

# Yoruba Culture & customs

Course number: **SSA 4930 Special Topics**, spring 2019

Venue: AND 0013

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**Time:** Tuesday 5-6 (11:45am to 1:40pm)

Thursday: 12:50 to 1:40pm)

## Introduction.

The two concepts of culture and customs are interrelated; one is the totality of the ways of life of a people while “custom is a traditional way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular place, time or society.” Customs, therefore, are a part of the cultural matrix. There are many ways to learn about other people and their ways of life. Understanding the culture and customs of people different from us allows us to deeply appreciate what is ours.

There are about 30 million native speakers of the language found in southwestern Nigeria and South-eastern Benin Republic. There are also descendants of Yorùbá people transported to the New World during the Transatlantic slavery of 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; most especially in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, etc. who speak variations of the language and claim the Yoruba identity.

## Course Description

Multi-faceted perspectives will be provided on the lived experiences of Yorùbá people with insights from anthropology, arts, language and linguistics, literature, history, religion, sociology, philosophy, psychology, criminology, law, technology, medicine, pharmacy, engineering, economics, education, political science, music, theater, popular culture, cultural studies, migration, gender and diaspora studies etc. Each week the class will address selected cultural practices and follow with tangible changes that have taken place in the culture over time. This blend between traditional culture and modifications to such cultural practices and philosophy gives a balanced and authentic picture of what can be regarded as culture and customs in present-day Yorùbá society.

To show grounded understanding of the weekly subjects, there will be weekly reflections and properly researched essays to demonstrate competence and deep level interpretation of text and context. The course fulfils both the Humanities (H) and Cultural diversity requirements.

## Course objectives

Learners will become cross-culturally proficient as they critically evaluate ideas and cultural practices different from theirs.

## Class Text

Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press, 2017, pp. 1040.

## Recommended Materials

George, O. (2016). What the Forest Told Me. Yoruba Hunter, Culture, and Narrative Performance. *Research In African Literatures*, (3), 193.

Forde, C. D. (2017). *The Yoruba-speaking peoples of southwestern Nigeria*. London; New York: Routledge.

Peel, J. Y. (2016). *Christianity, Islam, and Oriṣa-religion: three traditions in comparison and interaction*. Oakland, California: University of California Press,

## ATTENDANCE POLICY AND EXPECTATIONS

Each student is encouraged to attend classes regularly and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Students are, however, allowed two unexcused absences. Beyond that, each additional absence will require a medical note/excuse verifying illness. In case of family emergency, you will need to show proof in accordance with UF policy, failing which; your final grade will be lowered by a one-letter grade. Assignments are to be handed in as at when due. Late papers will be assessed a penalty of one-half letter grade out of fairness to those who hand in their work on time.

**COURSE EVALUATION:** Your final grade in this course will be based on the following:

<i>Class attendance,</i>	<i>300 points</i>
<i>Weekly learning journals (Reaction papers on each custom and cultural practice)</i>	<i>300 points</i>
<i>One mid-term test</i>	<i>100points</i>
<i>Final project/exam</i>	<i>300 points</i>
<i>Total:</i>	<i>1000 points</i>

*Weekly learning journals will have extra research done on the themes & topics of the week)*

## GRADE CORRESPONDENCE

930-1000 = A	900-920=A-	
870-890 = B+	830-860 =B	800- 820 = B-
770-79 = C+	730-760 = C	700-720 = C-
670-690 = D+	630-660 = D	600-620 = D-
Below 600 =E		

### Important Dates to Note: January 21: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Spring Break: - March 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9th

Classes end April 24 (ours on 22<sup>nd</sup>)

Reading days April 25 – 26

Final exam: April/01/2019 @ 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

### Points to Note:

A blog on music

<http://blogs.longwood.edu/samiuah/2012/04/30/the-importance-of-music-in-the-african-culturemore-than-just-a-song/>

## YORÙBÁ PEOPLE and their LANGUAGE

Yorùbá is a tonal language spoken in Nigeria by about thirty million people and in the neighboring countries of the Republic of Benin and Togo. In Nigeria, Yorùbá speakers reside in the Southwest region in states such as Òyó, Ògùn, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Kogi and Kwara states. **Yorùbá is a Kwa language**, which belongs to the **Yoruboid group**. Apart from about 30 million native speakers of the language found in south-western Nigeria and South-eastern Benin Republic, there are also descendants of Yorùbá people transported to the New World during the Transatlantic slavery of 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; most especially in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, etc. who speak variations of the language.

