

## RSOC46: AFRICAN RELIGION AND CULTURE

Winter 2016 : Kenna , 212  
2-3:40PM

January 5<sup>th</sup>

**Pre-requisite: Introductory Level Course (i.e SCTR 1-19, RSOC1-19)**

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**Office Hours: Mondays 2-3 or by Appointment**

**NB. Keeping Connected. Please Schedule Office hours at least once before end of week 6.**

### **Description of course:**

This course explores **African Indigenous Religion (s)** as a coherent belief system. Applying a *variety of methodologies* including but not limited to phenomenological , anthropological and gendered approaches to the study of religion, the course explores the *African worldview* .This involves analyzing key African ideas about the universe, (i.e. cosmology) , concepts of God, as well as notions of human nature and human destiny. It also explores key aspects/dimensions of religious phenomena such as **ritual and notions of after life** as these are exemplified and expressed in **selected African Communities** (e.g the Igbo of Nigeria, The Chagga of Tanzania ) The course also examines the **rich religio-cultural diversity** on the African continent while at the same time *mapping the unity in diversity* also manifest in this context. It will also examine, in a preliminary way the *historical interaction* between the indigenous cultures and religions of Africa with other religions and cultures particularly Christianity in order to appreciate the *African response to this interaction and in a preliminary and introductory manner and critically examine* the impact of this interaction on the contemporary social political context in which Africans live. A central goal of the class is the intention to test the view *that the ethical dimension of African Indigenous religions as this is embedded in other dimensions of the African belief system is of enduring and urgent relevance for Africa and beyond.*

### **Course Objectives:/Intended Learning Outcomes:**

**(A) Objectives of the Course related to the Core Curriculum:**

Using the Indigenous *African Belief System as a case study*, students who successfully take this course will:

1. Be able *critically to analyze complex and diverse religious phenomena* and their various dimensions including *ritual and ethical dimensions* and other cultural expressions of African religious/ Belief system,
2. Be able to analyze *in an integrated and comparative manner* different disciplinary approaches to a *coherent set of Religious Phenomena*. (e.g in our case integrate gendered approaches, anthropological/ethnographic approaches as well as *literary analysis* in our study of African religions )
3. Be able to *clarify and express beliefs* (their own and that of others) in light of their critical inquiry into the *religious dimensions of human existence*.

### **Objectives Specific to the Course: As an outcome of this course , Students will**

1. **Demonstrate masterly of an adequate content** on Indigenous African Belief system as this finds expression in the cultures of *selected African* communities.(including but not limited to the Igbo , and Chagga depicted in detail in key assigned texts)

2. **Demonstrate a basic understanding of key features** of the African religions including *inter alia, concepts of God, African cosmologies, notions of human nature and human destiny* in order critically to analyze these features.
3. Show their understanding of the **critical issues** surrounding the question of *hermeneutics (interpretation)* of African religion and culture.
4. Show a basic understanding of the *development and impact* of African religion (s) in social political and historical contexts.
5. Be able critically *and creatively howbeit in a preliminary manner to analyze the problem of power of discourse and the question this raises for the issues of diversity and difference among human beings.*
6. Demonstrate an analytical understanding of the *nature and relevance* of the *ethical dimension* of African Religions both in the past and contemporary contexts.

**Course Requirements :** ( i.e. Means of achieving learning outcomes)

1. **Regular Attendance and Active participation** in class discussions both in *structured* group work and voluntary suggestion of ideas or raising and answering pertinent questions. Students may be called upon either individually or in groups to lead discussion on specific subthemes or to act as discussants: 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 and in active participation in class. In-order to monitor this preparedness, students may at *random* but regular intervals during the quarter be asked to *submit written responses* to specific questions based on the readings. Prompts to guide readings will be posted **on Camino in files** / marked "**Prompts to Guide Readings**". Some of the readings will also be posted on Camino/Canvas and marked with the title of the article as it appears in the **syllabus**. For these reasons, be sure to **enroll on Camino/Canvas and begin to use it** immediately. Refer to our Course Camino page routinely for announcements, prompts and tips to guide readings etc. **Be sure to enroll for the class by end of day Tuesday week 1. (10% of final grade will be from your preparation )**
3. **2 Critical Response/reflection papers: Minimum 3 pages maximum 5 double spaced typewritten pages.** These should reveal your *critical engagement* with an issue or issues arising out of the *readings and their in class* discussion. This should be the opportunity to explore *an issue raised in or through the readings and their discussion that intrigues you* by analytically commenting on or questioning the issue as it emerges from the readings and other texts in the class. See class *schedule below for due dates: 10% each. Total 20%*
4. **One "Group" project:** Students will work in designated groups on a pertinent project designed to help them *collectively research, reflect and present* on key pertinent issues /themes studied in the class. Groups will be assigned on Thursday **week one** and topics assigned and group work modalities explained by Tuesday week 2 **week 2: 20%**
5. **Midterm:** To gauge mastery of content and understanding of key aspects of African by **week 6: 25% (Modalities TBA)**

