

Repatriation and a Holistic Concept of Africology (Black/African Studies): The Impact of Africa-Centered and Pan African Perspectives on the Lived Experiences of Black/African Scholars

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Abstract

The repatriation of Black/African Africa-centered (Cooper & Morrell, 2014) and Pan Africanist (Adi, 2018) scholars located in the African Diaspora to Africa is indispensable to Afrocentric (Asante, 2021) epistemic agency. Their repatriation to Africa is central to achieving irreversible intellectual authenticity needed for permanently warding off Eurasian forces historically and culturally aligned against the survival of African people. There are two cynical issues accepted as givens. Firstly, there is an inherence of tacit acceptance and consensus that African-rooted knowledge systems guided by Afrocentric universities must concede legitimacy to Eurasian knowledge systems. Secondly, the lack of unified political systems and governance on the African continent also auctions Africa-centered and Pan African knowledge production to conquered and substituted imperial and colonial production of being and knowing in time and space. These dangerous assumptions beg a series of important questions that this endeavor will attempt to tentatively address. 1. How must Africa-centered and Pan Africanist scholars located in contemporary North America, the Caribbean, South and Central America, as well as western Eurasia (i.e., destination sites of forced migration) broach the geography and anthropology, as well as the hermeneutics, of the emancipatory project that seeks to rescue Africa-centered and Pan African knowledge production systems from the tyranny of historical and cultural legacies of the violence of the “coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2007, p. 171; Quijano, 2000, p. 533)? 2. Do such emancipatory thinkers based in Africa proper have a moral, ethical, and epistemic responsibility to re-situate the dynamics of Africa’s quest toward full emancipation given the emerging global system in the 21st century? This emancipatory task is both daunting and needed for a continent whose population is fast exceeding a billion and rolling toward 2 billion in the nearest futures. This essay considers the intricacies of the push-pull factors that may impact some Africa-centered and Pan Africanist scholars’ decisions, regarding domicile, to remain complacent, to live and work outside of Africa, ultimately failing to fully ground their theories in the concrete moral, ethical, and existential realities of the African. The object of this essay is to (1) offer tentative initial reflections to better understand why so many Africa-centered and Pan Africanist scholars do not conduct most of their work in Africa, and (2) explore the benefits of choosing to live and work on the African continent as it relates to moral, ethical, intellectual, and epistemic emancipation of self and the continent at-large.

Keywords: Africology, repatriation, emancipation, Africa-centered, Pan African, academy

Author's Note: To retain linguistic precision, certain terms quoted from primary and secondary texts that may be offensive are retained, even as I do not profess to endorse their non-analytical contemporary usage. In addition, “Black” and “White” are capitalized when used as racial identities to reflect their status as socially and historically constructed categories.

Afrikology, as an epistemology of knowledge generation and application that has roots in African Cosmology, emerges at a time of extreme complexity in global economic and social relations, the physical environment and human history (Nabudere, 2011, p. 1).

I first made direct contact with community members of one of the oldest ethnic groups in the Republic of Ghana, the Mamprusi (“Mamprusi people,” 2020), located in the Wungu Traditional Area in the North East Region, in 2019 over the course of four weeks during a three-month stay in the country. At that time, I was on an academic sabbatical leave. My journey to Northern Ghana grew out of my activities at a predominantly White university in the United States of America (USA), where I had developed a (then) eight-year collegial relationship with a sociologist that led to him helping to facilitate the opportunity for me to meet his family, friends, professional contacts, and ordinary members of his community, as well as to initiate the process of me being able to spend protracted time in different parts of Northern Ghana (such as Walewale, Wa, Larabanga, Bolgatanga, Paga, Tamale, and Gambaga). I had the opportunity to meet traditional rulers and elders in a village that serves as the capital of a traditional area, as well as traditional rulers and elders in other locations, along with many other community leaders in one of the newest regions in Ghana (established in December 2018). These are relationships and networks that I continued to develop, and I relocated to Ghana at the end of May 2021 in order to start a new position teaching African Studies at the newest public university in Ghana (established in 2020). While Ghana is rightly considered a leading democracy in Africa, the predominantly rural northern regions are among the most marginalized in terms of civic engagement and among the most underdeveloped in terms of access to formal education, economic activity, and infrastructure. Yet the inhabitants of the Wungu Traditional Area remain proud, resilient custodians of traditional West African culture, and a diverse range of members of the community believe that the difficulty of accessing information in a low-resource area keeps them marginalized. The Mamprusi deserve more opportunities to fully participate in African development.

