

African Religious Culture and Creativity

AFR 372G/RS360/TD357T

Instructor: Dr. Abimbola Adedokun
Semester: Spring 2019
Class: RLM 7.112 TTH 11am- 12.30pm
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Rivers, ponds, lakes and streams — they all have different names, but they all contain water. Just as religions do — they all contain truths – Muhammad Ali.

Decades after western cultures first “killed” God, religion has continued to thrive in black cultures. Most Africans believe in God and the supernatural, and the rituals of their religion are part of the political praxis through which they want to right what is wrong with the world. While religious practices are considered means of seeking spiritual truths that sets free, they are also acts of creativity and artistic inspiration. In this course, we will examine religion as an aesthetic practice and explore the inventiveness of the imagination that underline African religious practices. The course will span through religious practices that existed in pre-colonial and post-colonial eras to contemporary period particularly in urban centers. We will examine the aesthetic dimensions of African traditional religions, Christianity, Islam, and forms of hybrid religions as well. We will study texts, performances, popular culture, audio, and different visual materials that illustrate how Africans use their religious performances to formulate and navigate their conceptions of the sacred and supernatural power. We will examine how Africans creatively produce meaning and generate the momentum to advocate for important issues through their acts of faith and worship. Through the semester, we will explore the dynamism that characterizes African cultural practices and reflect on a deeper understanding of what “religion” means to African people. We will also use the study of religious aesthetics to chart the larger socio-cultural and historical shifts that are shaping the evolving meaning of religion, and the ways Africans have used religion to facilitate social, cultural, and political change.

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Critically engage the discourse of religion, creativity, and the dynamics involved in the production of aesthetics of spirituality in different social and cultural contexts.
- Understand contemporary issues of religious creativity from a phenomenological and historical perspective, while reflecting on their own place as a witness to social history.
- Apply theories of performance to cultural phenomena, analyze them, and build original thoughts that extends existing horizons of analyses.
- Build skill sets that involve critical thinking and analysis, close reading of texts and performances
- Coherently and concisely express ideas coherently in writing and/or presentations.

**ALL READINGS ARE AVAILABLE ON CANVAS UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED*

GRADING:

At various points in the semester, students will complete the following assignments:

Attendance and Class Participation	15%
In-class assignments	15%
Two Reflection Papers	20%
Project Presentations	20%
Final Paper (8-10 pages)	30%

DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENT:

- Participation grade is awarded for punctuality to class as well as active engagement in class. Students are expected to study the texts prior to every class and be prepared to engage their colleagues in thoughtful and respectful dialogues.
- Twice in the semester, students will write their reflections on the materials discussed during the previous weeks. These reflection papers are expected to summarize, synthesize and advance the ideas discussed in class for the period. The professor will return the graded papers the following week with helpful feedback to enhance each student's subsequent papers and class discussions.
- The last two weeks of class are reserved for presentations. In groups, students will present their research on aspect of religion as a creative practice. While this exercise is the presentation of final year project, students do not need to take traditional formats of presentation. In fact, students are encouraged to be as creative as possible in their exploration of issues. Points will be awarded for creative engagement along with critical analysis.
- The final paper is students' reflection and analysis of contemporary issues around issues religious culture and creativity. This material is expected to be at least 8 pages and it should be well-researched to reflect thoughtfulness, resourcefulness, and an ability to re-conceptualize the theories and analyses discussed in class. While the focus of this class has been primarily around African religious practice, students are free to develop issues around religion from any world region of their own choosing.
- We will have a session of writing workshop where our draft papers will be circulated among colleagues for critique and feedback. Everybody is expected to participate by reading and reviewing their classmates' paper to provide them with useful insights.

COURSE POLICIES AND POLICIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS**Class Decorum:**

The decorum policies of this class exist as an agreement between all of us in order to create a respectful and productive environment for learning and dialogue. As such the following rules will be enforced:

- The use of electronic devices is permitted in class ONLY for note taking and with prior permission of the professor. Beyond that, you are not allowed to use electronic devices in class. Students who become disruptive with their devices will be asked to leave the class for the day and marked “unexcused absence.”
- Only productive discussion is allowed in class. This means talking must occur only in response to the subject of study that day. In order to facilitate this in an orderly manner I will act as a moderator. Students should raise their hands and wait to be called upon. Also, give others a chance to speak. And above all, BE RESPECTFUL.
- Students who repeatedly disrupt the class will be asked to leave and may fail the class.

Late Assignments

All assignments are due by the date listed on the syllabus and in the class. Students with excused absence can email an assignment to the professor. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Attendance

- Students are expected to attend every class meeting and be prepared to participate. If you are absent for any reason – excused or unexcused – you are still responsible for all material covered in class.
- I may post PowerPoint presentations on Canvas under “Files” if the slides contain information students need but were unable to take as notes in class. Students who are absent should make arrangements to get notes from a classmate. I am happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss any questions you have about course material, but I will NOT simply “tell you what you missed.”
- Classes and assignments may only be made up in the event of an emergency (documented illness, death in the family, etc.), or a pre-arranged absence (religious holidays, athletic events, conferences, weddings, etc.). Absences due to religious holidays must be arranged in accordance with the University of Texas at Austin Student Handbook. All make-ups (including those due to illness) must be accompanied with appropriate documentation.
- Please note that *traffic, car troubles, oversleeping, and missed busses are not excused absences* and students who miss submitting an assignment for these reasons *will not be allowed* to make them up. Out of fairness to all students, no exceptions will be made to this policy.
- In case of a medical emergency, please contact your professor and be ready to provide supporting documentation.

Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Use of Canvas in class

In this class we use Canvas—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://canvas.utexas.edu>—to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to receive assignments, and to give you online quizzes and surveys. You can find support in using Canvas at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8

a.m. to 6 p.m., so plan accordingly.

Feedback Loop

Throughout the semester I will give you individual feedback on your work. I also encourage you to visit office hours to discuss your progress through the course material. I will also ask you to give me feedback on your learning in informal as well as formal ways, including through a mid-semester survey about how my teaching strategies are helping or hindering your learning. It is very important for me to know your reaction to what we're doing in class, so I encourage you to respond to these surveys. I also hope that you will reach out to me during my office hours, with any questions or concerns you have regarding the course material, the assignments, or your progress in this department and the university in general.

The University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Academic Integrity

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit should be the student's own work. We have zero tolerance for plagiarism.

Documented Disability Statement

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).

Please notify me as early in the semester as possible if disability-related accommodations for field trips are required. Advanced notice will permit the arrangement of accommodations on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility, etc.).

Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information:

http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_students.php

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.

If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.

In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

Class Grading Scheme

Name:	Range:	
A	100 %	to 94.0%
A-	< 94.0 %	to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 %	to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 %	to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 %	to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 %	to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 %	to 74.0%
C-	< 74.0 %	to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 %	to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 %	to 64.0%
D-	< 64.0 %	to 61.0%
F	< 61.0 %	to 0.0%

Weekly Course Schedule

***The professor reserves the right to modify this syllabus at any time**

Week 1: Introduction

Jan 22: Meet the professor and colleagues. Discuss the syllabus.

Jan 24: Ali Mazrui, *The Africans' Triple Heritage* 3 (In-class video)

Buckenham, Karen. *Creativity and Spirituality: Two Threads of the Same Cloth*. Pg 56-63.

Geoffrey Parrinder. *West African Religions: A Study of the Beliefs*.

Week 2: Aesthetics and African Religions

Jan 29: Frank B. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*. Pg 1-5.

Jan 31: Nimi Wariboko, *Pentecostalism: A Kinetic Description* Pg 21-23.

Week 3: Meeting of the Supernatural and Natural (I)

Feb 5: Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, eds. *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities* Pg 1-5.

Vittorio Lanternari. *Dreams and Visions from the Spiritual Churches of Ghana*. Pg 85-91.

Feb 7: Joseph Mavinga. *The Witchcraft Understanding within African Cultures* (Online)

Week 4: Meeting of the Supernatural and Natural (II)

Feb 12: Badstuebner, Jennifer. "Drinking the Hot Blood of Humans": *Witchcraft Confessions*.... Pg 8-18.

Feb 14: Frank, Barbara. *Permitted and Prohibited Wealth: Commodity-Possessing Spirits, Economic Morals, and the Goddess Mami Wata in West Africa*. Pg 335-342

Due: Reflection Paper 1

Week 5: Modernity and Faith

Feb 19: Jacob Oluponna, *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions And Modernity*. Pg 1-5

Feb 21: Birgit Meyer, *Modernity And Enchantment: The Image Of The Devil In Popular African Christianity*.

Week 6: Religions and Rituals

Feb 26: Agorsah, Kofi. *Religion, Ritual and African Tradition*.

Nabofa, M.Y. *Blood Symbolism in African Religion*.

Feb 28: Vos, Donna Darkwolf. "Magic and Ritual: The South African Scene." *Dancing Under an African Moon: Paganism and Wicca in South Africa*.

Week 7: Spiritual and spatial configurations

Mar 5: Carole Rakodi. *Religion And Social Life In African Cities*. Pg 85-92

Mar 7: Gaudio, Rudolf Pell. *Allah Made Us: Sexual Outlaws In An Islamic African City*.

Week 8: Popular Culture and Faith

Mar 12: Hill, Joseph. "Baay is the spiritual leader of the rappers":
performing Islamic reasoning in Senegalese Sufi hip-hop.

Mar 14: Birgit Meyer. "Praise the Lord": *Popular cinema and pentecostalite style in Ghana's new public sphere*. Pg 98-106.

Due: Reflection Paper 2

Week 9: SPRING BREAK!!!

Week 10: Media and Mediation in Accessing the Supernatural

Mar 26: W. E. A. van Beek, Philip M. Peek, *Reviewing Reality: Divination Across Time and Space*

Mar 28: Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu J. "Get on the Internet!" Says the LORD':
Religion, Cyberspace and Christianity in Contemporary Africa.

Week 11: Faith and Mobility

April 2: Paolo Gaibazzi, "'God's Time is the Best': Religious Imagination and the Wait for Emigration in the Gambia.

April 4: Erin Kenny, "Gifting Mecca: Importing Spiritual Capital to West Africa."

Week 12: Local God, Global Faith

April 9: Oluponna, Jacob. *Communities of Believers: Exploring African Immigrant Religion in the US*.

April 11: Beck, Linda. *West African Muslims in America: When are Muslims not Muslims*.

Week 13: Group Presentations on April 16 and 18

Week 14: Research and Scheduled Meetings with Professor

Week 15: Submit Final Paper

Due Date: May 3