justice

Justice: Oduyoye Chapters 4, 5, & 7, 8, &9

(Possible video Resource: To Be a Woman)

Keeley Chapter 8

Week 8: Religion and Quest For Belonging

24th February :

Inculturation and the Quest for Authentic African Religion

Readings: Marc Ela: chapters 7, preface and chapter 1 (In that order)

Hood Chapter 6 (On E- reserve)

Video Excerpts: Misa Luba

Second Response paper due

26th February Quest for Belonging Concluded

Authenticity, Alienation and Religio- cultural Hybridity in Africa and its Diaspora :

Readings: Marc Ela: Chapters 8&9

Hood: Chapter 2: (Caribbean Indigenous Religions)

Group 6: Religion and the Navigation of Hyphenated identity in Africa and Its Diaspora (all as Resource persons)

Possible Video Resource: Lost Boys of Sudan

Week 9: Religion and the Transformation of Society in Africa: Navigating the Intersection Of modernity and Tradition

3rd and 5th March

Reading: Mosha Chapter 5, Oduyoye, Chapters 10,

Marc Ela: chapters 4, & 9.

In class presentations of religion and society in named African Countries: (All as resource persons)

Week 10:

10th and 12th March :

- a) Any Unfinished Business from week 9
- a) Reviews and Revisions and preps for final exam
- b) Course wrap up.

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