Access to basic information is a major issue facing the Wungu Traditional Area. Located in one of the poorest and most neglected regions in Ghana, the lack of an adequate information/learning center for the community in the capital of the West Mamprusi Municipal district is a major problem (“Students in Walewale,” 2021). This essay is interlinked with the evolving vision of a future institutional formation of a Centre for the Study of Black People, an organization whose goal will be to serve as a community-centered information/resource library in the Wungu Traditional Area that offers a holistic space for educational development and a dedicated space for accessing resources on civic engagement that will enhance the capacity of the community to actively impact public policy and problem-solving strategies at the glocal level (Khondker, 2019).

Given the current discourse on “Global Africa” and “Global African” phenomena (Bewaji, 2024; Beckles, 2018; Rashidi, 2009) that is taking place inside and outside the geographical borders of the African continent, at the outset, it is important for us to understand what our ancestor, the

historian Colin A. Palmer, referred to as the “five major African diasporic streams that occurred at different times and for different reasons” (Palmer, 2000, p. 27):

The first African diaspora was a consequence of the great movement within and outside of Africa that began about 100,000 years ago The second major diasporic stream began about 3000 B.C.E. with the movement of the Bantu-speaking peoples from what is now roughly the contemporary nations of Nigeria and Cameroon to other parts of the continent and to the Indian Ocean. The third major stream, which I shall characterize loosely as a trading diaspora, involved the movement of traders, merchants, slaves, soldiers, and others to parts of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia beginning around the fifth century B.C.E The fourth major African diasporic stream and the one that is most widely studied today is associated with the Atlantic trade in African slaves ... The fifth major stream began during the nineteenth century after slavery’s demise in the Americas and continues to our own times. (Palmer, 2000, pp. 27–28)

Thus, when we speak of Global Africa and Global African phenomena, or when we speak of the African Diaspora and especially Pan Africanism, we are making reference to Black/African (Azibo, 2023; Azibo, 2021) world community formations on a planetary scale, encompassing Black/African people inside and outside of the African continent.

About twenty-six years ago, I first encountered the Africa-centered and Pan Africanist work of our ancestor, the scholar Cheikh Anta Diop (Okafor, 2026), as an undergraduate student at a historically Black college in the USA. Two of his works were required readings for a course in World History for students whose major area of study was History, of which I was one. Today, readers of *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony*, an Afrocentric history of the African continent, are reminded by Molefi Kete Asante:

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Senegalese genius Cheikh Anta Diop, scientist, linguist, and historian, proposed the important thesis that Africa was not only the cradle of humanity but also the cradle of civilization ... It was Diop’s contention in his doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne in France not only that Africa was the home of humanity and civilization but that Europe had “stolen” or “distorted” much of the African record. (Asante, 2024, p. 6)

Indeed, several other Black/African Africa-centered scholars have attested over the years to the particular impact of two of Diop’s books that were translated into English, namely *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* as well as *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. According to Diop:

Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in the air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. In particular, the study of languages, institutions, and so forth, cannot be treated properly; in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic. Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of the western historian who has to write the history of Europe without referring

to Greco-Latin Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach. (Diop, 1974, p. xiv)

Diop also made the significant observation that:

Insofar as Egypt is the distant mother of Western cultures and sciences, as it will emerge from the reading of this book, most of the ideas that we call foreign are oftentimes nothing but mixed up, reversed, modified, elaborated images of the creations of our African ancestors, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, dialectics, the theory of being, the exact sciences, arithmetic, geometry, mechanical engineering, astronomy, medicine, literature (novel, poetry, drama), architecture, the arts, etc. (Diop, 1991, p. 3)

Approximately twenty-five years ago, between late May and early August in 2001, I first visited Ghana as a 23-year-old Ph.D. student as part of an Africa-centered, Pan African project called the “Women’s Health in the City of Accra Research Collective,” a joint project between the University of Michigan and the University of Ghana (UG), Legon, that was based at the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at UG-Legon. For 2½ months, I had the privilege of lodging in the compound of a Ghanaian family in Madina while serving as the Chief Editorial Assistant for research papers written by graduate students from Ann Arbor and Legon. My time at IAS and in the Accra metropolitan area (with occasional trips to Elmina and Cape Coast) was a life-changing, insightful, and direct experiential introduction to life on the African continent, our ancestral homeland.