6. **One Final paper** in the form of **critical analysis** of an assigned book in light of class themes and issues using **at least 2** of the approaches to the study of religion explored this quarter: **(20%) More guidelines for this project will be distributed and explained in week 7. The list of books for possible review is at the end of the syllabus.**

**Criteria for Grading:**

- A** Will be given for **outstanding** work both in class and written assignments. **An "A" Student** presents his or her work coherently, clearly and analytically. His or her written work is consistently analytical, systematic, relevant and well articulated, adequately addressing 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 works** 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**: eg 80%-82% =B, 88%-89%= B+ etc 90-92% A-

**Policy on Plagiarism and Academic Integrity :**

Students in this course are reminded that **plagiarism and academic dishonesty in any form is a serious issue and stands to be penalized.** Students should therefore be aware of the strong sanctions against plagiarism and academic dishonesty. For a full presentation of University policies concerning plagiarism, see:

<http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity>. If proven, charges of plagiarism could also result in **an automatic F for the course** . 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

(see also **Appendix one on SCU expectations regarding academic integrity and student Conduct Code**)

**Policy on Attendance:**

Class attendance is **mandatory** except for emergencies, which should be explained to me preferably *in advance* and *in writing*. Only those students with *excused /excusable absences* will be allowed to do make up assignments. Note that frequent (*more than 2*) **unexplained absences** will result in a reduction of your grade by a letter (ie B to C etc.) **More than 3**

**unexplained** absences invite an *"F"* for the whole course. Even when you have an excusable absence, it is your *responsibility to catch up with* what you missed during your absence.

*Disability Accommodation Policy:*

"To receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact *Disability Resources* located in Benson 216. The phone numbers is 408 554 4109. Please contact Disabilities office in good time, at any rate no later than **end Friday week 1** in order to ensure that you get the accommodations that you need in a timely and *meaningful manner*. See appendix 1 below for details current SCU accommodations policy as of December 2015

***Policy on Personal electronics, Cellphones etc. in Classroom***

*In the interest of collegiality and respect for class process ,space and time and member of this learning community , please make sure that laptops , tablets, smartphones pagers are turned doff and out of sight during class. Inappropriate use of these devices will lead to your being absent . Students with special needs in these regards should submit the required forms requesting such accommodation in a timely manner (No later than Friday week 1*

**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** 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 and its participants. Students' initiative** in keeping *tuned in by 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.*

**Connecting the dots/ Applying insights from Course readings and discussions in other contexts ...**

As indicated in the course goals, a major objective of the course a basic understanding of African Religions as a Belief system. The goal is also to nurture an understanding of the development and impact of African Religions in social and historical contexts particularly the implications of the ethical dimensions of African religions in the rather complex and challenging contexts in which Africans live . *Overall, a major part of the goal is to create a context in and through which students can explore their own analytical responses to the view that Africa's Religious , cultural and ethical stems are viable and of social political and ethical relevance today both in Africa and its beyond.* Students are expected analytically to connect the dots between the text book analysis of the African Belief systems and the lived realities in the diverse religio- cultural systems of our times. Opportunities for such connection include the scheduled *response/reflection papers*. They also include *group project and written responses to these presentations*. In addition, opportunities may provide themselves through co curricular programming at SCU in the winter Quarter. Students in this class are encouraged to take maximum advantage of these opportunities and to *tune in* to what is being said and discussed in these events or around campus, *"listening in with"* RSOC46 *"ears"*. Attendance of **pertinent events on campus** accompanied by a written **2-3 page statement** showing the *analytical connections* you make between the event and the class content, goals or themes will be considered for extra credit particularly if these connections

