

AFRICAN CULTURE

Course Description

Students will learn the totality of African culture, both material and immaterial, and what makes it unique compared to other major cultures in the world. This course will expose students to the foundations of African culture and civilization that include ideas, beliefs, institutions, and practices as they relate to philosophical, religious, social, political, and economic dimensions. Issues of epistemology and ontology in African culture will also be addressed. The objective is to have a comprehensive understanding of African culture through its immaterial aspects that include language, literature, oral traditions, and different forms of material culture that will include art and architecture. Many factors have affected the culture to change into its current state. The course is interdisciplinary and the readings will draw from a wide range of sources.

About the Professor

This course was developed by Tanure Ojaide, Ph.D., Professor of Africana Studies at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

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The course will take sixteen weeks. There will be three written assignments: a 1000-word paper in each of Units I and II, and a 3,000-word paper in Week 16 in Unit III. Any of the discussion questions, which follow each week's introductory material, can serve as material for the papers to be written. The discussion questions may simply be there to promote thinking about the content of the week's required text or readings. It is recommended that you start early in the course plotting out the topics you will use for your three papers. You will note that in the first ten weeks, which comprise Units I and II, each unit's paper must be completed at the end of the fifth and tenth weeks respectively. Week 16 is devoted to a final or term paper and a subject that encompasses all the work done in the course will be recommended. For instance, a student can choose a specific aspect of African culture and discuss the development from the traditional to the modern and contemporary. It is emphasized that the written work is very important in assessing the student's performance in the course. That written work will be the place where you display your research concerns, your originality, and your personal thoughts on African culture. The bibliography following the required text for the week should provide background material for the text itself and adequate scholarly work to draw from in the short and long papers. Students are also advised to keep a diary of their reflections on the course.

Texts: There are a few required texts for this course. However, there are readings that the student should endeavor to read in order to have a good general knowledge of African culture. In the weeks with required texts, there are still readings meant to reinforce the introductory materials of the week. Students are not expected to read all the other books listed but could visit a research library to fill the gaps. Of the required books, students are advised to read the relevant chapters to the topic for that week. The required texts are as follows:

1. Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005.
2. April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.
3. Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.
4. Bamba Suso and Banna Kanute. *Sunjata*. NY: Penguin, 1999.
5. Frank Willet. *African Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985.
6. J.H. Kwabena Nketia. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton, 1974.
7. Wole Soyinka. *Ake: The Years of Childhood*. New York: Arrow Books, 1983.

Week One: Introduction

SPATIAL SETTING OF AFRICAN CULTURE: Africa is not only a geographical and political region of the world that constitutes the African continent but also is the homeland of peoples who are racially black and have a distinct culture compared to peoples of Europe and Asia. Thus, a course on African culture has to begin with defining where African culture is practiced within the African continent. What will be studied as African culture applies to the ways of life of black peoples of Africa and they are mostly located in the sub-Saharan section of the continent. While much of North Africa is now Arab and Muslim, there are still large black African minorities in Egypt, Libya, and Morocco. These blacks are indigenous to those areas where majority Arab populations now live. There are also whites, of British and Dutch origin, in South Africa as well as a white minority population in Zimbabwe. What is going to be studied as African culture in this course therefore relates to the culture of black Africans in Africa. It should also be noted that Africa has so many ethnic groups and each ethnic group or people has rather unique cultures. Thus, one must understand the diversity of African culture and it should not be seen as monolithic or homogeneous. However, despite the diversity of ethnic groups that make African peoples and culture, there are commonalities that make them as variations of the same way of life; hence African culture.

ANCIENT ORIGIN OF AFRICAN CULTURE: African culture is the oldest of cultures, bearing in mind the scientific consensus to date that the first humans originated from Africa before dispersing to other regions of the world such as Europe and Asia that also claim relatively old cultures. As Ali M. Mazrui puts it in the widely acclaimed BBC documentary "The Africans," African culture evolved as man adapted to his environment. The antiquity of Africa should not blind one to think that African culture is fixed and unchanging. The inevitable evolution of man and society and the agency of history have come to bear on African culture to make it dynamic. Like other comparable cultures worldwide, African culture is dynamic and has to adjust to so many factors and these have bearings on the different aspects of the culture to be discussed in this course.

EUROPEAN DENIGRATION OF AFRICA: Despite the acknowledged scientific origin of man in Africa, there were European thinkers such as G.W. F. Hegel and Hugh Trevor Roper who claimed that Africa had no culture and no history. One of the rationales for the colonization of Africa by the European powers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that Africa had no culture and no history; a so-called tabula rasa that had to be filled with European civilization and history. European authors saw Africa as the "Other," the antithesis to European civilization to affirm their humanity. A European writers such as Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* portrayed Africa as a wild cultureless expanse that was outside the realm of culture and civilization. The renowned Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, had to write two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, to present African culture as Africans lived it and not as Europeans perceived it from their own Eurocentric positions. In fact, Achebe in an essay, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," writes that "African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans. . . Their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty . . . they had their poetry and, above all, they had dignity" (qtd. in Killam 8). From Achebe's first novel, one sees that Africans, as represented by the Igbo people, had a way of life that ensured harmony. Nobody was above the law and there were institutions to regulate human behavior. In the

African traditional society, the wellbeing of the community supersedes that of the individual, a point that Nigerian Literature Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, also affirms in his canonical play, *Death and the King's Horseman*.

AFRICAN CULTURE THROUGH AFRICAN EYES: One has to understand African culture as Africans practiced and still practice it and not as others see it. This way of looking at it is to avoid foreign derogatory descriptions of it as barbaric and uncivilized. There is nothing that is uniquely African in barbarism or uncivilized when one knows that there was human sacrifice in Roman times and there are many past and present European practices that the African would see as uncivilized. Let me give two examples of how looking at African culture through European/Western eyes could distort the understanding of African culture on the arts and the practice of polygamy. In Europe, painting is regarded as High Art while sculpture is Low Art. On the other hand, Africans generally see sculpture as the highest form of artistic production. So while a European or Westerner will see the Mona Lisa as the greatest form of art, the African will rather see a sculptured figure such as the Benin Queen Mother as the highest form of art. Frank Willet puts it thus: "The greatest contribution Africa has made so far to the cultural heritage of mankind is its richly varied sculpture" (26). We will learn in this course that culture conditions our perspectives of cultural productions. The second point is on polygamy practiced by traditional Africans in their agrarian societies to have enough hands to farm and also to have children to overcome the high rate of infant mortality. Over the decades, polygamy has reduced drastically because of the new realities in Africa in which farming is no longer the main occupation together with better health systems and the men's inability to cope with multiple wives. Culture has to be seen through the eyes of those who practice it and not by others who see it as an exotic thing.

BALANCED VIEW: However, much as Eurocentric and Hegelian views denigrate Africa and reduce the Continent to the margins, one should not take the opposite view of an exaggerated Afrocentric or Negritudinist view to romanticize Africa. In this course, the middle ground will be followed, acknowledging Africa has a culture that has its strengths and weaknesses but not the wild gyrations of history, as Hugh Trevor-Roper, Joseph Conrad, and their likes would see it. The point continues to be made that if Africa were left alone, it would have developed in its own way.

AFRICAN FOREIGN CONTACTS: While the current age is touted as the age of globalization, Africa's contact with the rest of the world, for good or bad, has brought changes to its people and inevitably to its culture. Through the early contacts with Europeans, especially the Portuguese, then colonization by the Western powers of Britain, France, and Portugal, and the prevailing globalization, African culture has been changing due to factors from outside. At the same time, African culture has been changing due to internal factors. Populations grew, land became scarcer, and the exploitation of minerals has impacted the traditional occupations of farming, hunting, and fishing. African culture is dynamic; hence this is reflected in this course. The third unit of this course focuses on the changes which have taken place on African culture in modern and contemporary times. African culture is unique and continues to change according to the dynamics of human needs, relevance, and forces beyond the people's control.