Yoruba is a tonal language and so it is important to pay attention to the tones in the language. Tones occur on the syllable in Yorùbá but in the orthography, tones are marked on vowels and syllabic nasals. There are three basic tones of different pitch levels in Yoruba: High, Mid and Low. In the writing system, the High and Low are marked with ( ´ ) and ( ` ) respectively, over the vowel. The mid tone is generally unmarked except where there might be ambiguity or confusion.

## WEEKLY BREAKDOWN OF THE COURSE

**WEEK 1-Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> of three sessions: Introduction to the course, the syllabus and my expectation. The link below captures the general overview of the course.** <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Mauritania-to-Nigeria/Yoruba.html>

**Video on Yoruba History and some of their exploits-** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCUIbS-c3hk> , Yoruba economic system, how laws were made, even how kings were deposed, and many more.

**January- & 10<sup>th</sup>-(2) Yoruba language is said to be head initial, so what is the difference between a language and a dialect? What can be learned from understanding how a people communicate?** Language, Orature, and Language Use. (1). Akínbíyì Akinlabi and Harrison Adéníyì (2017). The Language and its Dialects (pages 31 to 41)

**Week 2-Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> :** First class session-. Clement Adéníyì Àkàngbé (2017). Non-verbal Communication (pages 47 to 57).

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> (2).** Adépéjú Johnson-Bashua (2017). “È kú...” Yorùbá Greetings – A protocol (pages 69 to 83).

**Week 3: Monday Jan 21<sup>st</sup> -- No class through out the campus**

**Tuesday, Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> Names and naming in Yoruba culture are very important pillars of the culture. What a person is addressed as has both secular and spiritual connotations.** (2) Video screening of a typical naming ceremony (1). **Reading:** Harrison Adéníyì (2017). Naming, Names, and Praise Names (pages 85-95)

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> Reading and discussion-(3).** Murray Heller (1975). Black names in America: origins and usage Boston, G.K. Hall.

**Week 4. 29<sup>th</sup> Jan to 31<sup>st</sup> Theme: What are insults? Why study insults?**

There are negative sides to every culture and Yoruba culture has no immunity against such negative tendencies and cultural practices. The question to ask is what can be learned from such negative sides of the culture. **Article for the first class session-** Léré Adéyemí “Ribal Language: Insults, Slangs, and Curses” (pages 113 to123). A few samples of songs from video clips.

Jan 29<sup>th</sup> ,: (2). Tope Omoniyi (1995). Song lashing as a communicative strategy in Yoruba interpersonal conflicts. Text & Talk, pages 299-315. (To be downloaded from online)

Jan 31<sup>st</sup> **Third class session-(3).** Saudat Adébí sí Oláyídé Hamzat (2017). Songs. In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press, 2017, (pages) Video of samples of such songs

**Week 5 Feb 5<sup>th</sup> – Theme Storytelling and cognomens-**Yoruba and storytelling: theory & practice. The sessions will look at a number of articles and storytelling performances. First Session - Adémọ́lá Dasyíva. Folklore, Oral Tradition, and Oral Literature (pages 139 to 158). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press, 2017, .

**Feb 5<sup>th</sup> session.** Aside from stories, there are other creative expressions Yoruba people use in identifying each other; one of such are cognomens, which come in various forms. Read the article by- Moses Mábayọ́jẹ - Eulogy and Cognomen (pages 125 to 137). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press, 2017.

**Feb 7<sup>th</sup> Third session** will feature demonstrations of storytelling performances.

## **Week 6- Feb 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Theme-Art and beauty**

A people can also be known through their works of art and the value placed on such items. In the three sessions, 'Art and Aesthetics' will be our focus. How different are the way Yoruba people build and organize their spaces?