According to a Mamprusi proverb:

*Zunzon' ye' n' u yi-yuu' ka kul'na ni taam-biinni so' u kul'na ni
taan-kahari*

The bat says it's better if it delays and goes home with a ripe sheanut, than to go home with a raw sheanut.

The fruit bat feeds on fruit. It has the habit of nibbling at many fruits before taking one to go and eat. It gives the impression of trying to find a ripe one. The sheanut is the bat's favourite fruit, although it may feed on other fruit.

A person has taken a long time to achieve something or takes a long time to decide on an issue and people criticise him for the delay, perhaps pointing to more expeditious people or procedure. He may give this proverb to mean that he prefers to do things well.

It's better to delay and do things well than to do them badly in a hurry.

(Plissart, 1977, Section 2, Number 356 / 388, 2952, 3210)

About sixteen years ago, I was advised by a mentor-elder that my desire to work in a Ghanaian institution of higher learning would require patience and should be postponed to allow for at least ten years of professional development after earning the Ph.D. degree, largely due to the social, economic, political, and cultural adaptations required for Black/African diasporic permanent entry

into Ghanaian academia and society. I was attracted to the idea of living and working on the African continent ever since I was introduced in the late 1990s to the Black History Movement (Diouf, 2025; Meier & Rudwick, 1986) and to the Black Studies Movement (Stewart, 2024; Alkalimat, 2021; Karenga, 2010) during my undergraduate studies at a historically Black college in the USA and as a student intern for *The Journal of Negro History*, which was founded in 1916 by our ancestor, the historian Carter G. Woodson, who also organized Negro History Week in 1926 (the origin of Black History Month). It is worth noting that, according to a Google Arts and Culture online exhibit by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and Smithsonian National Postal Museum titled “The Genesis of Dr. Carter Woodson’s Negro History Week”:

Eminent scholar and social activist W.E.B. DuBois lauded Negro History Week as the greatest achievement to arise from the Black Renaissance of the 1920s in his 1940 book *Dusk of Dawn*. (Smithsonian National Postal Museum, n.d.)

As it turned out for me, after completing a Ph.D. in History in 2010 at a predominantly White university in the USA, and after ten years of work as first a visiting assistant professor, then a tenure-track assistant professor, and finally a tenured associate professor at another predominantly White university in the USA, with interim visits to Ghana as well as Namibia and Kenya, my dream of permanently coming home to the Motherland began to materialize. In 2021, I became a member of the academic staff in African Studies at a public university in Ghana.

I came home because I wanted to be a part of the rebuilding of continental Black/African civilization by directly contributing to the work of higher education in Africa. My research, teaching, and writings on African nationalism and Pan Africanism provide a foundation for my activism as a scholar, as I consider teaching and writing to be among the most viable non-violent means of (1) social protest against (and the ending of) injustice and (2) the achievement of sustainable development.

Almost 100 years ago, Carter Godwin Woodson wrote in 1933:

History shows that it does not matter who is in power or what revolutionary forces take over the government, those who have not learned to do for themselves and have to depend solely on others never obtain any more rights or privileges in the end than they had in the beginning. (Woodson, 1990, pp. 186–187)

My move to Ghana in 2021 was not to abdicate responsibility as a Black/African Studies scholar who was born and raised in the USA. I moved for the enhancement of my life not in material terms but in spiritual, moral, and intellectual terms. I moved to put myself in a position in which I am emotionally, physically, culturally, and spiritually well. The move was to save myself—mind, body, and soul. If I wanted to divest myself from the USA to abdicate existential responsibility, I would have done that a long time ago. I got to a point that I knew that I had to save myself. I needed to go to Africa to save my life because the USA was becoming, in short, emotionally and spiritually unhealthy. My move to Africa is strongly tied to my ongoing quest to fully know who I am culturally, socially, and historically as a Black/African person who is a descendant of Black/African ancestors who were forced to migrate to the Americas during the “Transatlantic Slave Trade” (the European crime against African humanity) (Radburn, 2023). I am not suggesting

that Black/African diasporic repatriation to the African continent is the only component of the ultimate solution to the African crisis of development.

