

Religions of Africa
REL 3370, RLG 5937, AFS 4935, & AFS 6905
Fall 2019

Instructor: Benjamin Soares

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Office Hours: Tues., 3-4 pm, Thurs. 1-2 pm, & by appointment

Course Time:

Tues., Period: 7 (1:55 – 2:45 pm)

Thurs., Periods: 7 (1:55 – 2:45 pm) & 8 (3:00 – 3:50 pm)

Classroom: MAT 2

Course Description: This course is an introduction to the study of religion in sub-Saharan Africa as a contemporary phenomenon as well as the outcome of historical processes. We will examine so-called African traditional religions, spirit possession, divination, mediumship, Islam, Christianity, and religious encounters. Through the close reading and discussion of selected articles and monographs and viewing of films/videos, religions in various societies, past and present, will be explored in their complexity and diversity. The course familiarizes students with research methods and identifies empirical and theoretical shifts in the anthropological, comparative, and historical study of religion in Africa.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course students should have:

- an overview of religion and some of the various religious traditions in Africa;
- an understanding of the diversity and complexity of religion in Africa;
- learned how to think about religion in Africa from anthropological, historical, religious studies, and comparative perspectives;
- an understanding of how religious practice in Africa can intersect with social, cultural, political, and economic factors.

Course Contract: By accepting this syllabus, you are agreeing to participate in frank discussions of some matters that are sometimes avoided in public and considered offensive or disturbing by some. These include—but are by no means restricted to—unusual ritual practices and forms of social life. If you are not ready to learn about and critically discuss such matters, do not take this course.

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:

The final grade will be determined by:

- Attendance (10%);
- Course participation (15%);
- Response paper #1 (ca. 1,500 words, 25%);

- Response paper #2 (ca. 2,500 words, 25%);
- Group project, digital presentation, & summary (ca. 1,000 words) (25%).

Attendance Guidelines: All students are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in a five-point deduction from the overall attendance and participation grades. Students with five or more unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. Absences will be considered excused only if a written request is submitted and accepted in advance or if written explanations are submitted and accepted with valid documentation.

Course Participation Guidelines: To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment. Students must read the material carefully before coming to class. In-class presentations include brief presentations (7 to 10 minutes) on selected topics/readings (from additional assigned readings). Everyone will make at least one **individual presentation** and participate in a **group presentation**.

Use of technology: During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or for accessing course readings. Students who use electronic devices for non-course purposes may be asked to put devices away and take notes on paper. Participation grades are tied to appropriate use of technology.

Response Papers (4,000 words in total): These response papers will address key issues and methodological and theoretical questions raised in the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The objective is to encourage students to read the materials closely and articulate their own informed and analytically nuanced perspectives. The format for papers is double spaced with font size 12. All papers should be uploaded via e-learning.

Group Project: In consultation with the instructor, each group will select a particular religious tradition or religious group or movement and work together on a group project, prepare a digital presentation of sources about the object of study (e.g., images, videos, text, etc.), and provide a narrative summary (ca. 1,000 words).

Grading Policies:

On UF policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grading Scale:

A	94-100 (4.0)	C	74-76 (2.0)
A-	90-93 (3.67)	C-	70-73 (1.67)
B+	87-89 (3.33)	D+	67-69 (1.33)
B	84-86 (3.0)	D	64-66 (1.0)
B-	80-83 (2.67)	D-	60-63 (0.67)
C+	77-79 (2.33)	E	Below 60 (0)

Readings:

The following **required** books are available for purchase:

- Hodgson, Dorothy L. 2005. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Nwapa, Flora. 1966. *Efuru*. London: Heinemann.
- Stoller, Paul. 1997 [1989]. *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

All other readings will be available either in electronic format through the UF library website or via e-learning.

Other resources/background reading/reference books:

- Bongmba, Elias Kifon, ed. 2012. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell (Multi-User E-book via UF Libraries catalog)
- Olupona, Jacob K. 2014. *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press (on reserve).

COURSE SCHEDULE**20 August:** Introduction & Orientation

Wainaina, Binyavanga. 2005. "How to Write about Africa." *Granta*, 92 (<https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>).

PART ONE: "TRADITIONAL" RELIGIONTopic 1: Witchcraft, Sorcery, & "Medicine"**22 August:**

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976 [1937]. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (ed. & abridged by E. Gillies). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-55.

27 August:

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976 [1937]. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (ed. & abridged by E. Gillies). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 176-204.