MODERNITY AND POSTCOLONIALISM impact on African culture and will be emphasized in Unit Three of this study. The coming of Europeans through colonialism brought new political and economic institutions that were strange to the African continent but would gradually become part of the living process of the people.

THE TOTALITY OF AFRICAN CULTURE will be studied in the areas of family and kinship, religion and spirituality, oral traditions, political and economic structures, as well as the music and the arts, the health, environmental, scientific and technological aspects. The last unit will focus on how changes have affected different aspects of the culture and the challenges of remaining African in the face of the multifarious onslaughts of globalization.

Each week is introduced with a guide on what areas of the topic to look out for in your study. These introductory remarks may not always be comprehensive enough and students should endeavor to read from more sources for a fuller grasp of the specific topic.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. What constitutes African culture?
2. How should we see African culture?
3. How has African culture adjusted to foreign influences?
4. Watch Ali A. Mazrui's BBC Documentary, "The Africans: A Triple Heritage" especially Segment 1 and any other relevant segment in the series
<http://dickinsg.intrasun.tcnj.edu/films/mazrui>

Readings and Viewing

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005.

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Killam, G.D., ed. *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 1978.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Ali Mazrui. "The Africans," Segment 1. BBC documentary on DVD.

Frank Willet. *African Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

Unit I: Foundations of African Culture

Week Two: Social Structure

THE FAMILY is the social unit primarily responsible for the early development and socialization of the child. Families are the primary economic unit of production in their societies; they are like businesses because of inheritance, especially of land.

MARRIAGE is universal in Africa. While marriage focuses on the individual, each individual represents a larger group and so marriages are alliances between families through the conjugal union of a female from one family and a male from another. Marriages have a series of formal arrangements or rites. Polygamy is accepted in most African societies. In the agrarian societies, it helps to increase the population for work. Also because of the high infant mortality in traditional societies, polygamy helps to make up for survivors. It is also practical for a couple as the woman abstains from sex when breastfeeding the baby. Marriages are public arrangements involving many people and are not private. Bride price or bride wealth is paid to the bride's family by the groom to show appreciation and to cement the relationship.

PATRILINEAL AND MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES exist in Africa. There are three ways of tracing lineage: patrilineal, matrilineal, and bilateral or cognate. Patrilineal family membership is traced through males and the father is the head of the family. In the matrilineal family, membership is traced through females. The woman's brother (uncle) disciplines the children. In bilateral, membership can be claimed from either the patrilineal or the matrilineal side.

CHILDREN are very important in an African marriage. There are three levels of membership of a family: 1) immediate family (man and wife/wives); 2) lineage: those who can trace themselves to a common forefather; 3) clan: everyone who can trace himself or herself to the same kin group. There is use of "brother" and "sister" to describe this kinship on this extended family level, unlike the womb brother or sister from the same mother.

TRANSMISSION OF TRADITION is important in African culture. Initiation is a ritual and involves a period of formal training for young boys and girls between the ages of nine and sixteen, and depending on the society, occurs every three to five years and lasts from two weeks to two months. The rite of passage from childhood to manhood or womanhood was designed to teach young ones how to survive in the real world, expose them to the secrets of life and to the traditions of the society, and also to tell them what the society expects of them. For boys there is circumcision, and girls in some societies had female circumcision. In societies without formal initiations, the young ones learned from observing, listening to the elders in the daily counseling and pronouncements by following examples of the adults, parents and older brothers and sisters.

Discussion Questions

How is a child raised in traditional African culture?

What do you understand by the African saying that "It takes a village to raise a child"?

How does one trace lineage or kinship in African culture?

Reading

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Week Three: Belief Systems, Religion, Spirituality, and Philosophy

INTRODUCTION: Traditional African religions do not have sacred books of the likes of the Christian Bible, the Muslim Koran, and the Hindu Veda. The oral nature of the documenting of the tenets and practices of these religions make it difficult to give their accurate history and their not having written texts to go to for doctrines might have limited their growth and followership to world religions. Africans have traditionally no single religion unifying different or diverse ethnic groups even though a few could have following in contiguous areas. It is significant that African religions do not have the aggressive proselytizing that includes forceful conversion as with religions of other cultural groups as Christianity and Islam with their respective crusades and jihads.

BELIEFS: Contrary to Western distortion of African belief systems, Africans believe in only one Supreme God with each ethnic group giving Him a name or names. He is the creator of the universe and all humans, and he is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. He lives in the sky and while individuals can approach Him directly, this is often done through intermediaries of ancestors, gods and goddesses, and spirits because humans feel too inadequate to contact Him directly for favors and grace. Africans also believe in the hereafter, which may be in the form of unending reincarnation.

WORSHIP: This takes the form of ceremonies and rituals. Sacrifices of animals, especially chickens, goats, and bulls take place in shrines or places of worship and the members of the religion share the meat among themselves and often leave the blood and bones to the ancestors or spirits. There are places of worship and in many shrines figures represent the gods, spirits, or ancestors through whom the people make offerings to the Supreme God. There are also days of worship in the four-day or eight-day week of the particular group set aside as sacred days as with the Urhobo and Igbo groups of Nigeria with their respective *eke* and *edewor*.

VALUE SYTEM: These religions are founded in the expectation of bringing harmony to the community and also preparing adherents spiritually and morally for the hereafter. They foster a sense of community and uphold moral and ethical values that will bring this about—truth, telling right from wrong, respect for others, etc.

THE YORUBA IFA is a good example of a developed African religious system, which involves divination. The *babalawos* (traditional priests), who are trained for three to seven years, consult Ifa by interpreting sixteen palm nuts thrown on a divination tray (*opon ifa*) and through verse prescribing the sacrifice for desired blessings or averting mishap. Verses express each *odu*—as many as 256 *odus* in 1680 verses. Though oral, the Yoruba Ifa has a highly documented oral “text” that must be followed by Ifa priests.

CONCLUSION: Practitioners of African religions are not pagans, heathens, or animists and they do not practice fetishism or magic more than Christians, Muslims, and Hindus do in their respective rites; rather they pursue a spiritual value system of truthfulness among themselves and to others as they believe in a Supreme God who is merciful, and will grant their demands if they do good or out of mercy because they would change for good. The mere fact that African religions have oral texts of tenets and practices makes them to adapt more easily to new times and environments in a dynamic fashion than Christianity and Islam whose fundamentalist adherents continue to insist on things as they were written down so many centuries ago.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the concept of God in African religions?
2. What are the expected benefits of African traditional religions?
3. Compare the rituals in African religions to those of a major religion from a different cultural zone.

Readings

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

John Mbiti. *Introduction to African Religion*. Oxford, UK: Heinemann, 1991.

---. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford, UK: Heinemann, 1969.

Geoffrey Parrinder. *Religions in Africa*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1969.

Benjamin C. Ray. *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Continuity* (2nd edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000.