My move, however, was also a part of my refusal to directly contribute to building a White-dominated nation (USA). Over the years of my re-Africanization, I have been fortunate enough to integrate as a member of the Mamprusi ethnic group in the North East Region of Ghana. In August 2022, I was named Mankutam during a ceremony that was attended by community members of the Wungu Traditional Area.

As the Mamprusi say:

Tees-sun' daan' teesiri n tirila u-maṇa
The well-meaning man thinks in his own favour.

Charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même.

A kind person looks after his own good. Charity begins at home.

(Plissart, 1977, Section 2, Number 2333)

Now, the issue of “embrac[ing] African names and African naming practices” (Zulu, 2017, p. 130) is just one of many significant factors related to our need to re-Africanize. There are a number of Black/African people who lament the large numbers of Black thinkers, scholars and activists who did not opt to Africanize even their names. Our ancestor, the Africologist Itibari M. Zulu, noted the following:

Unfortunately, the grip of psychological bondage is so great that even some of our greatest thinkers, scholars and activist[s] of yesterday ... went to the grave with a name historically linked to their oppressors, e.g., Alex Haley, Amos Wilson, Frances Cress Welsing, Tony Martin, John Henrik Clarke, and others, a reality acknowledged by Daudi Ajani ya Azibo (2016) in his list of forty psycho-cultural perpetrations committed by Caucasian Americans in an effect to strip African people, by renaming them with Caucasian names. (Zulu, 2017, p. 144)

But whether it be our names, religions, or places of domicile, the holistic recovery (and “remembering”) of Black/African people is tied to our awareness of Africa-centered and Pan Africanist knowledge and our decision to use this knowledge in our own *Black/African interests*, especially on the African continent (which includes our past, present and future) (wa Thiong’o, 2009, pp. 31–65; Armah, 2010).

In my book titled *Travel and the Pan African Imagination* (2021), I focused on the repatriation movement during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and on the discipline of Africology, the latter through an analysis of E. Uzong’s *Africology* (1969). Uzong’s study was the first academic book with Africology as its central focus. Given that intellectual engagement is a critical part of knowledge production in Africology (Black/African Studies), the current essay seeks new ways of understanding the contemporary relationship between repatriation and Africa-centered and Pan Africanist scholarship.

According to our ancestor, the Afrikologist Dani Wadada Nabudere:

Afrikology is an epistemology of knowledge generation and application that has roots in African cosmology and worldviews. It is a universal epistemology, precisely because it recognizes that knowledge is created by different languages. Afrikology is therefore universal because it can help us integrate human knowledge. It seeks to retrace the evolution of knowledge and wisdom from its source in the Cradle of Humankind in Africa, up to the current scientific epistemologies and to try to situate them in their historical and cultural contexts. (Nabudere, 2012, p. 78)

What is the relationship between contemporary Africology/Africa-centered research and the apparent unwillingness of Africologists/Africa-centered scholars to physically and conceptually repatriate to the African continent, or “contemporary/modern-day  Kmt ‘Land of Black People’” (Kambon, 2022; The Africa Institute (GSU), 2022; Aketema & Kambon, 2021, p. 48, n. 2)? When we consider the moral/ethical imperative to relocate in that emancipatory endeavor vis-à-vis internal pushbacks from those who have internalized the colonial interpretation as the only or best route toward that project, we find that the leading scholarship, research, and professional organizations that focus on Africa are not primarily located or produced at sites situated on the African continent.