Feb 12<sup>th</sup> ---Reading for the class-Abímbọ́lá O. Aşojó (2017).Architecture: Transition from Indigenous to Modern, (pages 191- 201). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Feb 12<sup>th</sup> - second Session**, we look at how spaces are organized. Abímbọ́lá O. Aşojó and Babátúndé Jaiyéọba (2017). **Settlement Pattern** (259 to 268). ). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Feb 14<sup>th</sup> -what is the difference between Art & craft?** -final session, we will look at Arts and crafts in preparation to a virtual visit to the Harn museum. The article by Adémọ́lá Azeez (2017). **Art and Crafts** (203 to 214). ). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

## **Week 7. 19<sup>th</sup> February & 21<sup>st</sup> February- Religion, Festivals, and Belief System**

Rebecca McKee states that, "[t]he discipline of Religion examines diverse cultures and the ways in which each has answered questions of existence, meaning, and purpose. Scholars of religion use an interdisciplinary methodology to understand religious systems, including sacred text, space, ritual, lifestyle, and organization." McKee is not alone in helping to answer the question of why study religion at all when it is so subjective and personalized. In any case, what a people believe and how they worship the Supreme Beings tells us a lot about their culture and way of life. During the week, we turn our focus on "Religion, Festivals, and Belief System."

**19<sup>th</sup> Feb. Session 1**-Reading-Şégún Ògúngbèní (2017). Traditional Religious Belief System (309 to 324). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> Session** – Reading-Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Babátúndé Adéshínà Faustino (339-354).Extra-mundane Communication: Insights from Festivals and Carnivals. In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Feb. 21 Session 3**- Review the Robert W. Woodruff, AUC, Traditional African Religions Research website; Traditional African Religions: Yoruba at <https://research.auctr.edu/c.php?g=404402&p=2752855>

## **Week 8 Feb. 26<sup>th</sup> & Feb 28<sup>th</sup> - Belief system in practice (what is done and how to do it)**

**Feb 26<sup>th</sup> Session 1**- Ọmọ́tádé Adégbíndín (2017). **Divinatory Systems** (363-378). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Feb. 26<sup>th</sup> Session 2**- Ìbígbọ́ládé Adéribígbé (2017). **Ritual and Sacrifice** (325-338). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

Feb 28<sup>th</sup> **Session 3**- Martin Tsang (2017) **Spirits and Spirit Possession** (433- 444). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

## Spring Break Saturday March 2<sup>nd</sup> to Friday March 8<sup>th</sup>

### Week 10 March 12<sup>th</sup> & March 14<sup>th</sup> Theme Economic system

- In the Yoruba worldview, there is a linkage between religion and commerce. A goddess of commerce (Ajé) is invoked when profit is the essence. To understand the “Economy and Economic System” allows for a deeper appreciation of how wealth is produced and distributed.

**March 12<sup>th</sup> Session** - Olúfẹ́mi Adéòṣun (2017). Associations: Cultural, Cooperative, and Religious (473- 481). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 12<sup>th</sup> Session 2-** Saudat Adébisí Oláyídé Hamzat (2017). **Economy, Commerce, and Wealth** (511- 519). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 14<sup>th</sup> Session 3-** Olúwólé Tẹ̀wọ̀gboyè Òkẹ̀wándé (2017). **Markets, Marketing, and Advertisement** (553-565). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

### Week 11. March 19<sup>th</sup> & March 21<sup>st</sup> Intersection of family and culture

The definition of family is culture specific and can be influenced by the nature of the economy. In economies that are mostly informal, members of the family form part of the work force and extended family members help act as contact points for business and enterprises.

**March 19<sup>th</sup> Session 1-** Adéboḷá Bọ́lájókó Dasyva (2017). Family, Indigenous Education System and Discipline (709-720). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 19<sup>th</sup> Session 2-** Enoch Olújídé Gbádégeşin(2017). **Marriage and Marital Systems** (721-732). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 21<sup>st</sup> Session 3-** Tóyìn Oláiyá (2017). Childbirth, Childbearing, and Child Education (669-682). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

### Week 12. Mach 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> Theme Food, cultural implications

The ecology of a place is one of the factors that help shape what people eat and drink. Preparation of meals is also shaped by energy requirement and accessibility. There is a lot to learn from what people eat and how the meals are consumed. There is also a religious aspect of foods and drinks. The Yoruba culture has some prohibitions and taboos when it comes to meals.