Week Four: African Oral Traditions: Narratives

THE FOLKTALE is perhaps the commonest form of traditional African narrative. It is anonymous because it is a product of the common imaginative genius of the group. Often folktales are narratives with animal characters that behave and act like human beings. Though with animal characters, the elders telling the story and the young ones listening know that the tales are re-enacting human behavior and actions. Folktales are usually didactic and teach moral and ethical lessons. Growing up in a traditional African

environment, one is not taught not to steal or do bad things directly but indirectly through folktales. One learns to be selfless and to desist from bad things through the lessons learned from folktales. Whoever is like the tortoise that is self-centered and greedy gets punished for the bad behaviors which destabilize society. Traditional African folktales teach one to be a constructive individual in a communal unit. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of folktales geared towards moral and ethical lessons. As indicated already, different animals are involved in folktales. The tortoise (and its water equivalent, the turtle), the spider, hyena, the fox, the elephant, the lion, the rat, birds, and others are often characters in the folktales. Many of these, such as the tortoise tales, are trickster tales in which weak or small animals outwit bigger and stronger animals. For instance, the small rat often outwits the big elephant to teach the lesson that the small can overcome the big with wit. However, a typical folktale tells the action of one animal as it relates to others and the consequence of such action. A folktale does not only teach a lesson but also explains a natural phenomenon of why the tortoise's shell is a patched body. Many of such etiological tales explain why things are what they are. However, in the tortoise tale, the lesson is not only moral and ethical but also explains that in a communal society in which the tortoise has to borrow wings from birds to fly to the sky to have dinner with God, he has to share with them too. The tale also shows that humans are interdependent. The Ananse/spider stories are common among the Akan people of Ghana and in the stories the spider displays cunning and wisdom. There are other tales about human beings as of the many variants of the beautiful girl or princess that wants to marry a spotless man or a complete gentleman. Often the girl falls in love at first sight with an ogre or snake that has transformed into a handsome man after hearing of the finicky girl, perhaps in a market; the girl marries the stranger without traditional procedure and in haste and follows him away. On the way to the stranger's home, he gives back the borrowed body parts and becomes an ogre or a snake but the woman finds herself stuck with him until she is rescued by one of the locals she had earlier rejected and be rewarded with her. While this may be a folktale common in many African patriarchal societies, it tells how humans have a desire for the ideal that often is non-existent.

THE FUNCTION OF FOLKTALES: The folktale can be a means of entertainment. However, they play an even stronger role in educating the people, especially the young about morality and ethics. Each folktale is a "text" that is taught by elders and studied by young ones for lessons of life and society. African folktales are very didactic and have lessons embedded in them. The animals in the story promote a sense of communal existence/harmony while the individual exercises some rights and obligations. Each individual contributes to the wellbeing of society and any attempt to disrupt this sense of harmony is resisted by the shaming of the over-individualistic ones. The *ajakpa*/tortoise tales of the Yoruba are a good example of the place of the individual in the community. The tortoise is greedy and goes against the spirit of communal cohesion. As John Mbiti says of the African view of oneself, "I am because we are." Other oral narratives include myths and legends.

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ORAL NARRATIVES: People are socialized to know that folktales relate to other folks in the community and understand the environment. One who transgresses the communal ethos thus becomes a pariah and is often ridiculed to discourage extreme or radical behavior that promotes selfish interests instead of the corporate one. This kind of indigenous knowledge is very important for the individual and the community. The knowledge of an individual believing in a corporate existence is fundamental to the world created by African folktales.

Discussion Questions

1. What do folktales tell us about traditional African values?
2. How significant are folktales in the raising of children in African culture?

Readings

Warren D'Azevedo, ed., *The Traditional Artist in African Societies* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1989).

Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970).

Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner, eds., *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Gordon Innes and Bakari Sidibe, eds., *Hunters and Crocodiles: Narratives of a Hunters' Bard* (Sandgate, UK: Paul Norbury/UNESCO, 1990).

Abiola Irele, "Orality, Literacy and African Literature" in *The African Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Background, Character, and Continuity* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992).

---. *Once Upon a Kingdom* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002).

Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London/New York: Methuen, 1982).

Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Trickster Tales* (Lincoln/London: U of Nebraska, 1997).

Harold Scheub, *African Oral Narratives* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977).

Week Five: African Oral Traditions: Poetry and Performance

POETIC FORMS in African culture include folksongs, abuse songs, praise chants, and proverbs. Folksongs and other types of songs are integral parts of the African oral poetry tradition. Folksongs are common songs that mainly men, women, and children sing. Sometimes they are parts of folktales. They tend to be simple and involve repetition. Many songs are associated with festivals and rituals. In addition to folksongs are many other types of songs and chants in traditional Africa. There are songs of praise as the *ijala* praise chants of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin Republic. These are praises of hunters for their bravery in confronting wild animals in the bush. *Ijala* recitals are common at the burials of hunters as the last respect for fallen comrades. In South Africa, especially among the Zulu and the Sotho, are impromptu praise chants called *izibongo*. The poet/imbongi is a colorfully and flamboyantly costumed man who recites his praises of important personalities on special occasions. The imbongi often praises kings and their chiefs and is expected to

know the history and genealogy of those praised. Since the position is often inherited from father by son, certain formulas and praise-epithets tend to run in one family's recitals. The *izibongo* requires very good memory, wit, and dramatic skills from its practitioner. As there are praise songs and chants in traditional Africa, so are there also abuse and satiric songs. There are varieties of satirical songs in Africa but the most elaborate traditions seem to be the *udje* dance songs of the Urhobo people in Nigeria and the *halo* among the Ewe of Togo and Ghana. *Udje* is a unique type of Urhobo (Nigerian) performance in which rival quarters or towns perform songs composed from often exaggerated materials about the other on an appointed day. Central to the concept of *udje* are the principles of correction and determent through punishment with "wounding" words. Rival quarters or towns used these performances to maintain their rivalry during peaceful times. By exaggerating undesirable behaviors or characteristics, *udje* dance songs were also used to establish and maintain social norms. These songs attack negative features such as adultery, flirtation, greed, harshness, laziness, miserliness, prostitution, overzealousness, stealing, and vanity, among others.

THE EPIC is a repository of a group's knowledge. It teaches a people's history, culture, the arts, and more. Of course the griot who sings the heroic tales is a human treasure and he embodies the experience of his or her people. From the various texts of *Sunjata*, *Ozidi*, and the epic of *Mwindo*, there is so much to learn about the African concept of hero. Isidore Okpewho in *The Epic in Africa* has done a thorough study of the features of the epic hero. In *Sunjata* such features include patience, courage, passion for justice and fairness, saving one's people from oppression and exploitation, and exercising of authority for the people's good. According to Okpewho, the hero represents the highest ideal to which society can aspire. The hero is a good citizen who has leadership qualities and has a passion for justice, fairness, and a sense of pride in the homeland.

Discussion Questions

1. Take a particular type of African song and discuss its content, form, and techniques.
2. What is poetic in an African praise or abuse song? Take any tradition of songs in Africa and use it to answer this question.
3. What are the cultural values of any African epic?

Required Text

Bamba Suso and Banna Kanute. *Sunjata*. NY: Penguin, 1999.

Other Readings

S.A. Babalola, *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

Stephen Belcher, *Epic Traditions of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999).

J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, ed., *The Ozidi Saga: Collected and Translated from the Oral Ijo Version of Okabou Ojobolo* (Washington, DC: Howard UP, 1991).

Trevor Cope, ed., *Izibongo: Zulu Praise Poems* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968).

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999).

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Ode Ogede, *Art, Society, and Performance: Igede Praise Poetry* (Gainesville, FL: U. of Florida Press, 1997).

D.T. Niane, *Sundiata: Epic of Mali* (Harlow: Longman, 191979).

Tanure Ojaide, *Poetry, Performance, and Art: The Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2003).

Isidore Okpewho, *The Epic in Africa* (NY: Columbia UP, 1989).

Jeff Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

Unit II: Practices and Productions

Week Six: Traditional Political and Economic Structures

INTRODUCTION: Chinua Achebe's earlier quoted statement that Africans had a philosophy of great depth before the coming of Europeans to Africa and the way the people of Umuofia ruled themselves before the colonialists and missionaries arrived in *Things Fall Apart* indicate a political structure in place in traditional African society. Though each ethnic group or unit has its own political institutions and modes of operation, each group's system is often a variant of many other groups that share similarities within the African culture.

