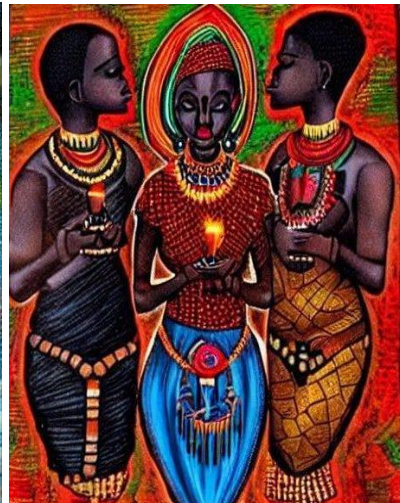




AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN TIMES (GENED-1071)

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**GEN-ED 1071:
AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN TIMES
Fall 2024**

Time: Tuesdays/Thursdays 1200-1:15 PM

Lecture Location: Memorial Hall SandersThtr (FAS)

Students are required to attend all Lectures. Lectures will begin in Week 1.

Professor: Dr. Jacob Olupona

Email: olupona@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Office Location: Barker Center, 2nd Floor

Head Teaching Fellow: Rhonelle Bruder

Email: rbruder@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM or by appointment

Office Location: Barker Center, 2nd Floor (in person) or Zoom

DISCUSSION SECTIONS:

Students are required to attend all sections. Sections will begin in Week 2

Section	Time	Location	Teaching Fellow
D001	Mon 10:30-11:30 a.m.	LISE 303	Mariam Khursheed Ahmed mariam_khursheed@hsph.harvard.edu
D002	Mon 4:30-5:30 p.m.	Emerson 101	Uchenna Nwodim unwodim@jd26.law.harvard.edu
D003	Mon 6:00--7:00 p.m.	CGIS Knafel K050	Rhonelle Bruder rbruder@fas.harvard.edu
D004	Tues 1:30-2:30 p.m	Sever 204	Djelimory Diabate Ddiabate@g.harvard.edu
D005	Tues 3-4 p.m.	Sever 204	Amadu Kunateh akunateh@fas.harvard.edu
D006	Tues 4:30-5:30 p.m.	Sever 204	Amine Mernissi amine_mernissi@hks.harvard.edu
D007	Wed 10:30-11:30 a.m.	Sever 101	Phil Scholer

			philscholer@hds.harvard.edu
D008	Wed 3-4 p.m.	Sever 201	Hannah Scruggs hannahscruggs@g.harvard.edu
D009	Wed 4:30-5:30 p.m.	Sever 201	Djelimory Diabate Ddiabate@g.harvard.edu
D010	Thurs 1:30-2:30 p.m.	Sever 308	Amine Mernissi amine_mernissi@hks.harvard.edu
D011	Thurs 3:00-4:00 p.m.	Sever 308	Amadu Kunateh akunateh@fas.harvard.edu
D012	Thurs 3:00-4:00 p.m.	Northwest Bldg. B104	Mariam Khursheed Ahmed mariam_khursheed@hsph.harvard.edu
D013	Thurs 4:30-5:30 p.m.	Northwest Bldg. B104	Nautica Jacobs njacobs@jd26.law.harvard.edu
D014	Thurs 4:30-5:30 p.m.	Sever 308	Dinah Orozco-Herrera dinahorozcoherrera@g.harvard.edu
D015	Fri 1:30-2:30 p.m.	Barker 024	Nautica Jacobs njacobs@jd26.law.harvard.edu
D016	Mon 10:30-11:30 a.m.	Barker 024	Uchenna Nwodim unwodim@jd26.law.harvard.edu
D017	Mon 4:30-5:30 p.m.	CGIS Knafel K108	Rhonelle Bruder rbruder@fas.harvard.edu
D018	Tues 1:30-2:30 p.m.	Sever 112	Dinah Orozco-Herrera dinahorozcoherrera@g.harvard.edu
D019	Tues 1:30-2:30 p.m.	Boylston G07	Hasna Salam hsalam@gsd.harvard.edu
D020	Tues 1:30-2:30 p.m.	CGIS South S003B	TBD
D021	Tues 3-4 p.m.	Sever 112	Phil Scholer philscholer@hds.harvard.edu