are specially creative and pertinent . *Consider such co-curricular involvement as a means to achieving the learning outcomes stated above as well as a means of achieving your own self defined learning outcomes.* Please note that *the extra credit will be added at my discretion* to the **lowest grade** that you will have at the end of the quarter as per the course requirements and will not exceed **5% of the total grade**. Please note that participation in these **campus events is extra** and **does not substitute scheduled class work**. For details of some of these campus events, see **Santa Clara University website**. Also check the electronic bill boards around campus for pertinent events .I will periodically draw your attention to pertinent events for these purposes.

**Class Schedule: Please note that this may change to accommodate shifts in class demographics and other contingencies**

**Week 1: Introductory Background :**

**January 5<sup>th</sup>**

- a. Introduction to the Course and its requirements.
- b. Introducing the African Continent.  
Lecture Discussions: No Readings  
Video. Basil Davidson: Africa, Voyage of Discovery: Caravans of Gold or equivalent  
(Self - Introductory Statements assigned)

**January 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Issues in the Hermeneutics of African Religions and African Responses**

- a) The Invention of Africa and the Impact of the Myth of the Dark Continent  
Readings: Bratlinger: Victorians and the Africans (PDF on Camino)
- b) African Responses to the Invention of Africa: Readings: Mbiti: Introduction and Chapter 2: (on Camino)  
Assignments of groups and initial consultation among members.  
**Self - Introductory statements due in class & on Camino**

**Video Excerpts from Basil Davidson Series : Africa Voyage of Discovery**

**Week 2 .Issues in The Study of African Religions:**

**January 12<sup>th</sup>**

- a) Issues of Definition: Correcting Errors and Constructing a Working Definition Of African Religions  
**Readings :** Idowu : African Religions :A Definition Chapter 1(Excerpts pdf on Camino )  
Magesa :Chapter One

**January 14<sup>th</sup>**

- a) Defining African Religions: Emic and Gendered perspectives:  
Readings:  
Moshia: Introduction and Chapter 1; & pages 7-20  
Ifi: Preface and introduction
- b)  
In class discussion: Africa: *Enduring issues of hermeneutics and Representation : All as Resource persons of Hollywood Africa*

**Week 3: Aspects of African Belief System: Mapping African Ethics through Understanding Its Mythical and Narrative Dimension**

**January 19<sup>th</sup>** Myth , African Cosmogonies and the Social –Moral Order

Readings: Magesa: Chapter 2 :Pages 35-46 ; Moshia Chapter 2: pages 35-68;

Ifi Chapter 1

(Oduyoye :2:PDF will be placed on Camino as a supplementary reading on myth

January 21<sup>st</sup> : Aspects of African Belief System (1): Divinity, Notions of God and (*African*)  
*Experience:*

Readings: Mbiti : Chapters 4,5,6;(on Camino)

Ifi Chapter 6

Group 1: On Myth, African Notions of God and a Gendered Human experience  
(see separate sheet for prompts)

1<sup>st</sup> Response paper due in my **Mailbox** and **simultaneously on Camino By Friday week 3**  
**4:30PM** in order to incorporate insights from all of week 3

**Week 4 : Aspects of African Belief System (2): Understanding African Notions of the Human Person**

January 26<sup>th</sup> : African notions of **Human Nature**: Ubuntu, Corporate Identity and the  
“relationship imperative “

Ubuntu and/As Corporate Identity :

Mbiti: Chapters 9 ,10

Ifi Chapter 3:

January 28<sup>th</sup>

Ubuntu as “Virtue” The Relationship Imperative, Reverence and Communality

Mosha Chapter 3&4, Magesa: pages 57-76

Achebe: (Achebe: Part 1: Chapters 1-6)

Group 2 : A gendered analysis of the African Notions of the Human Person

Week 5: Aspects of African Belief System: (3&4): Human Nature , Human destiny and the issue  
of theodicy :

February 2<sup>nd</sup> African Notions of Immortality and Afterlife

Readings: Mbiti Chapter 8, 14

Magesa: pages 46-57

Hinga: Article on African Notions of Afterlife: (**On Camino**)

