

RSOC18 Religion and Culture: Africa.

Winter 2008

Bannan 334

(Amended to re-align Keeley Readings (15th January 08)

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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 *particularity 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 often have profound impact on a people's 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- ness*’ 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. Demonstrate masterly of 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 the question of *identity formation 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)

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 2004

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

Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance:** This will be monitored and will comprise 5% 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. (10%)
NB: Questions to Guide the Readings will be distributed before hand...
3. **Active participation** in class discussion and any *in class assignments* including group work as well as participation in *pertinent events beyond scheduled class*. For these purposes, the class will be divided into working groups in and through which common tasks can be accomplished (15%)
5 % here will go towards your participation in and analytical response to Pertinent events beyond our class in the spirit of *connecting the dots...* see below
4. **2 Response papers** minimum 3 pages maximum 5 double- spaced typewritten pages and 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 discussions that intrigues you by analytically commenting on or questioning the issues (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 exam** (Format TBA 25%)

Criteria for Grading:

Please note that your **grade is cumulative** and is based on how well you do on all the various course requirements as detailed above. 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 adequately 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 does 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 according to university policy and procedures on Academic integrity. 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.

Class Procedures:

The course will be presented through a **combination of lectures and discussion** in order to achieve the 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.

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 projects*, 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. Please take full advantage of these opportunities. If you attend any of the events, (or other pertinent ones) submitting a reflective statement (not more than 3 double spaced pages) indicating the analytical connections you see between what you learn in and through the events and our class themes and insights will earn you points towards the participation grade (see above)

Schedule of Classes: This could change to reflect any changes in class demographics or other unpredictable's....

Week 1: Introductory Background

January 8th:

- a) Introducing the course
- b) Defining key terms : i) Critical Thinking :an Overview ii) The idea of Religion
Lecture/ discussions: no readings

January 10th (self introductory page due)

Defining Key terms continued:

- a) The Idea of culture
- b) The "Idea of Africa"

Lecture/discussion:

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

Viewing: Video Excerpts: Africa: Voyage of Discovery series: Part 3: Caravans of Gold)

Week 2: Mapping the African religio-cultural landscape:

January 15th:

a) African Belief Systems: An Introductory Overview

Readings: Mbiti: Preface and Introduction, &19

Mosha: Introduction and chapter 1: pages 7-15

Keeley: Chapter 3

January 17th:

African Cosmologies, African Oratures and Religio-cultural Imagination

Readings: Mbiti Chapter 3 & 9

Oduyoye: Chapter 1&2

Keeley Chapter 4

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

January 22nd God-talk in Afro- cultures

Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 4-8

Keeley Chapter 5

January 24th April: African God- talk (Continued)

Readings: Hood: Chapter 5&7 (On E-reserve)

Video Excerpts: From Ali Mazrui's: The Africans

Keeley Chapter 6

1st Response paper due

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

January 29th

The "Ipvunda" process: Its means and ends:

Readings: Mosha: Chapters 1 pp 15-30, Chapters 2&3

Mbiti Chapter 10

January 31st

Gender and Religio_ cultural formation:

Readings: Mosha Chapter 4

Oduyoye: Chapters, 3 &4

Keeley Chapter 7

Group 1: On the Ipvunda Process in Comparative /gendered perspective

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

February 5th: Understanding African Rituals of Becoming:

Readings: Mbiti: Chapters 11, &12

Mosha: (revisit) Chapter 2: pages 68-78

Video on Rituals of Becoming

February 7th Ritual and Ethical Practice:

Readings: Mbiti Chapters 15, 16, 17

Keeley chapter 8

Video Excerpts: "Mami Water"

Group 2: African Rituals as Challenge and Promise in the quest for Ubuntu

Week 6 African Religion and Cross- Cultural Encounter:

February 12th: Colonialism and its impact: Ambiguity of Mission

Readings: Jean Marc Ela: Chapter 2

Hood: Introduction (On E-reserve)

Keeley Chapters 9

Video Excerpts: Africa: Voyage of Discovery: This Magnificent African Cake/the Bible and the Gun

February 14th: 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

Group 3: Colonialism and African Religio-cultural responses:

Week 7: Religion, Culture and the Search for Political Freedoms

February 19th: Religion and the struggle against Racism: case study Apartheid in South Africa

Readings: Hood Chapter 3 (on E-reserve)

Marc Ela Chapters 3 & 5

Video Excerpts: Sarafina

Keeley: Chapter 10

February 21st: Religion and Politics of Protest in Africa and Its Diaspora: The role of Music and Dance;

Readings: Revisit Masha: Pages 60-64

Excerpts from Kenyatti: Thunder from the Mountains: On E-reserve

Excerpts from James Cone: the Spirituals and the Blues (Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2 (on E-reserve)

Group 4: Religion and African History: The role of Music and Dance In Africa and Its Diasporas:

Week 8: Religion and the Enduring Quest for Ubuntu and Justice

February 26th

Religion and Women's Quest for Ubuntu and gender-Justice

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

Possible video resource: "To be a Woman"

Group 5 Presenting: Religion and African Women's Quest for Ubuntu

February 28th: Religion and the Quest for Belonging

Inculturation, Liberation and the Quest for an Authentic African Religious Identity:

Readings: Marc Ela: chapter 7, Foreword and chapter 1 (*in that order*)

Hood Chapter 6 (On E- reserve)

Video Excerpts: Misa Luba
Keeley Chapter 11
Second Response paper due

Week 9: Quest for Belonging Concluded

March 4th

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

Readings: Marc Ela: Chapters 8&9

Hood: Chapter 2: (Caribbean Indigenous Religions) on e_reserve

Keeley **Chapters 12**

**Group 6: Religion and the Navigation of Hyphenated identity in Africa and its
Diaspora**

March 6th : Transforming Culture: Opportunities and Enduring Challenges in the 21st
Century :

The Enduring Challenges of Modernity and Pluralism

Reading: Mosha Chapter 5, Oduyoye, Chapters 10,

Marc Ela: chapters 5, & 9.

**Group 7: Navigating religion ,culture and tradition in the context of
diversity and modernity**

Week 10: Conclusions and Synthesis

March 12th :

- a) Any Unfinished Business from week 9
b) Reviews and Revisions
Keeley Chapters 13 &14

March 14th

1. Last day of Class ;Students' Questions and Concerns
2. Course Wrap Up

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