AGE GRADES AND GROUPS matter in African culture. There are youths and elders and each group has its role in society. Usually the elders take decisions and the youths implement them. There are women's groups and they tend to be represented in a general meeting at the local village and town levels on issues affecting the people. In many communities, older women, especially postmenopausal ones, are members of the ruling councils that comprise mainly of men in the patriarchal societies. Priests and priestesses and healers are also respected in traditional councils.

KINGSHIP AND CHIEFTAINCY are the principal ruling authorities in African culture. Kingship is often hereditary or chosen by a council of chiefs from a royal lineage. The chief and a council of elders rule the village or town. The chief has to be acceptable and is never imposed on the people and he takes an oath of office to serve his people. The council of chiefs advises the king.

DEMOCRACY IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY: Kings and chiefs rule by consent of their people. The unwritten constitution of the people imposes customary limitations on rulers because the chief's authority derives from the ruled. The king is not above the law but has to obey the duties the office demands of him. When the king or chief fails his people, they

could defy him, dethrone him, or in extreme cases, as among segments of the Yoruba of Nigeria, could be asked to commit suicide. Among the Urhobo of Nigeria, the old women perform a nude dance to bring down tyrants. The African traditional council continues talking until there is agreement. Most of the decision-makers are elders who are highly respected for their wisdom and experience. The Dogon of Mali have the *togu na* (the house of words) in which nobody stands where the elders meet to resolve problems. Some critics believe traditional Africa cannot be democratic because the society is hierarchical and gives women no room in political decisions. However, even Britain with a Queen is hierarchical and so a state can be hierarchical and democratic. As for women, it took women a long time in most Western countries to have the franchise. As Chinua Achebe told Bill Moyers in an interview, Africa had democracy before the coming of Europeans to Africa. To the renowned novelist, the colonizers brought a form of dictatorship in their colonial rule.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE: As indicated earlier while talking about the African family, the family structure is tied to the economic and business structure too. A husband and a wife or wives among the Urhobo do the palm oil production together from cutting down the bunch of ripe palm nuts through their collection to a central place where the oil is extracted. In other cases, husband, wives, and children farm or fish together. As also explained earlier, it is the need for manpower that drove traditional Africans to practice polygamy so as to have as many hands as possible to farm. The decline of the agrarian economy has also led to the decline of polygamy.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the African family a business partnership?
2. In what ways will you consider the traditional African political structure democratic?

Readings

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Kwame Gyekye. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford/New York: OUP, 1997.

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Bill Moyers: A World of Ideas—Writers. One on One Interview with Chinua Achebe
<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/achebe>

Week Seven: Music and Dance

DIVERSITY: African culture has a diversity of musical traditions which are connected to hundreds of ethnic groups, each with some type(s) of music for which it is known. Despite the diversity, there are common features in African traditional music. While there are professional musicians and dancers, everybody living the culture is expected to sing or dance. Music assumes a higher profile in the traditional non-literate culture. Music is communal and is tied to rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death in different ceremonies. The professional musician is expected to have a good memory, a sweet voice, and a supple wrist to beat the drum and should apprentice himself or herself to a master musician/singer from an early age. While traditional African music is often accompanied with dance, there is personal music, group music, and what Mario Azevedo describes as "listeners' music" that is performed by professionals (254).

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS are of different varieties in Africa and one should not get the impression that Africans use only drums. Perhaps the most comprehensive classification of African musical instruments has been done by Kwabena Nketia in *The Music of Africa*. African musical instruments fall into one of these categories: 1) idiophones which are self-sounding instruments that are either rhythmic such as rattles, bells, slit drums, or melodic such as xylophones and mbira (also called sansa); 2) membranophones which are instruments with a parchment head which are single-headed or double-headed drums of different shapes, sizes, and weight; 3) aerophones that include flutes, reed pipes, horns, and trumpets; and 4) chordophones of the plucked and struck varieties that include the harp, zither, lute, and lyre. Some instruments tend to be more found in some areas than others depending upon the environment. It must be noted that Africans have names for the instruments that are often called by Western names such as the Yoruba *sekere* called the gourd rattles, the Igbo *ogene* called the slit-drum, the *bata* drum called the hourglass drum, and the Shona *mbira* called the thumb piano.

SINGING STYLES: There are a variety of singing styles in African culture. These styles are often attributed to ethnic groups. However, across Black Africa there is the lead singer followed by a chorus, what is also called "call-and-response." Choral singing seems to be limited to Southern Africa. There are work songs, abuse songs, and praise and celebratory songs. African music is distinct in its polyrhythms and reliance on percussive rhythms. Other features include repetition and improvisation; both qualities are reinforced by the orality of African culture.

DANCE in African culture is social and artistic. According to Kwabena Nketia, African dance can be simple or intricate and each type of dance accentuates a body part such as breasts, trunk, belly, chest, shoulders, upper part of the body, and buttocks/hips. Men and women tend to dance differently even in the same dance tradition and dance drama is of three types: memorial as of hunters, chiefs and priests; drama of worship as in festivals; and social dance drama.

MUSICAL TRADITIONS in Africa include Juju music among the Yoruba, highlife music in West Africa, especially in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone; rhumba/soukous in Central Africa, especially in Congo DR, and mbira among the Shona of Zimbabwe.

CONCLUSION: Music is always evolving and, as will be studied in Unit Three, there are many factors that influence the dynamism of African music.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the main features of traditional African music?
2. Discuss the main classification of African musical instruments.
3. How are music and dance related in traditional African culture?

Required Text

J.H. Kwabena Nketia. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Other Readings

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005.

Francis Bebey. *African Music: a People's Art*. NY: Lawrence Hill, 1975.

Paul F. Berliner. *The Soul of Mbirá*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978.

Graeme Ewens. *Africa O-Ye!: A Celebration of African Music*. London: Guinness Publishing, 1991.

Ronnie Graham. *The Da Capo Guide to Contemporary African Music*. NY: Da Capo Press, 2000.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Alan P. Merriam. *African Music in Perspective*. New York: Garland, 1982.

Week Eight: Arts, Crafts, and Architecture

INTRODUCTION: African art has gone a very long way from the time it was described as fetish by European missionaries and colonialists through the time Benin artworks burst into Europe after the British Punitive Expedition of 1897 to now when African arts can be found in major museums and galleries across the globe. Factors such as the vegetation and climate of an area, social and political organizations, and functionality of the work affect artistic productions in African culture. For instance, the availability of timber could affect the production of wooden figures and masks and architecture as in West Africa and Central Africa. Patriarchal societies tend to focus on drums and masks while a matriarchal society as the Ashanti's produces things that relate to women such as the *akuaba*, the so-called fertility doll that Ashanti and Fanti women carry on their backs either to induce fertility or when already conceived to enhance their chances of having beautiful female children.

KINDS OF ARTS: African arts could be described as glyptic or plastic arts; glyptic art mainly rock engravings and paintings found in caves in desert areas as in the Sahara and Namib

Deserts while plastic arts include metal, ivory, and wood works. Sculpture is the most popular plastic art form in African culture and includes works done in terra cotta, copper alloys (bronze and brass), and wood. Art works are also done in ivory, gold, and iron. One can talk of mixed media in African sculptural figures and masks as other materials other than wood are used. African rock art goes as far back as the Stone Age some 7000 years ago and might have been part of rituals of nomadic people in desert caves. Wood work is common in the rain forest and lower savannah belt areas of West Africa and Central Africa with West Africa renowned for human figures and Central Africa for huge masks as of the BaLuba and BaKongo groups. It is difficult to tell where crafts end and arts begin in Africa; they are all functional artistic productions.

