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*Virtual exchange methodological seminar*

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# Methodology of Research in Religious Studies

## For an Interdisciplinary Approach

Organised by

Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose (FSCIRE) – Italy

Theologische Universiteit Appeldoorn (TUA) – Netherlands

Kenyatta University (KU) – Kenya

Makerere University (MAK) – Uganda

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**March – June 2025**

### General information

**Dates:** March 27th, April 10th, April 30th, May 15th, May 29th, June 12th, June 26th

**Time:** CET (Central-European Time): 4-6 pm, after March 30th, CET will be 5-7 due to the switch to daylight-saving time. EAT (Eastern African Time): 6-8pm.

**Modality:** Virtual Exchange

**Zoom link:** it will be provided few days before the beginning of the seminar

**Contact person for registration (for more details see below):** Francesco Cargnelutti, [cargnelutti@fscire.it](mailto:cargnelutti@fscire.it)

**Deadline for registration:** April 4th, 2025

### Purpose of the seminar

The purpose of the seminar is to enable students to:

- Acquire a broader set of tools (from the critical-historical and the theological methodological approaches) to study and research religion from an interdisciplinary perspective. Although each discipline (history and theology) has its specific methodology, the interpretation of sources (interpretive approach) plays a central role in both research perspectives. Methodologically, the course aims to train students to be “systematic interpreters”.
- Address the question of “how knowledge from the past works in practice”, by bringing historical and theological sources into dialogue with people.
- To learn about the contribution of post-colonial African theology and African feminist approaches to the way we discuss about and research religion.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the seminar, students will be able to:

- Become familiar with the methodological framework employed in the critical-historical study of religion, including the identification, analysis, and contextualization of primary and secondary sources, with particular emphasis on narrative sources.
- Engage with the concept of “Theological Action research”, which employs an empirical approach to problem-solving. This method involves working in the field with a group of people who deal with a controversial problem (such as power differences, post-colonial issues, leadership, moral education of the next generation) as well as deepening the religious theological conversation in the context.
- To assess the impact of the African post-colonial and feminist discussion on the field of Religious Studies.
- To enhance their critical thinking, acquire strong intercultural communication skills and improve their self-confidence, thanks to the different Virtual Exchanges activities implemented

## Seminar structure, content and schedule

The seminar is structured into three primary components (historical method, applied theological perspective, and African point of view) and seven different modules. Each module is composed of two parts: an introductory lecture and a specific interactive activity. Students will be divided in small international break-out groups and will participate in these activities under the guidance of trained facilitators. The aim of these student-centered activities (based on the Virtual Exchange Model), is to promote an intercultural and transnational exchange of ideas. These activities, including source analysis, text discussion, and fieldwork projects, are integral components of the seminar.

### March 27th

*Introduction* – Dr. **Iliaria Macconi Heckner**, Dr. **Francesco Cargnelutti** (FSCIRE), prof. **Bram de Mynck** (TUA)

In this section the VEREAD (Virtual Exchanges in Religious Euro-African Dialogue) learning approach is introduced, along with its interactive, interdisciplinary and student-centered nature. The seminar's outline and the description of the different activities are then provided. Finally, the students' expectations will be discussed.

### April 10th

*The “Historian's Craft” and its Critical Thinking Skills as Tools for Citizenship: Contextualising, Analysing, and Interpreting Primary and Secondary Sources* – Prof. **Silvia Cristofori** (FSCIRE, UNILINK).

The aim of this seminar is to provide some tools for recognizing conspiracy theories. These tools are primarily drawn from the toolbox of the “historian's craft” and will help distinguish and contextualize the sources through which we obtain information. Students will therefore have the opportunity to apply these tools by engaging in a guided exercise on the topic of “the great replacement”, as an example of a contemporary conspiracy theory.

## April 30th

*Alternative sources for the Study of Religion: Oral History and Narrative Interviews* – Dr. **Ilaria Macconi Heckner** (FSCIRE)

In this module, the main characteristics of Oral History sources and Oral Tradition will be examined, along with an analysis of their relevance for the study of African religious history and an evaluation of their limitations. The discussion will then focus on narrative interviews as a method for collecting living individuals' testimonies about their past. Students will then engage in a small-group discussion regarding texts that critically approach the use of Oral History (and that they have already analyzed prior to class).

## May 15th

*Theological Action Research: method and background of the 'four voices approach'* – Prof. **Bram de Muynck** (TUA)

The first lecture of this module explains the background of the method with its 'four voices approach' and discusses the steps necessary for successful research. Students have to read two basic texts about the method, that are referred to during the lecture. They will also organize an exemplary group meeting with participants of a potential project (they will be instructed for it during the first meeting).

## May 29th

*The character of theological reflection and its 'problem solving potential'* – Prof. **Bram de Muynck** (TUA)

In the second class, students will focus on (a) the character of theological reflection and (b) the ways in which religious and philosophical language can be used to solve institutional problems and to nourish the vision of the problem at stake.

## June 12th

*Post-colonial African Theology and its contribution to the theological reflection and to the historical research framework* – Dr. **John Bosco Kamoga** (MAK)

The main objective of this session will be to engage in a critical appreciation of the developments that have taken place in 'African' theological reflection in the so-called post-colonial era. Part of the introductory material discussed in the first hour will be aimed at problematizing the era in question, as well as the epithet, African. I will make effort to speak to the different theologians from Africa who have made their contribution to theological reflection, and the paths they have taken, paying a close attention at the task they felt called to in their reflection. We shall interrogate, albeit in a condensed manner, the sources employed, and the achievement of their efforts, as we attempt to be open in answering the question, what is the novelty and impact of 'post – colonial theological reflection from Africa' on the current trajectory of theological research and historical framework in the academia and praxis on the continent. The course is intended to be interactive and discussive, but participants will be asked to prepare for the lecture by reading three articles to stimulate our critical engagement. The participants will be invited in the last 45 or so minutes, to speak to their take-away points and what they perceive as actionable points in pursuit of an impactful 'African' theology that contributes to an alleviation of the challenges abounding on the continent.

**June 26th**

*Feminist approach to the study of religion and to theology: The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.* – Prof. **Philomena Njeri Mwaura** (KU)

The objective of this module is to provide an overview of the feminist approach to the study of religion and theology. The module will address the specific case study of the “Circle of Concerned Women Theologians,” focusing on a concise historical account of the Circle, its theological tenets, the sources and methods employed, and the salient issues it has addressed. The activities in this module include reading and analyzing texts by authors especially from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, as well as discussions on topical issues in international and intercultural groups.

## Registration

Registration for the seminar is open to everybody. You just need to email Francesco Cargnelutti (cargnelutti@fscire.it) sharing with him your name and last name. If you are or were a student, please specify your academic background (university, department, discipline, academic level).

## Students' evaluation

Participants will be evaluated based on their active involvement in the activities and they will receive CTS credits as compensation. Participants who are not enrolled in one of the organizing universities/institutions will receive a participation certificate of attendance from FSCIRE.



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