As a Black/African who was born during the late 1970s in the Deep South of the USA, the idea of repatriating to my ancestral homeland – continental Africa, Land of Black People – remained an elusive dream for many years. It seemed that relocation to Africa was something that could only be achieved by Black/African diasporic people in the past whom we read about in history books, stories about ancestors who were fortunate enough to escape lands of enslavement, or profiles of political activists and members of a relatively privileged minority of missionaries. After the demise of centuries-long legalized chattel enslavement in the USA, for the average Black/African person coming of age in the context of “white world terror domination” (Kambon, 2017, p. 77), it was rare to even be encouraged to think about Africa in a nuanced way, let alone visit Africa, and the notion of leaving the USA to live and work in Africa was virtually unheard of as far as being a realistic possibility. This experience is often couched in terms of materialistic development (particularly infrastructural development), but it is also intellectual/cognitive/conceptual.

The reality of the overlap between the Eurasian system of enslavement and modern systems of freedom/unfreedom was captured in the House Negro/Field Negro analysis of our ancestor, the Muslim minister and Pan African activist Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz; Omowale), in what he called a “talk right down to earth in a language that everybody here can easily understand” (X, 1990, p. 4; Malcolm X Files), in November 1963, and it is particularly relevant to the issue of continental Africa repatriation among USA-based academic and/or scholarly Black/African agents of social change.

In an iconic speech that was delivered on November 10, 1963, at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan (“Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference”), Malcolm X theorized the following:

So we are all black people, so-called Negroes, second-class citizens, ex-slaves To understand this, you have to go back to what the young brother here referred to as the house Negro and the field Negro – back during slavery. There were two kinds of slaves. There was the house Negro and the field Negro And if you came to the house Negro and said, “Let’s run away, let’s escape, let’s separate,” the house Negro would look at you and say, “Man, you crazy. What you mean, separate? Where is there a better house than this? Where can I wear better clothes than this? Where can I eat better food than this?” That was that house Negro. In those days he was called a “house nigger.” And that’s what we call him today, because we’ve still got some house niggers running around here And if someone comes to you right now and says, “Let’s separate,” you say the same thing that the house Negro said on the plantation. “What you mean, separate? From America? This good white man? Where you going to get a better job than you get here?” I mean, this is what you say. “I ain’t left nothing in Africa,” that’s what you say. Why, you left your mind in Africa. (X, 1990, pp. 4, 10–11; Malcolm X Files, 2023)

Leaders such as Malcolm X viewed the repatriation of most Black/African people in the USA to Africa as a psychological and cultural possibility, rather than a literal physical migration. This perspective was informed by his awareness that, to use his words from an October 11, 1963, interview at the University of California, Berkeley:

The propaganda of the American government is skillfully designed to make our people think that our people back home don’t want us. Government propagandists tell us constantly, “Africa is a jungle. Africans are savage and backward. They have no modern conveniences and you’re too much like us white folks. How could you live comfortably back there?” (Braun, 2017)

Most non-academic narratives regarding “going back to Africa” remain historical references; more recently, however, they are often shaped by the organizational structures of study abroad programs, field research, tours, and occasional visits.

The influence of Malcolm X on the establishment of Black/African Studies academic programs in colleges and universities is well noted in the historical record (Edozie and Stokes, 2015). The 1960s birth and growth of Africology departments (also variously called African Studies, Africana Studies, African American Studies, Pan-African Studies, African Diaspora Studies, and African and African American Studies departments) across the USA has arguably played the biggest role in “re-orient[ing]” (Asante, 2021, p. 229) Black/African consciousness of Africa, and the institutional proliferation of these centers of African-centered knowledge production mainly at predominantly White institutions of higher education across the USA presents twenty-first century Black/African scholars with the opportunity to carefully engage the contention that African-centered scholarship (Africology) is “the Afrocentric study of African phenomena” (Asante, 1993) and that it is African-centered in form and function (Mano & Milton, 2026). Specifically, locating Africa at the center of theory and practice is interrogated in an effort to determine the possibilities of achieving a holistic conceptualization of Black/African Studies, one that is centered in continental Africa.

Push-Pull Factors can be examined through two guiding questions:

Why are most Black/African-centered scholars still based at institutions of higher learning in the USA rather than within the African academy?

What factors drive Africa-centered scholars' decisions to live and work in Africa?