AFRICAN WORLDVIEW affects the artistic productions. The belief systems of the people that involve gods/goddesses, ancestors and spirits are reflected in works. Thus there is the importance of religion and rituals or spirituality in African traditional art forms. The worldview and belief systems make African art generally representational or abstract. For instance, the African sculpture allots space according to importance; hence in human figures the head is exaggerated to show its importance in the body. Likewise, the woman's breasts and a man's genitals are also exaggerated because of their importance as life-giving forces.

FUNCTIONALITY: African art is generally utilitarian, unlike European/Western art for art's sake concept of art. Even walking sticks show social status as plate covers given by mothers to their daughters going into marriage meant to indicate the married woman's interest in resolution of marital problems. In architecture, the impluvium shows how houses are built to gather rain water in the Yoruba and Edo areas of Nigeria. Thus, functionality is a very important principle of African aesthetics because the "beauty" and "pleasure" of an African artwork lie in its function.

ARTISTIC TRADITIONS: Africa has a variety of artistic traditions and among the most famous are the Yoruba, Benin, Dogon, Bamana, Senufo, and Ashanti in West Africa; the BaKongo, BaLuba, and BaTeke in Central Africa; and the Zulu in South Africa.

Discussion Questions

1. Write a brief history of African art.
2. How has reception of African art changed in the West?
3. What are the aesthetic criteria of art in African culture?

Required Text

Frank Willet. *African Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002.

Other Readings

Suzanne Preston Blier. *African Royal Art: The Majesty of Form*. New York: Prentic Hall, 1998.

---. *Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.

Jean Laude. *The Arts of Black Africa*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: U of California Press, 1971.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Susan Mullin Vogel. *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*. New York: Center for African Art, 1986.

Week Nine: Health (Medicine and Healers), Environment, Science and Technology

INTRODUCTION: This week's assignment should be one of the most challenging in the course because little work has been done in this area. Often when scholars and students discuss African culture, this section is avoided; maybe because such people feel as if a traditional society has no health, environmental, scientific and technological aspects incorporated into its way of life. It is left for us to look for these aspects in the culture and we will find them.

HEALTH (MEDICINE AND HEALERS): African communities have their concept of the causes of ill health and how good health can be restored. Ill health or sickness in traditional African culture could result from what a person has done—the result of breaking a taboo—or the result of witchcraft from malevolent and envious folks, and the catching of diseases or sickness. Thus, there are applications of antidotes to ill health sustained from supernatural afflictions and from diseases. Medicine men/women and healers abound to take care of the physical, mental, and spiritual health of folks in the society. They have different names across the continent—*dibia* among the Igbo, *babalawo* among the Yoruba, and other names in East and Southern Africa. One of the most documented healer/diviner traditions is the *babalawo* of the Yoruba who consults Ifa through sixteen cowries thrown on a divination plate (opon Ifa) to divine the ailments or transgressions and to recommend sacrifices. Irrespective of what is actually done, the *babalawo* and other diviners give a sense of self-confidence to people who consult them. This shows the African does not believe that every ailment can be cured by ordinary medication alone. Other healers specialize in using herbs, barks of trees, and other preparations to cure sicknesses. The proof of the veracity of their cures lies in the health of traditional folks without Western-style hospitals that lived and still live long lives.

THE ENVIRONMENT is an important aspect of the people's culture and lives. Ranging from myths explaining the environment to folktales that deal with the animals around to the musical and visual arts of the people that rely on instruments made from available materials, the African environment gives sustenance as in farming, fishing, pastoral, and other occupations of the people. It is significant that the people have methods of taking care of their environment. Many gods and goddesses relate to nature as represented by rivers, hills, land, and caves, and so these are seen as sacred and treated as such. To ensure environmental conservation and sustainability of their livelihood, the environment is taken care of. Among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta of Nigeria, there are times to cut palm nuts, times to hunt, and times to fish to allow young ones grow to maturity.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: There is the astrological knowledge of the Dogon people of West Africa gained from their experience in living in the harsh and isolated environment of the Bandiagara Escarpment area in Mali. They have names for most of the stars and knew Sirius before Western astrophysicists “discovered” it. In other parts of black Africa, the people had knowledge of and practical extraction knowhow of iron and its smelting, copper and bronze works, and gold industries. From the Nok culture of Central Nigeria to the Dogon of Mali and the Fon of present-day Benin Republic and others, iron has been mined and smelted for weapons and artistic productions for centuries in Africa. In Central Nigeria and the Great Lakes region of East Africa, iron smelting goes back to at least 800 B.C., even preceding the adoption of iron in Europe (Schmidt and Childs 1995). We now know that Africans not only invented the technology of iron production on their own but that the Haya people of Tanzania produced steel when such technology was missing in Europe (Schmidt and Avery 1978). Ife and Benin’s use of bronze in the lost wax method for sculptures and figurines is legendary and for the latter continues till this moment. At Ife, geochemical analysis now tells us that the craftsmen of that ancient city produced primary glass beads and sold these beads across West Africa in the 12th through the 17th centuries (Lankton et al 2006). The Ashanti and their Akan brethren have over centuries perfected their gold mining and refining skills.

Discussion Questions

1. How has necessity generated scientific and technological discoveries in African culture?
2. In what ways were traditional Africans involved in environmental conservation and for what purpose?
3. Where do sick folks in traditional African culture go to for a cure and why?

Readings

Omoweh, Daniel A. *Shell Petroleum Development Company, the State and Underdevelopment of Nigeria’s Niger Delta: a Study in Environmental Degradation*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005.

Schmidt, Peter and D. Avery (1978). Complex iron smelting and prehistoric culture in Tanzania. *Science* 201: 1085-1089

Schmidt, Peter. and Terry Childs (1995). Ancient African iron production. *American Scientist* 83: 524-33.

Week Ten: The African Festival

FESTIVALS are occasions for particular ceremonies or rituals in African communities (clans, towns, or ethnic groups) to pause from the year’s routine works and celebrate. They are thus specific periods in the ritual calendar of communities. They are periods of rest, music and dance, and feasting with foods and drinks. Celebrants have guests, especially kinship relations who live far away and friends. The festival period is filled with conviviality and generosity.

RELIGIOUS-SPIRITUAL NATURE: African festivals celebrate different things but, irrespective of what is celebrated, there is always a religious-spiritual angle to it. Many groups in Nigeria, especially the Igbo, have their New Yam Festival to celebrate harvest. During the period, the farmers pay tribute to the Supreme God through Ani, the goddess of the earth and fertility that has ensured a good harvest. As farmers have festivals, so do fishermen and women as well as hunters, and devotees to gods and goddesses. Animal sacrifices are performed to gods/goddesses at family and community shrines to put the people in good standing before their tutelary gods. Most festivals take the form of communal cleansing at the end of the year so that the people would start the “new year” with the grace of their divine guides and guardians.

DURATION: Festivals could last one day or a week in the ritual calendar. Most traditional weeks are either four days or eight days. During that week, the celebrants do not go to the bush to farm or fish or do what they normally take as their means of livelihood and let themselves go in celebration. There are small and big festivals and while some take place every year, others take place over longer intervals of five, ten, twenty, thirty, or even more years.