29 August:

Film: *Witchcraft among the Azande* (André Singer, director, 1982, 52 min.)

3 September: Frédérick Madore, guest lecture about Omeka.net for group projects

5 September: Group meetings

Topic 2: Spirit Possession**10 September:**

Stoller, Paul. 1997. *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession among the Songhay of Niger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, prologue + ch. 1-6.

12 September:

Stoller, Paul. 1997. *Fusion of the Worlds*, chapters 7-9 + epilogue.

Stoller, Paul. 1992. "Les Maîtres Fous." In *The Cinematic Griot*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 145-60.

Film: *Les Maîtres Fous* (Jean Rouch, director, 1954, 29 min.)

Topic 3: Possession & Divination**17 September:**

Boddy, Janice. 1994. "Zar." In *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 125-65.

19 September:

Shaw, Rosalind. 2002. "The Politician and the Diviner." In *Memories of the Slave Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 247-62.

Smith, James. 2004. "Of Spirit Possession and Structural Adjustment Programs: Government Downsizing, Education and their Enchantment in Neoliberal Kenya." In Brad Weiss (ed.), *Producing African Futures*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 262-93.

24 September:

Honwana, Alcinda. 2003. "Undying Past: Spirit Possession and the Memory of War in Southern Mozambique." In Birgit Meyer & Peter Pels (eds), *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 60-80.

Masquelier, Adeline. 2008. "When Spirits Start Veiling: The Case of the Veiled She-Devil in a Muslim Town of Niger." *Africa Today* 54(3):39-64.

Week 4: Mediumship & Mami Wata**26 September:**

Nwapa, Flora. 1966. *Efuru*, chapters 1 to 6.

1 October:

Nwapa, Flora. 1966. *Efuru*, chapters 7 to 17.

3 October:

Bastian, Misty. 1998. "Mami Wata, Mr. White and the Sirens Off Bar Beach: Spirits and Dangerous Consumption in the Nigerian Popular Press." In Henry J. Drewal (ed.), *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 87-94.

Film: *Mami Wata: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria* (Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, director, 1989, 59 min.)

8 October: Group meetings

PART TWO: WORLD RELIGIONS & RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS

10 October: Visit to the Harn Museum with Susan Cooksey, Curator of African Art Cole, Herbert M. and Dierk Dierking, eds. 2012. *Invention and Tradition: The Art of Southeastern Nigeria*. Prestel Verlag (selections TBA).

Carlson, Amanda B. 2019. "In the Spirit and in the Flesh: Women, Masquerades, and the Cross River." *African Arts* 52 (1):46-61
(https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/afar_a_00446).

Roberts, Allen F. and Mary Nooter Roberts. 2003. "Healing Worlds: Mouride Arts of Writing and Inscription." In *A Saint in the City: Sufi Arts of Urban Senegal*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, pp. 165-86.

*****1st Response Paper Due: Friday, 11 October at 5 pm*****

Topic 5: Islam

15 October:

Seesemann, Rüdiger. 2006. "Islam in Africa or African Islam? Evidence from Kenya." In Roman Loimeier & Rüdiger Seesemann (eds), *The Global Worlds of the Swahili*. Berlin: Lit-Verlag, pp. 229-50.

Kresse, Kai. 2006. "Debating Maulidi: Ambiguities and Transformation of Muslim Identity along the Kenyan Swahili Coast." In Roman Loimeier & Rüdiger Seesemann (eds), *The Global Worlds of the Swahili*. Berlin: Lit-Verlag, pp. 211-30.

Buggenhagen, Beth A. 2009. "Beyond Brotherhood: Gender, Religious Authority, and the Global Circuits of Senegalese Muridiyya." In Mamadou Diouf & Mara Leichtman (eds), *New Perspectives on Islam in Senegal*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 189-211.

17 October:

Adama, Hamadou. 2007. "Islamic Associations in Cameroon: Between the *Umma* and the State." In Benjamin Soares & René Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 227-41.

Sadouni, Samadia. 2007. "New Religious Actors in South Africa: The Case of Islamic Humanitarianism." In Benjamin Soares & René Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 103-18.

Topic 6: Christianity

22 October:

Peel, J.D.Y. 1990. "The Pastor and the Babalawo: The Interaction of Religions in Nineteenth-Century Yorubaland." *Africa* 60(3):338-69.