D022	Wed 10:30-11:30 a.m.	CGIS South S003B	Nicholas Judt njudt@g.harvard.edu
D023	Thurs 1:30-2:30 p.m.	Robinson 106	Nicholas Judt njudt@g.harvard.edu
D024	Thurs 3-4 p.m.	Emerson 108	Hasna Salam hsalam@gsd.harvard.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Taking the Marvel blockbuster “Black Panther” as a starting point, the course will explore the African spiritual heritage both on the continent and the diaspora communities (Black Atlantic diasporas). We will begin by spelling out the features of African indigenous religious traditions: cosmology, cosmogony, mythology, ritual practices, divination, healing ceremonies, sacred kingship, etc. We will then explore how these traditions have traveled across the oceans to the new world and how they have contributed to the emergence of new forms of black identities in Brazil, the Caribbean, the USA, etc. This class will equally look at African religious encounters with Islam and Christianity on the continent, resulting in what we often call “Africa’s Triple Heritage.” It then considers African religious sensibilities in the contemporary period as they relate to the issues of modernity, economic and social development, ethnic and cultural identities, class, and community relations. Finally, we will look at the status of African religion as a global tradition, not necessarily in competition with other religious traditions, but in its relationship to other world religions.

COURSE WEBSITE:

The course website will be the central source of information for the course. It will contain links to all online readings, posting areas based upon section assignments, space for students to share information and have conversations and contact information for the course professor and Teaching Fellows.

Website: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/140707>

COURSE GOALS:

1. To introduce you to African indigenous religions through an interdisciplinary array of texts.
2. To stimulate deeper comprehension of African worldviews and help students make cross-cultural connections across multiple disciplines.
3. To help you practice communicating your original questions, interpretations, analysis and foster generative and creative classroom discussions and writings.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Read across selected disciplines and interpret various articles and book chapters that sometimes have contrasting formats and argumentative structures.
2. Complete weekly readings and writing assignments that ask you to think critically and comparatively about African cultures.
3. Articulate their critical thinking aloud in class discussions and presentations.
4. Comparative research methodologies, cross-cultural analysis, and transnational discourses.

ASSIGNMENTS, GRADING, AND WEIGHTING:

Course Assignments:

Your final course grade will be based on the following assignments. Instructions for all assignments are published on Canvas:

1. Reflection paper (15%)

During the semester, you will be required to write one short reflection paper on a course reading and present it to your section. Each person will write an individual short reflection paper that should be at least one page long and no longer than three pages long. **In week 2**, a sign-up sheet will be provided in your section so you may select a reading. Reflections are **due 11:59, the day before the class discusses the reading**.

2. Group presentation (10%)

In the second week of class, you will be placed into groups that will discuss course readings in a 15-minute presentation that will take place in one of the remaining weeks of the fall semester, **starting on September 13th**. You are required to craft a PowerPoint that summarizes your readings and illustrates how the readings do (or do not) illustrate what African spiritual traditions can contribute to human flourishing in the contemporary age.

3. Interview assignment/Creative essay (15%)

You will have the option to complete either a peer interview with a Harvard College peer who was born and raised in Africa or write a creative essay on a creative work that sparks your attention/passion, discussing how it relates to African spiritualities and spiritual practices. Both assignments must be 2-pages, double-spaced and **are due on Nov 21, 2024, by 11:59 pm**

4. Midterm (25%)

On October 8th, at the end of class, you will be presented with five questions regarding the course material covered up to then. You will then **choose two** of these questions and write an elaborate answer of **1-2 pages max. for each question**. Your answers should engage course readings and take into consideration your own opinions regarding them. Midterms will be due **on Oct 10, 2024, by 11:59 pm**.

5. Final essay (30%)

Your final assignment will be an essay (10-12 pages for undergraduate students, 15 pages for graduate students) on an aspect of African Spiritualities. You may choose any topic, but Dr. Olupona must approve it. **Research paper topics and outlines are due Oct 31, 2024.** Paper topics may include (but are not limited to) those stated in the headings for each week on the syllabus. Additionally, you may discuss the ethnic groups examined in the course readings, or you may include ethnic groups we have not studied. **Final papers will be due on Dec 14, 2024, by 11:59 pm 5:00 pm.**

6. Attendance (5%)

Grading:

93 – 100:	A
90 – 93:	A-
87 – 90:	B+
83 – 87:	B
80 – 83:	B-
77 – 80:	C+
73 – 77:	C
70 – 73:	C-
Less than 70:	Non-Pass

Pass/Non-Pass: This course may be taken Pass/Non-Pass. All work/assignments must be completed, and an overall grade of C- or better (70 or higher) is required to Pass. Attendance is required in all GENED Courses.