MUSIC AND DANCE are common during festivals in African culture. In some Ghanaian societies, as Kwabena Nketia observes, “worship of the gods culminates in special festivals spread over a number of days. The kplezo festival of the Ga of Ghana for example, is spread over a period of one week in some of the principal towns. The activities are generally incorporated within some dramatic framework, as can be seen in the opening event of the festival celebrated at Tema, one of the principal centers of kple worship. . .” (222). In that festival, after the priest has performed some rites, the dancing begins. The dance drama often reenacts some ancient legend or myth of the people as they use the festival to reconnect with their ancestors or tutelary gods. In different parts of Africa, there would be masquerade performances or initiation dances of boys and girls celebrating their attainment of adulthood during the festival that is the culminating point of their rites of passage. While many cultural festivals still take place, they may not still retain the intensity they generated long ago; more so now with so many Africans, including traditional rulers, converted to Christianity that frowns at traditional rites.

CONCLUSION: Festivals in African culture bring together the religious, spiritual, agricultural or some other professional, artistic in the sense of musical, dance, and other aspects of the group’s lives. Each group of people, farmers, worshipers of a specific deity, musicians, or any other group set time aside in the calendar year to have a festival to recognize divine protectors and guides, reinvigorate themselves and begin a “new year” cleansed.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Choose a specific African festival of any ethnic group and explain how the celebrations are connected to the religion, occupations, and the arts of the people.
2. How correct is it to say that the African festival is the expression of what is best in the culture?
3. The festival in African culture is the culmination of the people’s expression of their values and aspirations. Discuss this in relation to a specific festival.

Readings

Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.

J.H. Kwabena Nketia. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Unit III: Modernity and African Culture

Week Eleven: African Culture Today I (New Social Structure: Family, Roles of Men and Women)

MODERNIZATION and its attendant angst have brought changes into the African family over decades. Most educated men, whether religious (Christian or Muslim), secular minded, or practicing African religions no longer practice polygamy as done by their agrarian forefathers. Similarly, women who have gone to school and gone through the high school level to the first degree or studied more are less likely to go into a polygamous relationship because of the perceived problems in such a family. With the agrarian lifestyle gone and infant mortality down, the justification for polygamy has weakened. Families find themselves working to raise cash to take care of many expenses that have become necessities such as paying their children's school fees and taxes and raising money to pay rent or build houses and buy imported luxuries.

URBANIZATION is a major outcome of changes in African culture. Even though towns have always been in some parts of Africa, especially among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, urbanization is a modern phenomenon that has seriously impacted on African culture. The towns tend to have a mixed population of people from different ethnic groups that may not have the same customs and festivals. So, while as educated people and government and industry workers men and women relate as colleagues or co-workers, the same folks are very mindful of their specific customs and families. Thus, when Africans migrate to urban areas, they do not cut themselves from their rural homes that they visit during important traditional and modern festivals and public holidays such as their festivals, Christmas, New Year, and Independence Day. Those families doing well in urban areas and out of ancestral homes send part of their earnings to supplement members of their families—parents, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, and cousins—at home.

WOMEN find their roles expanded in the rural areas as well as in the city. With population increase and less land to cultivate, rural women have less land to cultivate to take care of their children going to school. There are similar pressures on women in the city who have to play their traditional roles as wives and still go to work as their men; a problem that Mariama Ba talks about in her famous novel, *So Long a Letter*. This course will have a week to focus on women in the new state of African culture.

OUTSIDE HOME: Africans in urban areas, outside of their home areas, and even abroad have adopted traditional ideas of communal support to form migrant associations. There are hundreds of Igbo town/village associations across the United States of America.

YOUNG PEOPLE in Africa are changing with the times. They are becoming alienated from elders; those in the city no longer care much about their age-grade roles since they are cut from home. Many no longer speak their ethnic languages fluently, if at all they speak them. The greatest change comes from their adopting of Western individualistic beliefs and pop culture lifestyle promoted by globalization.

Study Questions and Activities

1. What will you tell somebody who says that African culture does not change as far as the family is concerned?
2. What factors of modernization have come to bear on the African family?
3. Look for an African family wherever you live and ask its members about their family. Note whether any of them will talk of his or her immediate family or describe the family to include relatives in the extended family.

Readings

J.F. Ade Ajayi and Toyin Falola (eds.). *Tradition and Change in Africa: The Essays of J.F. Ade Ajayi*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000.

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

Mario Azevedo and Gwendolyn Prater, eds. *African and Its People*. Dubuque, IA: Kendal/Hunt, 1982.

Mariama Ba. *So Long a Letter*. London: Heinemann, 1981.

Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin. *Africa and Africans*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988.

Ron Lesthaeghe. *Reproduction and Social Organization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

David Parkin and David Nyamwaya (eds.). *Transformations of African Marriage*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1989.

Elizabeth Wheeler. *Women of Modern Africa*. New York: Women's African Committee, 1956.

Week Twelve: African Culture Today II—the Arts and Their Transformation

CHANGES: The arts, especially art and music, continue to evolve in every culture but so many factors have brought about changes in African arts to the extent that these artistic traditions have become more hybrid than purely African. This is expected of every culture but African culture has been more changed by forces from outside than Africa has changed

other cultures. Excepting the role of African representational or abstract art on Cubism and Pablo Picasso, what else of significance has Africa done to change the artistic productions of others? Following from the earlier discussion of the arts, sculpture which used to be the main art form in traditional African art is losing its foremost position to painting which used to be practiced mostly in mountain caves in both the Sahara and Namib Deserts.

FACTORS OF CHANGE IN AFRICAN ARTS: Christianity, Western education and art teachers, Islam, and forces of modernization have all accelerated changes in African art. The tourist industry and the pressure of making money in a modern urban society have made artists more conscious of profit than at any time before. In the past, many traditional artists worked for the gods/goddesses or ancestors that made them look towards spiritual fulfillment and a sense of kinship among their communities. Other artists, as in Benin and other kingdoms, were patronized by the ruler and they were highly regarded in their societies. Today tourists have influenced art as among Dogon who perform with old masks to the Europeans and other foreign visitors who cherish the old ones over the new masks they wear to perform among themselves. Five-star hotels and airport shops sell African arts to foreigners and tourists that do not understand the tradition of the works, and so though the artists may make more money but art is being adversely affected as quality is ignored at the expense of quantity.

OTHER FACTORS that have changed the arts include increased means of communication, urban movements, mass media like the radio and television, and international art trade that has led to the theft of many African works. With improved means of communication, African artists can now procure materials and tools from anywhere in the world within weeks; instead of relying on their local environment they now have more materials and tools to work with.

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN MUSIC is a good example of changes that the culture has incurred in recent decades. Improved communication now means that Africans consume on radio and cable television what is current outside Africa, especially in the United States and Europe, and that affects the artists' own productions. Almost every musical piece, even from little-known African groups can now be accessed through You Tube. Such a global village we now live in that once a musical piece is aired in any part of the world, it instantly reaches everywhere else. African hip-hop is thus an extension of African-American hip-hop that blares in FM radio stations across the continent.

CONCLUSION: African art, music, and other artistic productions are changing fast. Such traditional architectural constructions as the impluvium have changed with new metal roofs and underground tanks in compounds. Some African art has become part of international art trade at Christie's and Sotheby's. And contemporary music has become more diversified in the blending of indigenous African rhythms with new borrowings as of Fela Ransome-Kuti's Afro beat; a mixture of Yoruba and jazz music traditions.

Study Questions and Activities

1. Go to You Tube and listen to or watch some African music performances of Senegaese Youssou N'dour, Nigerian Fela Kuti, Ghanaian E.T. Mensah, and South

African Hugh Masekela, among others to see the combination of modernity and traditionalism in African artistic transformation.

2. Will you consider African art and music benefitting or losing from the features of globalization?
3. How is tourism impacting on African arts?

Readings

Frank Willet. *African Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985.