**March 26<sup>th</sup> Session 1-** Olúfadékẹ́mi Adágbádá (2017). **Cuisines and Food Preparation** (481-494). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 26<sup>th</sup> Session -**Dúró Adélékè (2017). **Drinks: Beverages and Alcohol** (495-510). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**March 28<sup>th</sup> Session -** Olátúbọ̀sún Christopher Ọ̀mọ̀léwu (2017). **Taboo** (445-458). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), *Culture and customs of the Yoruba*; Pan-African University Press.

**Week 13. April 2<sup>nd</sup> & April 4<sup>th</sup> Theme- Music & Fashion**

“Music has traditionally played an important role in African culture. It is essential in representing the strong African heritage and its importance seen in many aspects of the culture. Unlike many cultures today, ancient African cultures encompassed music into their everyday lives. Dance, story-telling and religious practices are all grounded on the music of the culture.(History of African Music)” Online

In addition to music is also fashion and both music and fashion in their original forms speak to the nature of the land and the people who derive their sustenance from it.

April 2<sup>nd</sup> **Session 1-** Bọ̀dẹ̀ Ọmọ́jọ̀là (2017). Music and Dance in Culture and Performance (407-420). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), Culture and customs of the Yoruba; Pan-African University Press.

April 2<sup>nd</sup> Session - Adéjọlá Agòkẹ̀ (2017). Fashion (295-307). In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), Culture and customs of the Yoruba; Pan-African University Press.

April 4<sup>th</sup> Session - Ayọ̀lọ́lá Ọládùnkẹ́ Àràńsí (2017). Body Adornment and Cosmetics. In Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (Eds.), Culture and customs of the Yoruba; Pan-African University Press.

**Week 14: April 9<sup>th</sup> & 11**

**Exploration of videos and websites on Yoruba culture**

Session 1: Popular songs, meaning & issues

Session 2: Modern day customs/fashion and performances

**April 11<sup>th</sup>** Session 3: Demonstrations and exhibition of Yoruba artefacts

Week 15: April 15<sup>th</sup> & April 18<sup>th</sup>

Round up with questions and review of the semester

Week 16: **March 22<sup>nd</sup>** Last Day of class

Final exam: Final Exam: 5/01/2019 @ 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

**End Notes:****Preserving the Yoruba Language**

By Oladele Awobuluyi

The Yoruba community in Nigeria is currently experiencing the early stages of what students of Linguistics know as language shift. The latter occurs when a given community completely abandons its native language and fully adopts another language instead. Such other language may be another language within that same community, another language spoken in a neighbouring community, or a language that is native to another country altogether.

Language shift usually begins with a negative change in the attitude of native speakers to their own language. Indications of such a negative change are easy to observe in the Yoruba community today. Thus, that community now has parents who would not want Yoruba spoken to their growing children anywhere, whether in the home, at school, or even on the streets. Children raised by such parents would, as adults, know no Yoruba that they could ever pass down to their own children. There are other parents in that same community who, like one former Governor there, would like Yoruba confined to the home and not used or taught at all elsewhere in society. For the children raised by such parents, Yoruba would at best be only a spoken language, and one that is, therefore, to be valued less than, say, English and French, both of which are spoken and written everywhere in their respective communities. Yoruba-speaking students in large numbers now avoid studying Yoruba in tertiary institutions, for fear, first, that doing so would greatly lower their esteem among their peers and, second, that it would not land them any really desirable jobs in society. To cite only one more example, many highly placed Yoruba-speaking persons in society today view the language with contempt and disdain, so much so that yet another former Governor is said to have once advised all the Yoruba teachers in his State to find something better to do than teaching a language that could not be used to teach highly esoteric and awesome subjects like Science and Mathematics, but was only good enough for uttering incantations and reciting verses from the Ifa divinatory corpus....”

Oladele Awobuluyi  
Retired Professor of Linguistics  
Former Acting VC, AAU, Akungba-Akoko  
Chairman, Yoruba Cross-Border Language Organisation