

# Islam & Popular Culture in Africa

SSA 4930 . Section 20370 . RLG 5937 . Section 21623

Fall 2018. MWF 5 (11:45-12:35) . MAT 0117

**Instructor:** Dr. Fiona Mc Laughlin

**Office:** 305 Pugh Hall

**Hours:** Wednesday 9:00-11:00am & by appt.

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**Course description:** Welcome to Islam and Popular Culture in Africa. This course will examine popular forms of contemporary African cultural expression – especially Islamic cultural expression – and how they reflect people's views on topics that range from political oppression and economic crises to religion and gender within an increasingly globalized postcolonial context. The course will focus on a number of themes such as the history of Muslim societies in Africa, approaches to popular culture, youth culture, fundamentalism, and will touch on a variety of genres including painting, music and song, fashion and dress, architecture, photography and film, as well as mixed forms that defy categorization. Students will become familiar with theoretical approaches to popular culture and modernity, especially Islamic modernity, and will engage in critical thinking about the study of Africa and Islam.



**Objectives:** Combining the study of popular culture, Islam, and Africa into a single course presents a number of challenges, but also invites any number of creative approaches. In this course we will engage with a variety of subject matter, shaped in part by student interests. The specific goals of the course are:

- To become familiar with the history of Muslim societies in Africa
- To acquire the critical skills necessary for analyzing popular culture in Muslim African contexts and learn how to apply them
- To survey the different paths of inquiry into popular culture
- To gain experience in presenting oral and written arguments about popular culture in Muslim Africa
- To develop a deep understanding of at least one aspect of popular culture in Muslim societies in Africa

**Books & other readings:** We will use the following books in this class:

Robinson, David. 2004. *Muslim Societies in African History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Barber, Karin. 2018. *A History of African Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Skinner, Ryan T. 2015. *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Renne, Elisha P. 2013. *Veiling in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

In addition, several required articles and chapters are available to students on the course website at <https://elearning.ufl.edu>

**Requirements and grades:** Given the nature of this class, students are asked to engage with the subject matter and contribute to discussions in class. This requires, among other things, doing the readings in advance, thinking critically about them, and being prepared to discuss them. You will be required to write two 5-6,000 word papers on specific topics, and a longer (8-10,000 words) final paper on a topic of your choice. There will be one exam early on in the semester to test your knowledge of the material we will build on for the rest of the course, but no final exam. Grades will be calculated on the following basis:

Paper 1	15%
Paper 2	20%
Final paper	30%
Exam	15%
Class activities	20%

### **Students with disabilities**

Students with disabilities that may affect their performance in class should contact the Dean of Students Office ([www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drp/)) so that special arrangements can be made to accommodate them.

### **Academic dishonesty**

Academic honesty, including plagiarism or handing in the work of others as your own. Will not be tolerated. Any student found engaging in academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to University policy. ([www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academicguide.htm](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academicguide.htm))

### **Recommended websites**

**BBC Africa.** In addition to having the latest news from Africa, the BBC website has numerous photo essays, covers many aspects of popular culture and encourages reader input. Take five minutes a day when you're on the web to keep up on what's happening in Africa.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm>

**Afropop Worldwide.** This is a great source for music of Africa and the diaspora. It's the website of a radio program by the same name, hosted by Georges Collinet.

<http://www.afropop.org/>

**Schedule of topics and readings** (subject to change according to class needs):

## **I FOUNDATIONS**

**August 31: Introduction to popular culture in Africa**

Barber, *A History of African Popular Culture*. Chapter 1

**September 5-7: The history of popular culture in Africa**

Barber, *Chapters 2-7*

**September 10-14: Muslim societies in Africa**

Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*. Chapters 1-6

**II VISUALITY**

**Exam September 17**

**September 19-21: Hajjis and saints in popular art**

Excerpts from Parker & Neal. 1999. *Hajj Paintings: Folk Art of the Great Pilgrimage*.

Robinson, Chapter 13.

Roberts, Allen F. & Mary Nooter Roberts. 2003. *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal*. Chapter 1.

**September 24-28: Interiors and display**

*A Saint in the City*. Chapter 2.

Meier, Prita. 2009. Objects on the edge: Swahili coast logics of display. *African Arts*. 8-23.

**October 1-5: Self-presentation**

Renne, Elisha P., ed. 2013. *Veiling in Africa*.

TBA

**III AURALITY**

**October 8-12: Soundscapes**

Hirschkind, Charles. 2001. The ethics of listening: Cassette-sermon audition in contemporary Egypt. *American Ethnologist* 28(3):623-649.

**Paper 1 due October 12**

**October 15-19: Praise songs and popular music**

Mc Laughlin, Fiona. 1997. Islam and popular music in Senegal: The emergence of a 'new tradition.' *Africa* 67(4):560-581.

**October 22-26: Music and Islam in Bamako**

Skinner, *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music*. Chapters TBA.

**October 29-31: Gnawa music and music festivals**

Kapchan, Deborah. 2007. *Travelling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*. Chapters TBA.

Kapchan, Deborah. 2008. The promise of sonic translation: Performing the festive sacred in Morocco. *American Anthropologist* 110(4):467-483.

**IV YOUTH**

**November 5-9: Muslim youth**

Masquelier, Adeline. 2016. "The mouthpiece of an entire generation": Hip-Hop, Truth, and Islam in Niger. In A. Masquelier & B. Soares, eds. *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*. Chapter 9.

Aishima, Hatsuki. 2016. "Are we all Amr Khaled? Islam and the Facebook generation of Egypt. In A. Masquelier & B. Soares, eds. *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*. Chapter 4.

**Paper 2 due November 9**

**November November 14-19: The moral self**

- Hawkins, Simon. "The rage of young martyrs: A unifying ideology in the Tunisian revolution"  
In A. Masquelier & B. Soares, eds. *Muslim Youth and the 9/11 Generation*. Chapter 4.
- Schielke, Samuli. 2009. Being good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, fragmentation, and the moral self in the lives of young Egyptians. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 24-40.
- van Nieuwkerk, Karin. 2011. Of morals, missions, and the market: New religiosity and "art with a mission" in Egypt. In K. van Nieuwkerk, ed. *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Muslim World*. Austin: U of Texas Press. Chapter 6.

**V MEDIA****November 26-28: Islam and media**

- Larkin, Brian. 2014. Techniques of inattention: The mediality of loudspeakers in Nigeria. *Anthropological Quarterly* 87(4):989-1016.
- Larkin, Brian. 2015. Binary Islam: Media and religious movements in Nigeria. In R. Hackett & B. Soares, eds. *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Chapter 3.
- Bezabeh, Samson. 2015. Living across digital landscapes: Muslims, Orthodox Christians and an Indian guru in Ethiopia. In R. Hackett & B. Soares, eds. *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Chapter 14.

**December 3-5: Synthesis**

Final paper due December 5