Wolfgang Bender. *Sweet Mother: Modern African Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

J.H. Kwabena Nketia. *The Music of Africa*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Week Thirteen: **Wole Soyinka's Ake: The Years of Childhood**

THE MEMOIR GENRE TRADITION: The genre is relatively new in Africa. Since the postcolonial period, many autobiographies have been written in Africa by those who feel that their lives have something significant to share with fellow human beings. Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood* reflects the socio-cultural background, politico-economic and other features that form the backdrop of experience of the memoirist. The book explores the extent to which the major character bears testimony to the culture and events of his time and the values that come out of a specific life. This memoir also shows an African culture in transition with the coming of modernity.

THE AFRICAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE is covered in the life of Wole. He has his parents, both his mother called "Wild Christian" and his father called "Essay", his grandfather, as well as his uncle Daodu (the Principal of Abeokuta Grammar School), and a host of relatives. Thus, the immediate and extended families are part of the life of young Wole. It is interesting that relatives bring their children to his parents to take care of so as to go to school to ensure future wellbeing. His mother's bedroom is like a dormitory with many cousins sharing the same sleeping mat. Despite modernity and the stresses involved, the African family appears strong as reflected in Soyinka's memoir.

GROWING UP AND EDUCATION is covered in this text. Schooling has become part of the life of Africans who send their children to school. Wole's elementary school and his attempts to enter Government College, Ibadan, are described. Parents send their children to stay with

educated people so that their children could go to school for a better life in the new dispensation of modern Africa.

YORUBA TRADITIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE is shown here with the Alake as the traditional ruler (Oba) with a council of chiefs, the *ogbonis*. The ruler is advised by his council of chiefs and he deals with issues that affect his subjects.

YORUBA WOMEN are portrayed here in their mass movement. Headed by Mrs. Kuti, these women activists educate others through literacy programs, mass mobilization, and protest against unfair laws of the colonialists and the traditional ruler. Wole's mother was a trader and had her shop where she made some money to supplement her husband's pay as a teacher.

OTHER CULTURAL ASPECTS are shown in the memoir. The *oro* and *egungun* masqueraders show African performance tradition still thriving.

MODERNITY, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND AFRICAN CULTURE continue to have a challenging relationship. Since culture is dynamic, it absorbs elements of modernity as increasingly hybridity has become the reality of Africa today.

Study Questions and Activities

1. In what ways will you say that the African family represented in the text is vibrant and healthy?
2. What traditional socio-cultural and political aspects appear to be working in tandem with modern ones in the text? Are there tensions and how are they resolved?
3. How is Wole raised as a child?
4. Pick another African memoir and show how the writer's life has been shaped by his or her culture and historical events of the time.

Required Text

Wole Soyinka. *Ake: The Years of Childhood*. New York: Arrow Books, 1983.

Other Readings

Toyin Falola. *A Mouth Sweeter Than Salt: An African Memoir*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Aminatta Forna. *The Devil that Danced on the Water: A Daughter's Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002

Tanure Ojaide. *Great Boys: An African Childhood*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998.

Week Fourteen: African Women Today

AFRICAN WOMEN are primary custodians of African culture; hence this week's study is devoted to African women today. Women raise children with the help of men but they play a predominant role in their upbringing.

RURAL AGRICULTURE is still overwhelmingly done by women about 80% are farmers compared to 65% of men rural farmers. Women who are divorced, widowed, or still married to men with low incomes still have to cultivate crops for subsistence of their families and for sale to make income to provide other amenities for the family. The women farmers have to work against the odds of land tenure and customs that put lands under the control of men. Women members have to borrow money from rotating credit unions called *esusu* in West Africa to have capital to finance their farming. There are few female agricultural extension workers across the continent but efforts are being made to train women.

WOMEN TRADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS have an important role in the economic sphere in their families, communities, and nations. In Ghana and Nigeria, for instance, women traders are famous for their textile business, buying wholesale and retailing their fabrics. Yoruba and Ashanti women are known for their trading acumen.

MODERNITY AND SCHOOLING have raised the status of women in African culture socially, economically, and politically. Educated women now abound in most professions, including bankers and professors. This means they earn as much as their male counterparts and they are at the top tier of good wage earners in their societies. Education and good jobs also free the women from many of the abuses of patriarchal societies in which men decide for the family. In many parts of Africa, female students are as many if not more than male students.

MANY CULTURAL PRACTICES are changing with the education of women and the general enlightenment of the populace. An example is female circumcision, which has declined considerably owing to works of NGOs and the education of women.

AFRICAN WOMEN TODAY are like women anywhere else in the world. They have changed and yet maintain their African identity. An African woman banker or professor could have the same ideas and values as women from other cultures; however, she is still likely to braid her hair African-style, wear African dresses, and still have respect for the culture knowing the roles for men and women are shared equally and not weighed against any gender.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the problems that rural women face in agriculture?
2. How are educated African women coping with their state as women today?
3. What have African women gained from modernity?

Readings

Mario Azevedo, ed. *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and the African Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005).

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

David Sweetman. *Women Leaders in African History*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1984.

Week Fifteen: The Future of African Culture: Prospects and Challenges

CHANGES in political organizations, economic life, religious practice, social conditions, and values have impacted on African culture in various ways. As noted from the introduction to this course, culture is dynamic and is ever-evolving. Happenings outside and within drive the course of any culture and African culture is no exception. The knowledge (or rather lesson) from this course is that people always have a way of life and as long as Africans live, they have a culture which will continue to change according to internal necessities and pressures from outside and within.

MODERNITY has impacted on African culture and one can now talk of modern African culture in place of traditional African culture. The postcolonial condition has impacted on the culture which is no longer a pristine aggregate of ideas/customs, institutions, and practices but have been changed over time and will continue to be changed in an ever-evolving manner. It is true changes have become more rapid with modernity in the postcolonial era but that is expected of similar cultures worldwide.

EXTREME RELIGIOUS FORMS from outside, especially Pentecostal Christianity and fundamentalist Islam, are some of the threats to African culture in its evolution. Pentecostal Christianity has increased exponentially in Africa during the past two decades. The growth could have resulted from the failure of political leadership with its corruption that has led to the failure of governance. Poverty has become widespread despite the resources available in most states. Those belonging to the political and sometimes military elite classes embezzle the resources of state and leave the majority of the people in abject poverty. The rise of new churches of pastors preaching how their congregations could achieve prosperity can thus be explained in the desire of the poor to seek their socio-economic desires in these churches. Also many folks who feel insecure psychologically put their trust on miracle workers for solace. Many of these Pentecostal pastors organize crusades to destroy symbols of traditional African religions. Similarly, extreme Islamic groups are also gaining ground and attempting to subject men and women to rules that are not part of the African culture.

GLOBALIZATION has its advantages and disadvantages as far as African culture is concerned. If it were an open and fair playing field, it would be great. However, globalization seems to be more of a one-way traffic than a two-way one; it favors the developed countries more than the developing nations of Africa. Globalization has encouraged migration from Africa to the West and much of African literature today appears to be written by Africans living in the West who may be looking at Africa through the prism of the West. However, instruments of globalization such as Social Media like the Internet and You Tube help to make African culture available to the rest of the world. One can thus say that globalization is a double-edged sword that hurts and helps the culture of less powerful peoples of the world.

SYNCRETISM appears to be the realistic future of African culture. Though not new, since it has been a part of Africa's postcolonial condition, it has been reinforced by globalization and the new partnerships at all levels in the world. Africa's cultural identity will be ever-changing in the midst of internal and external dynamism.