According to the linguist, Obádélé Bakari Kambon, a repatriate to Ghana:

In short, our behavior is directly attributable to who we say we are. Our possibilities are governed by our identities. When you repatriate to Ghana or elsewhere in contemporary Kmt 'The Black Nation/Land of the Blacks' you also have the choice to focus on the river or focus on the rivulet. One should choose wisely. (Kambon, 2021, p. 68)

Physical *and* conceptual repatriation to Africa differ from the dominant forms of knowledge production found in most Black/African Studies scholarship and programs, as well as in travel narratives and tours of the African continent.

Toward Africa-Centered Epistemic Agency

Principal research methods for the full achievement of Africa-centered epistemic agency must engage "historical location" (McDougal III, 2017, p. 89), as well as Africology through "the Afrocentric method," which "is derived from the Afrocentric paradigm which deals with the question of African identity from the perspective of African people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded" (Mkabela, 2005, p. 179).

An additional key research method that must be utilized in this endeavor is an Africa-centered ethnographic method via "[p]articipatory, liberatory, and transformative research approaches and methodologies that draw from indigenous knowledge systems" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 51), guided by principles that were charted by one of the original architects of the Afrocentric methodological approach, our ancestor, the statesman Kwame Nkrumah (Adé, 2023), as explained in an October 25, 1963, speech titled "The African Genius" that he delivered to commemorate the opening of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. These kinds of epistemic approaches would open space for a deeper understanding of Black/African African-centered scholars who are based in the USA; Africa-centered scholars who repatriated to, or are based on, the African continent; as well as those Africa-centered scholars and Pan-Africanists who wish to repatriate to the African continent.

According to Nkrumah, there exists:

the need for a re-interpretation and a new assessment of the factors which make up our past. We have to recognise frankly that African Studies, in the form in which they have been developed in the universities and centres of learning in the West, have been largely influenced by the concepts of old style "colonial studies", and still to some extent remain under the shadow of colonial ideologies and mentality. (Nkrumah, 2013, pp. vi–vii)

Nkrumah urged us to:

study the history, culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in new *African centred* [emphasis added] ways — in entire freedom from the propositions and pre-suppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those Professors and Lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment. (Nkrumah, 2013, p. vii)

Frehiwot et al. (2022) remind us that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

Africa was the key to many Pan-Africanist promotion of Pan-Africanism. Most did not make the journey *back home* due to the political, economic, and social conditions of the period, but they all longed for the day that Africa would be the epicenter of Pan-African Activity. Kwame Nkrumah's homecoming after several years studying abroad marked the beginning of Pan-Africanism[']s] return to Africa. (p. 126, emphasis in original)

As a direct result of the impact of Nkrumah, African Studies instruction is a compulsory part of tertiary education in Ghana. The opportunity to teach Africa-centered knowledge to continental African youth facilitates achievement of one of the main goals of centering “sbAyt nt Kmtyw ‘Studies of Black People’” (Kambon, 2021)—integrating “African Studies” into the thinking and actions of students (future agents of social change) especially on the African continent.

Cooper and Morrell (2014) make clear that “knowledges can become Africa-centred regardless of where they originate. But they do so only when they get entangled in African realities, lexicons and matrices and are shaped by these contexts. This particularly includes conceptions of identity, agency and subjectivity, which emphasize relatedness rather than individuality” (pp. 3–4). Holistic educational development on the African continent (Manuh, 2021) is central to the rebuilding of continental Black/African civilization and our sustainable development.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the participants at the following scholarly gatherings for their feedback on presentations of different versions of this essay: (1) the “Humans Through Philosophy” panel that took place at the 4th Biennial Conference of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA), Theme: Africa and the Human: Old Questions, New Imaginaries, at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (via Zoom), on April 15, 2022; (2) the School of Natural and Environmental Sciences (SNES) Research Seminar Series at the University of Environment and Sustainable Development, Somanya, Ghana, on May 19, 2022; and (3) the Pan African Heritage World Museum Third International Conference on African Arts, Theme: Global Africa: (Re)Narrating Our Stories with Our Creative Arts, at the African University College of Communications, Accra, Ghana, on July 29, 2023.

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