Weighting:

Assignments will be weighted according to the schema presented above. In addition to assignment grades, final grades are subject to weighting. Weighting final grades is expected to occur in the event of discrepancies across sections or if final grades do not match the distribution of anticipated scores in GENED courses. Note that a weight is not a curve. A curve adjusts scores to bring them closer to the average; scores further away from the average are assigned higher weights than scores closer to the average when using a curve. A weight used to adjust scores across sections and in accordance with GENED distributions assigns the same weight to scores within sections. This ensures fairness to students across sections and that final grades approximate distributions expected from GENED courses.

COURSE POLICIES:

Absences:

Because you will be graded on your attendance, you are required to come to class regularly.

HOWEVER, IF YOU ARE SICK, PLEASE STAY HOME! Your absence will not be counted if you are sick and turn in a doctor's note. If you are presenting on the day you are sick, accommodations will be made to ensure you can present when you are well.

Disability Accommodations:

Harvard University welcomes individuals with disabilities to participate in its classes, programs, and activities. If you would like to request accommodations or have questions about the physical access provided, **please contact the Disability Access Office** (dao@fas.harvard.edu) **and your resident dean as soon as possible.**

See also: <https://dao.fas.harvard.edu>

Penalties for Late Submissions:

Each assignment grade will be lowered by 10% for each day it is late. Also, if you submit an assignment on the same day but after the time it is due, the assignment will be counted as a day late. Also, your reflection papers are due in hardcopy at the **beginning** of class. Extensions may be granted by the professor on a case-by-case basis per Harvard University's policies, but you must communicate with the professor immediately if a situation arises.

Grade Disputes:

Requests for re-grades will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Note that a grade may increase or decline after a re-grade.

Collaboration and Academic Integrity:

You should ensure that any written or oral work you submit for evaluation is your own research and writing. Permissible collaboration includes consulting with your classmates on the choice of paper topics. The course follows Harvard College's policies on plagiarism and collaboration. I ask all students to bookmark and consult regularly the Harvard Guide to Using Sources website at <http://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>.

The Harvard College Honor Code:

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standard of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Submission of the Same Work to More than One Course

Papers and other work are normally submitted to only *one* course. However, certain two instances are Allowable.

1. Any student who wishes to submit to another course or for another academic purpose the same or similar work used in a previous course must obtain the prior written permission of the instructor.
2. If a student wishes to submit the same or similar work to more than one course during the same term, the prior written permission of all of the instructors involved must be obtained.

A student who submits the same or similar work to more than one course without such prior permission will ordinarily be required to withdraw from the College or from GSAS.

Artificial Intelligence/ChatGPT

We expect that all work students submit for this course will be their own. In instances when collaborative work is assigned, we expect for the assignment to list all team members who participated. We specifically forbid the use of ChatGPT or any other generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools at all stages of the work process, including preliminary ones. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. We draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 1- September 3 & 5: Introduction and Methodological and Conceptual Issues

1. Watch the 2018 movie Black Panther in its entirety.
2. Hallen, Barry. "Cosmology: African Cosmologies." In Encyclopedia of Religion, Vol. 3. 2nd ed., edited by Lindsay Jones, Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 19982002.
3. Cox, James L. "Methodological Views on African Religions." In The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions, edited by Elias K. Bongmba, Malden: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012. 25-40.

Week 2 - September 10 & 12: Sacred Cosmos: Worldview, Cosmology, and Mythology

1. Ray, Benjamin C. "Creation and Origins." In African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community, 1-24.
2. Agbasiere, Joseph Therese. "Igbo Cosmology." In Women in Igbo Life and Thought, by Joseph Therese Agbasiere. New York: Routledge, 2000. 48-64.
3. Achebe, Chinua. "Chi in Igbo Cosmology."