UNENDING CONTINUUM: African culture thus renews itself in an ever-continuing flux. As some artistic and other traditions such as the Nigerian Urhobo *udje* poetic performance decline, hip-hop groups are springing up in major cities across Africa with the content and form of the songs and performance steeped in indigenous oral poetic performance traditions. New literature continues in new poetic, narrative, and dramatic forms that incorporate forms and techniques of the oral tradition. As many traditional religions decline or disappear, there is the emergence of new churches infusing Christianity with traditional African religious content.

Study Questions and Activities

1. How do the concepts of tradition and modernity apply to African culture?
2. Take a specific aspect of African culture and trace its dynamism over decades.
3. Go to You Tube and watch some contemporary African artistic production. What influence has Social Media had on contemporary African culture?

Readings

April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon, eds. *Understanding Contemporary Africa*. Fifth Edition. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

Kwame Gyekye. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. Oxford/New York: OUP, 1997.

Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Third Edition. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.

Week Sixteen: 3000-word final paper

As stated earlier, the final paper could come out of Unit III's materials but preferably a topic that encompasses the entire course. The student must show full grasp of the changes, challenges, and prospects of African culture and the theoretical underpinnings. These are some topics that students should consider for their final paper: 1) How has modernity influenced African traditions? 2) With specific reference to the arts, how has globalization influenced African culture? 3) What factors today are putting stress on the African family? 4) Take a major modern African literary work and show how the writer has incorporated traditional literary techniques. 5) To what extent can one describe African literature today as contemporary as different from modern or traditional? Students could choose to write on topics that incorporate some of the ideas in these questions in their own topics.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

- 1.1. Discuss the different authors, trends and forms that form the subject of the course.
- 1.2. Identify distinguishing features of African culture.
- 1.3. Analyze the place of each topic in African culture.
- 1.4. Understand African culture as it relates to historical, social, political, and economic contexts.
- 1.5. Research and critically evaluate scholarship relevant to each week's topic in the context of African culture.
- 1.6. Use secondary sources and close reading skills to produce a substantive critical essay relating one or two texts to particular historical, social, political, economic or other factors that have impacted on African culture.
- 1.7. Demonstrate a balanced perspective and a deepened understanding of the times, people, and situations that produce cultural phenomena.
- 1.8. Write coherent literary arguments that explore the relationships of various concepts and texts, and which provide a clear synthesis.

Course Objectives:

- 1.1. Provide students with a broad perspective of approaches to African culture and the various ways in which they manifest themselves and to assess students' ability to express their perspectives through exams and essays.
- 1.2. Provide students with a deeper understanding of diverse aspects of the course and to express the deepened understanding in written tests and a critical essay.
- 1.3. Provide an overview of literary analysis and interpretation methods and help students apply these skills in writing critical essays and examinations.
- 1.4. Identify major features of African culture.
- 1.5. Read widely and critically in a variety of books on African culture and to demonstrate the depth and breadth of this reading in essay examinations and a critical essay.
- 1.6. Do a library research on a particular aspect of African culture, the family, or an issue in the area of gender studies and to write a critical essay which incorporates this research.

Course Preparedness:

This course is an African culture course. It assumes the mastery of prerequisite college-level skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing, and essay writing. It also assumes the ability to read and analyze texts. This course provides instruction in African culture and does not address remedial writing issues at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level. This course requires college-level writing skills that exceed those required at the secondary level.

Course Workload:

For a sixteen-week course, students can expect to devote a minimum of 6 hours of independent study per week in order to complete the coursework. If students are taking the course in an accelerated 8-week mode, they can expect to devote a minimum of 12 hours per week of study.

Assessment Strategy:

Learners will demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and their ability to engage in critical thinking and problem solving activities.

- *Journal Entries/Discussion Questions.* Designed to help students to identify authors, their works, literary terms, and concepts. Students will also analyze texts, connect the authors and texts, and critical concepts. Students should also look at texts from multiple perspectives in order to evaluate their own thought processes.
- *Synchronous Online Activities.* Designed to help learners apply the concepts in the course to texts, and to share their insights.
- *Essays/Research Paper.* Designed to help students write scholarly papers.

Activities:

1—READING

Please read the textbook assignments in your reading lists.

2—REVIEW

Students will review Study Guide questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and the concepts. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help them write the essays.

3—WRITING

Students are required to write a total of two (2) unit essays and a final essay. The unit essays will be at least 1000 words in length, and will be turned in at the end of each unit. Each essay will be 25% per unit. The final essay will be at least 3,000 words in length and will be turned in at the end of the course. The final essay will be 50% of grade points.

The essays are comprehensive discussions and should contain the following elements:

Clear thesis statement

Analysis of the topic, with supporting textual evidence

Insights and interpretations

Clear conclusion

Works Cited (use MLA style: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>)

Definition of Grades:

Graduate Courses

- A Outstanding Achievement
- B Commendable Achievement
- C Unsatisfactory*
- F Failing*

*Students receiving this grade in a course that is required for his/her degree program must repeat the course.

- I The Incomplete "I" grade is given at the discretion of the instructor when a student who has completed **at least two-thirds of the course class sessions** and is unable to complete the requirements of the course because of uncontrollable and unforeseen circumstances. The student must convey these circumstances (preferably in writing) to the instructor prior to the final day of the course. If an instructor decides that an "Incomplete" is warranted, the instructor must convey the conditions for removal of the "Incomplete" to the students in writing. A copy must also be placed on file with the Office of the Registrar until the "Incomplete" is removed or the time limit for removal has passed. An "Incomplete" is not assigned when the only way the student could make up the work would be to attend a major portion of the class when next offered.

An "I" that is not removed within the stipulated time becomes an "F." No grade points are assigned. The "F" is calculated in the grade point average.

- W **Withdrawal** Signifies that a student has withdrawn from a course after beginning the third class session. **Students who wish to withdraw must notify their admissions advisor before the beginning of the sixth class session in the case of graduate courses, or before the seventh class session in the case of undergraduate courses.** Instructors are not authorized to issue a "W" grade.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas or work as one's own. Students must give credit for any information that is not either the result of original research or common knowledge. If a student borrows ideas or information from another author, he/she must acknowledge the author in the body of the text and on the reference page. Students found plagiarizing are subject to the penalties outlined in the Policies and Procedures section of the Catalog, which may include a failing grade for the work in question or for the entire course. The following is one of many websites that provide helpful information concerning plagiarism for both students and faculty:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Ethics:

Ethical behavior in the classroom is required of every student. The course will identify ethical policies and practices relevant to course topics.

Technology:

Students are expected to be competent in using current technology appropriate for this discipline. Such technology may include word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software. Use of the internet and e-mail may also be required.

Diversity:

Learning to work with and value diversity is essential in every class. Students are expected to exhibit an appreciation for multinational and gender diversity in the classroom.

Civility:

As a diverse community of learners, students must strive to work together in a setting of civility, tolerance, and respect for each other and for the instructor. Rules of classroom behavior (which apply to online as well as onsite courses) include but are not limited to the following:

- Conflicting opinions among members of a class are to be respected and responded to in a professional manner.
- Side conversations or other distracting behaviors are not to be engaged in during lectures, class discussions or presentations.
- There are to be no offensive comments, language, or gestures

Students with Disabilities:

Students seeking special accommodations due to a disability must submit an application with supporting documentation, as explained under this subject heading in the General Catalog. Instructors are required to provide such accommodations if they receive written notification from the University.

Writing Across the Curriculum:

Students are expected to demonstrate writing skills in describing, analyzing and evaluating ideas and experiences. Written reports and research papers must follow specific standards regarding citations of an author's work within the text and references at the end of the paper. Students are encouraged to use the services of the University's Writing Center when preparing materials.

The following website provides information on APA, MLA, and other writing and citation styles that may be required for term papers. <http://www.bibme.org>