Shankar, Shobana. 2006. "A Fifty-Year Muslim Conversion to Christianity: Religious Ambiguities and Colonial Boundaries in Northern Nigeria, c. 1906-1963." In Benjamin Soares (ed.), *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 89-114.

24 October:

Kiernan, Jim. 1994. "Variation on a Christian Theme: The Healing Synthesis of Zulu Zionism." In Charles Stewart & Rosalind Shaw (eds), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 69-84.

Film: *Rise Up and Walk: The Life and Witness of the African Indigenous Churches* (John Ankele, director, 1988, 55 min.)

Roman Catholicism**29, 31 October & 5 November**

Hodgson, Dorothy L. 2005. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Pentecostalism**7 November:**

Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse." In Richard Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony*. London: Zed, pp. 182-208.

Marshall-Fratani, Ruth. 1998. "Mediating the Global and the Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28(3):278-315.

Premawardhana, Devaka. 2015. "Conversion and Convertibility in Northern Mozambique." In Michael Jackson and Albert Piette (eds), *What is Existential Anthropology?* New York: Berghahn, pp. 30-57
(<https://emory.academia.edu/DevakaPremawardhana>).

PART THREE: GLOBALIZATION, MEDIA, CONFLICTTopic 7: Religion & Media**12 November:**

de Witte, Marleen. 2015. "Media Afrikania: Styles and Strategies of Representing 'Afrikan Traditional Religion' in Ghana." In Rosalind Hackett & Benjamin Soares (eds), *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 207-26.

Ukah, Asonzeh. 2015. "Managing Miracles: Law, Authority, and the Regulation of Religious Broadcasting in Nigeria." In Rosalind Hackett & Benjamin Soares (eds), *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 246-65.

Larkin, Brian. 2015. "Binary Islam: Media and Religious Movements in Nigeria." In Rosalind Hackett & Benjamin Soares (eds), *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 63-81.

Topic 8: Religion & Conflict**14 November:**

Gifford, Paul. 1987. "'Africa Shall Be Saved': An Appraisal of Reinhard Bonnke's Pan-African Crusade." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 17(1):63-92.

Hackett, Rosalind I.J. 2012. "'Devil Bustin' Satellites: How Media Liberalization in Africa Generates Religious Intolerance and Conflict." In J. H. Smith & R. I. J.

Hackett (eds), *Displacing the State: Religion and Conflict in Neoliberal Africa*. South Bend IN: University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 153-208.

19 November:

Last, Murray. 2007. "Muslims and Christians in Nigeria: An Economy of Political Panic." *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 96(392): 605-16.

Cooper, Barbara M. 2003. "Anatomy of a Riot: The Social Imaginary, Single Women, and Religious Violence in Niger." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 37(2-3):467-512.

Seesemann, Rüdiger. 2007. "Kenyan Muslims, the Aftermath of 9/11, and the 'War on Terror.'" In Benjamin Soares & René Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 157-76.

21 November: Group meetings

*****2nd Response Paper Due: Friday, 22 November at 12 pm*****

26 November: Group project presentations

28 November: Thanksgiving break

3 December: Wrap Up

*****Group Project Due: Wednesday, 4 December at 5 pm*****

Policies, Rules, Expectations, and Resources:

1. **Multi-tasking:** Given the prevalence of technology and its attendant effects (fragmentation, interruption, poor concentration, distraction) the **use of electronic devices in class is for classroom use only**. Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned to vibrate during class (in order to be available for the UF emergency system).
2. **Handing in Assignments:** Response papers and group writing assignments should be uploaded to e-learning.
3. **Late Assignments:** You may receive an extension only in extraordinary circumstances. If you do not receive an extension from the instructor, assignment will be marked down a half grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.
4. **Completion of All Assignments:** You must complete all written and oral work and fulfill the requirement for attendance and class participation in order to pass the course.
5. **Honor Code:** UF students are bound by the Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>), and all students have agreed to follow this Code, meaning they will not give or receive unauthorized assistance in completing assignments.

6. **Writing Tips & Plagiarism:** On writing strategy and how to avoid plagiarism, see the resources here: <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/for-students/video-resources/rhetoric-strategy/>. A grade of zero will be assigned to any assignment that breaks the UF Honor Code; in such cases an incident form will also be sent to the Office of the Dean.
7. **Course Evaluation:** Students are expected to provide feedback on the course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>.
8. **Students Requiring Accommodation:** Students with disabilities requesting accommodation should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.