Week 3 - September 17 & 19: The World of Gods, Spirits, and the Ancestors

1. Olupona, Jacob K. "To Praise and to Reprimand: Ancestors and Spirituality in African Society and Culture." Ancestors in Post-contact Religion: Roots, Ruptures, and Modernity's Memory. Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Center for the Study of World Religions Harvard Divinity School, 2001.
2. Olupona, Jacob K. "Gods, Ancestors, and Spirit Beings." In African Religions: A Very Short Introduction, by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 2037.
3. Larsen, Kjersti. "Bodily Selves: Identity and Shared Realities among Humans and Spirits in Zanzibar." Journal of Religion in Africa 44, no. 1 (2014): 5-27.
4. Ray, Benjamin C. "Divinity and Humanity," in African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community. Second edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000. 25-46.

Week 4 - September 24 & 26: Sacred Time, Sacred Space, and Sacred Places

1. Benjamin Ray, "African Shrines as Channels of Communication" in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Crossroads, 2000. 26-37.
2. Olupona, Jacob K. "Ile-Ife in Time and Space." In *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space, and the Imagination*, by Jacob K. Olupona. University of California Press, 2011, 21-50.
3. Montgomery, Eric and Christian Vannier. "The Shrine at Gbedala" (Chapter 5) in *Ethnography of a Vodun Shrine in Southern Togo: Of Spirit, Slave, and Sea*, by Eric Montgomery and Christian Vannier. Leiden: Brill, 2017. 154-168 & 194-216.
4. Douny, Laurence. "The Role of Earth Shrines in the Socio-symbolic Construction of the Dogon Territory: Towards a Philosophy of Containment." *Anthropology & Medicine* 18, no. 2 (2011): 167-79.

Week 5 - October 1 & October 3: African Spirituality and the Environment

1. Ikeke, Mark Omorovie. "The Forest in African Traditional Thought and Practice: An Ecophilosophical Discourse." *Open Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2013): 345-350.
2. Rusinga, Oswald and Richard Maposa. "'Traditional Religion and Natural Resources' A Reflection on the Significance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems on the Utilisation of Natural Resources among the Ndau People in South-eastern Zimbabwe." *Journal of Ecology and the Natural Environment*, vol. 2, no. 9 (September 2010): 201-206.
3. Behrens, Kevin. "Exploring African Holism with Respect to the Environment." *Environmental Values* 19, no. 4 (2010): 465-484.
4. Von Hellermann, Pauline. "Tree Symbolism and Conservation in the South Pare Mountains, Tanzania." *Conservation and Society* 14, no. 4 (2016): 368-79.
5. Mergo, Jamessa. "'The Scene Does Not Speak': The Demise of the Odaa Bulluq Sacred Forest in Horro Guduru, Northwestern Oromia, Ethiopia." *Journal of Oromo Studies* 19, no. 1 & 2 (2012): 101-138.

Week 6 - October 8 & 10: Ritual Practices: Divination, Medicine, and Healing

Midterm exams due

1. Grillo, Laura S. "African Rituals." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*, edited by Elias K. Bongmba. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2012. 112-126.
2. Devisch, René. "Of Divinatory Co-naissance among the Yaka of the DR Congo." In *Reviewing Reality: Dynamics of African Divination*, edited by W.E.A. van Beek and Philip M. Peek. Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2013, 25-54.
3. Danfulani, Umar Habila Sadem. "'Pa' Divination: Ritual Performance and Symbolism among the Ngas, Mupun, and Mwaghavul of the Jos Plateau, Nigeria." In *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Crossroads, 2000. 87-113.

Week 7 - October 15 & 17: Sexuality and Gender in African Spirituality

1. Grillo, Laura S. "Genies, Witches, and Women" In *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa*, by Larua S. Grillo. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2018. 21-53.
2. Mkasi, Lindiwe P. "African Same-sexualities and Indigenous Knowledge: Creating a Space for Dialogue within Patriarchy." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 37, no. 2 (2016): 1-6.
3. Ajibade, George Olusola. "Same-Sex Relationships in Yorùbá Culture and Orature." *Journal of Homosexuality* 60, no. 7 (2013): 965-983.
4. Jell-Bahlsen, Sabine. "The Lake Goddess, Uhammiri/Ogbuide: The Female Side of the Universe in Igbo Cosmology." In *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Crossroads, 2000. 38-53.