February 4<sup>th</sup> The issue of Evil and Suffering: re-constructing African Theodicies

Readings : Mbiti Chapter 16 and 17; Magesa Chapter 5

(Achebe: Part one: Chapters7-9)

**Week 6: Concluding Discussion of Theodicy , Introducing the Ritual Dimension of African Religions**

February 9<sup>th</sup>

Restoring the Forces of Life: Affliction and Its remedies

Readings Mbiti Chapter 15; Magesa: Chapter 6

(Achebe: Part 1: Chapters 10-11)

**Group 3: On African Theodicies**

**February 11<sup>th</sup> : Ritual dimension of African religions** : Case Study : Rites of passage  
Readings: Moshia: Pages 68-79; Mbiti Chapter 12 , Magesa Chapter 3; Mbiti  
Chapter 12;  
Ifi Chapters 5 **Video Excerpts : Dembele Women' Women's Rituals**  
Midterm Distributed

Week 7: Concluding Discussion of Ritual  
February 16<sup>th</sup> Ritual and Community: Case Study: Marriage  
Readings: Mbiti: chapter 13; Ifi Chapter 4,

**February 18<sup>th</sup> Ritual and Africa's quest for Abundant life**  
Magesa: Chapter 4; **Achebe: chapters 12&13**  
Video resource: Mami Water Rituals in Ghana  
(Midterm modalities Explained )

**Group 4: On Ritual and African quest for abundant life**

**Week 8:** African Religions, Cross Cultural encounters and African Responses:  
(Guidelines for final book Review Distributed

**February 23<sup>rd</sup> :**

- i) The coming of the Europeans and ambiguity of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Christian Missions  
African Responses : Case Study The Igbo  
Ifi Chapters 7&8 Achebe: chapters 16-20;  
**Video: Basil Davidson: The Bible and the Gun**

**February 25<sup>th</sup> : Responding to Cross Cultural encounter : African Religion and Quest for Freedom and Justice**

- a) Quest for Spiritual Freedom : African Independent Churches  
(Readings: Excerpts from Hood : (on Camino)  
Video: Zulu Zion  
Excerpts: Michael Spencer: Protest and Praise  
Video: Sarafina/Amandla

**Second Response Paper due**

**Week 9: African Religion Responding to ng to Cross Cultural encounter :**

**March 1<sup>st</sup>**

- a) Religion and quest for Racial justice and "Somebodiness: case study : Black Theologies of Liberation  
Readings Hood: Chapter 3:  
Excerpts from Cone: The Spirituals and The Blues

**Group 5 " On religion and quest for freedom in Africa .**

**March 3<sup>rd</sup> : Responding to Cross Cultural encounter :**

**Religion and Quest for a Livable Future: Understanding and tapping the Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa :**

**To Heal a Continent: Understanding and Tapping the Heart- beat of Indigenous Africa**

Readings : Magesa: Chapter 7 Moshia: Chapters

Group 6 : On African Religion and Quest for a Livable Future In Africa and Beyond

**Week 10: Last week of Class: Course conclusions and synthesis**

March 8<sup>th</sup>

- a) Any unfinished business from the week 9
- b) African Religions and the Future of a Continent : a Synthesis (all as resource persons )
- c) Preparing the final paper

Readings: Magesa: *Foreword and Conclusions*; *Ifi Conclusion*: *Moshia: Epilogue*  
**Oduyoye Chapter 10: On Camino**

March 10<sup>th</sup>

- a) **Course** wrap up
- b) **Students** questions and concerns

**Required Readings:**

Ifi: *Male Daughters Female* : Zed Books

Magesa L: *African Religions: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*

Mbiti J. *African Religions and Philosophy*(excerpts on Camino)

Moshia: *Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa*

Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

Books for Review for Final Paper have been Ordered through the book store and are marked as **recommended**:

These include:

1. Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*
2. Mariama Ba : *So Long a Letter*
3. Marise Conde: *I Tituba Black Witch of Salem*
4. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *The River Between*
5. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *Devil on the Cross*
6. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *the River Between*
7. Ngugi Wa Thiongo: *I will Marry When I want*
8. Nozipo Maraire : *Zenzele: A Letter to My Daughter*