Week 8 - October 22 & 24: Ethics in African Spirituality

1. Metz, Thaddeus "An Overview of African Ethics." In *Themes, Issues, and Problems in African Philosophy*, edited by Isaac E. Ukpokolo. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017. 61-75.
2. Wiredu, Kwasi. "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture." *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux. London; New York: Routledge, 1998. 306-316.
3. Tangwa, Godfrey Banyuy. "Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics." In *A Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 387-395.
4. Bewaji, John Ayotunde Ishola. "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture." In *A Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by Kwasi Wiredu. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 2004. 396-403.
5. Grillo, Laura S. "Trajectories in African Ethics." In *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics*, edited by William Schweiker. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2005. 438-44.

Week 9 - October 29 & 31: African Spirituality in the New World (Caribbean, South America, USA, Haiti, etc.)

Research paper topic and outline due

1. Murphy, Joseph. "Haitian Vodou." in *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*, Boston, MA: Beacon 1994. 10-43.
2. Flores-Peña, Ysamur M. "Mofá and the Oba: Translation of Ifá Epistemology in the Afro-Cuban Dilogun." In *Ifa Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, edited by Jacob Olupona and Roland Abiodun. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 212-222.
3. Eastman, Rudolph and Maureen Warner-Lewis. "Forms of African Spirituality in Trinidad and Tobago." In *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, edited by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Crossroads, 2000. 403-415.
4. Crosson, J. Brent. "What Obeah Does Do: Healing, Harm, and the Limits of Religion." *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 2 (2015): 151-76.

Week 10 - November 5 & 7: African Spirituality Encounters Islam, Christianity, and Colonialism

1. Olupona, Jacob K. "Christianity and Islam in Africa," African Religions: A Very Short Introduction, by Jacob K. Olupona. 89-104. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
2. Levitzon, Nehemia. "Islam in the Bilal al-Sudan to 1800." in The History of Islam in Africa, by Nehemia Levitzon and Randall Lee Pouwels. Athens; Oxford; Cape Town: Ohio University Press. (2000) 63-91.
3. Britt, Samuel I. "'Sacrifice Honors God': Ritual Struggle in a Liberian Church." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 76(1) (2008): 1-26.

Week 11 - November 12 & 14: African Spiritual Expression in the Arts: Dance, Music, Visual and Verbal Arts, Literature

1. Olupona, Jacob K. "Sacred Arts and Ritual Performances." In African Religions: A Very Short Introduction, by Jacob K. Olupona. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 7288.
2. MacGaffey, Wyatt. "Art and Spirituality." In African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions, edited by Jacob K. Olupona, New York: Crossroads, 2000. 223-256.
3. Rush, Dana. "Ephemerality and the 'Unfinished' in Vodun Aesthetics." African Arts 43, no. 1 (2010): 60-75.
4. Richards, Polly. "Masques Dogons in a Changing World." African Arts 38, no. 4 (2005): 46-93.

Week 12 - November 19 & 21: African Spirituality in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math **Interview assignment/Creative essay due**

1. Dade, Lennell R. "Reaffirming African-Centered Scientists' Place in the Paradigm Shift: Stolen Legacy II." Journal of Black Studies 44, no. 4 (2013): 395-405.
2. Alamu, F. O., H.O. Aworinde, W. I. Isharufe. "A Comparative Study on Ifa Divination and Computer Science." International Journal of Innovative Technology and Research 1, no. 6 (2013): 524-528.
3. Eglash, Ron. "Bamana Sand Divination: Recursion in Ethnomathematics." American Anthropologist 99, no. 1 (1997): 112-122.
4. Segla, Aimé. "Viewing Formal Mathematics from Yoruba Conception of the Sky." Journal of Astronomy in Culture 1, no. 1 (2016): 9-21.
5. Sègla, Dafon Aimé. "Chasing the Shadow of the Sun: The Batammaliba's Binary System of Time." In Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena VIII: City of Stars, edited by Brian Patrick Abbot. Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP) Conference Series, Vol. 501. 277-285. San Francisco: Astronomical Society of the Pacific, 2015.

November 26 & 28: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Dec 3: LAST DAY OF CLASS

December 5: READING PERIOD

December 14, 5:00 PM FINAL PAPER DUE