**Note on Book Reviews :**

The books assigned for review are *mainly novels* in which are embedded an analyses and critique of African Religions and Cultures, through the lenses of *post colonial theory* (eg as Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi wa Thiongo *The River Between*) or the lenses of *gender and afro feminism* (eg Mariama Ba (*So Long a letter*, Marisa Conde: *I Tituba Black witch of Salem* , or Nozipo Maraire : *Zenzele* , *A Letter to My Daughter* ) .Students are supposed analytically to review the novels in light of class themes as articulated in the selected required class texts. Both the Class texts and the novels are *chosen* so that they allow analyses of the class material from *multiple perspectives* eg : cultural anthropological **perspective** , feminist /gender studies perspective and post colonial theory perspective. . Thus in reviewing Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart* ) in light of Class text by Amadiume Ifi: *Male Daughters and Female Husbands* ,for example, students will apply insights from *postcolonial literature* and its analysis of Africa through with *postcolonial theory* but also use insights from the method of *gendered cultural anthropology* exemplified by Amadiume Ifi. The Ifi text also offers gendered analysis through an *Afro -feminist perspective* of what happened to the Igbo culture and religion under colonialism thus allowing students to probe the idea of *cultural formation*



and transformation and notions of identity formation over time even though this formation and transformation is contentious. **This facilitates achievement and testing of Core Learning Goal 2)** This final exercise also tests and facilitates Goal no 4 in the departmental goals list : *Students will use diverse materials (in this case literary novels in combination with class texts ) to demonstrate their capacities for Critical enquiry into religion and ability to move beyond description to critical reflection.*

**Note on Group work and Its relation to class goals :** The group topics are designed to facilitate and test achievement of *Core Goal number 1* .ie students :ability to “ *analyze complex and diverse religious phenomena such as architecture, music , ritual, theological systems and other cultural expression of religious belief*” . The topics for example include an analysis of *Ritual, African Music and African theologies of liberation* (including : Theologies of African Independent Churches, or Inculturation theology of Jean Marc Ela ) ) as examples of *complex ways in which humans express and live their religions*. Through the group projects ,students will also be expected to *show case their ability to “clarify and explain/express beliefs “ (of Africa) in light of their own critical /analytical enquiry about Africans and the religious dimension of their “Human Experience:”* Thus this exercise facilitates and also evaluates the achievement of **Core goals number 3** :see course goals above : **Group topics will be distributed and groups assigned by 1<sup>st</sup> day of week 2 .**

### **Video Resources:**

Frequently in the class, we will illustrate class themes with reference to Videos and documentaries. Some of these are in the library and although we may only be able to watch excerpts of these in class, it is advisable when you have time to watch the full documentaries. This is particularly the case for the *Series: Africa Voyage of Discovery by Basil Davidson*. These series are on **permanent reserve** in the Library but you can borrow them and watch them in the library at your own pace and during your own time. Highly recommended....

### **A Note on the Readings and Their *relation to ( RTC Core) Goals:***

**Please note that the** Class texts are deliberately chosen to allow at **least two different approaches** to the materials as is expected for RTC2 Courses: eg Cultural anthropological methods (eg Mbiti, and Ifi) gendered approaches; eg Ifi , and Oduyoye ; Post colonial theories and Liberation theology theories (eg Hood: Must God Remain Greek ). The texts also highlight the study of African Religions as **Ethical Systems** : (eg Mosha : Heart Beat of Indigenous Africa; Magesa :The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life ): Thus through this course activity (i.e. annotated readings ) the course facilitates fulfillment of core goal 2 and tests its achievement in an ongoing way through out *the quarter*. Students are expected to do an annotated critical reading of texts that approach the same materials from different methodological angles. Thus while Ifi (*Male Daughters and Female Husbands* ) is a cultural anthropologist , she also offers *gendered analysis* and even feminist analysis of the religio cultural life of the Igbo People. Achebe (one of the books also listed for final essay )offers an analysis of the same group through the lenses of the novel as a *literary device* . Both offer an *emic (insiders)* perspective and offer a **critique of exclusively etic** (outsider) readings of Igbo religions and Culture particularly where those *readings are skewed by a colonial and sexist hermeneutics*.