

# **CRAZY THINGS:** CAN WE BE TRUE TO SELF, A DECOLONIAL AGENDA, AND THRIVE IN TODAY'S ACADEMY?

AKOSUA ADOMAKO AMPOFO

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# **CRAZY THINGS: CAN WE BE TRUE TO SELF, A DECOLONIAL AGENDA, AND THRIVE IN TODAY'S ACADEMY?**

*KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE 2024 APN AND NEXT GEN WRITING AND DISSEMINATION WORKSHOP*

**AKOSUA ADOMAKO AMPOFO**

*INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON*

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## **Introduction: Remembering the Ancestors**

It gives me great pleasure to be speaking to our “next generation” of scholars. I delivered the inception keynote for the SSRC Next Generation Social Science in Africa (Next Gen) program almost a decade ago, on July 2nd, 2013, at the University of Ghana. I titled it, “Who is The Next Generation Scholar in Africa?” As I prepared my remarks, I reflected on what the decade since that inception lecture has brought us, and what we might focus on today.

Before I begin, could we all offer a moment of silence to remember and acknowledge the work of our ancestors, and the fallen heroes of 2022? I will present some names for this ancestral roll call that reflect global, not just continental, Africa. Of course, this is by no means even the tip of an exhaustive list; please consider them as points of contact representing our forefathers and mothers, our siblings, and fellow soldiers.

**Lawrence Brooks** (September 1909—January 2022) was, at the time of his death, the oldest surviving U.S. World War II veteran. A Louisiana native and resident, he was drafted into the army in 1940, serving in the Army's 91st Engineer Battalion, made up predominately of Black servicemen due to the military's segregation practices at the time. When he returned to the US, although he received the Presidential Unit Citation, and a World War II Victory Medal, he was denied GI or military benefits. Without these benefits, which includes tuition benefits, he was unable to attend college as he had dreamed he would. Since 2014, he has been celebrated at the World War II Museum in New Orleans.

**Doris Adelaide Derby** (November 1939 – March 2022) was an American civil rights activist, documentary photographer, director of Georgia State University's Office of African-American Student Services and Programs, and adjunct associate professor of anthropology. In her role as director and professor, she promoted the work and lives of young black students.

**Atherine Juanita Lucy** (October 1929 – March 2022) was born to sharecropper

parents in Alabama, eventually studied at the historically black Miles College, and became a civil rights activist. In 1956, she was admitted to the University of Alabama but was later expelled purely on racial grounds. In 2010, in recognition of her work, a clock tower was erected in her honor on the university's campus. In 2019, she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Alabama.

**Sidney Poitier** (February 1927 – January 2022) “originally”, as they say, from the Bahamas, he was the first black actor to receive an Academy Award in 1964. He also received the US Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009. Poitier was a strong advocate for racial justice, and, perhaps most famously, in terms of his legacy regarding race relations, acted in the film “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” about inter-racial romantic love.

**Karim Ouellet** (December 1984 – November 2021) was a Senegalese-born Canadian pop singer-songwriter. He served as the French-language spokesman for Black History Month in Canada in 2018.

**Nathaniel Ian Wynter (Natty) Wailer** (September 1954 – March 2022) was a Jamaican-born reggae musician and Rastafarian, a foundation member of the group The Wailers, and best known for his work with Bob Marley (and the Wailers), singing what I would refer to as “redemption music”—music championing the release of black people from various forms of structural racism and resultant oppression.

**Charles Yohane** (August 1973 – February 2022) was a Zimbabwean footballer who played as a midfielder, and was a coach at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) development team until its collapse in 2020. He was an advocate for black players in a historically white university. Structural racism might be part of the cause for his decline, socially and economically. In February 2022, Yohane was the victim of a carjacking and shooting while working in South Africa as a delivery driver.

My current street cred when it comes to pop culture, in terms of who is doing what, is probably at a B rating, maybe a B-, but—at best—definitely no higher than a B. However, as a living, breathing person, I know enough to get by at a dinner table conversation, and I have researched enough on the subject—film, music, art—to know its popularity level and political reach. I can even toss in some big names and what they may have recently been up to. This knowledge is thanks, in no small part, to the young people in my orbit. Music is often seen as an integral part of our self-identity, and this truth continues being relevant throughout life. Music is closely linked with our personal memories and significant moments in history. So, let’s take a slice out of Nigerian singer Tems’ repertoire, and think about where you were when you first heard her song, “Crazy Tings.”

## “Crazy Tings”

The refrain of this song by the Nigerian singer, Tems, goes like this:<sup>1</sup>

*Crazy tings are happening  
Crazy tings are happening  
If you need somebody's craze  
You fit chop somebody's craze*

The lyrics of the song describe a state of confusion and chaos, where things are not as they should be, and Tems evokes a sense of being lost or out of control. In this sense, I employ Tems' Crazy Tings as a metaphor for the state of our nations as well as the state of the academy today, which, like our nations, is facing several challenges and changes that could be described as uncertain, confused, even chaotic.

There are many issues afflicting our continent and her diaspora that we might read as an “African backsliding.” Some common complaints include:

- The continent is home to three of the longest serving presidents in the world, all of them in the dubious company of other dictators: Equatorial Guinea (since 1979); Cameroon (since 1982); Uganda (since 1986). There is also President Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo (Brazzaville), who first came to power in 1979; he has since been re-elected thrice with one ‘intermission’ between 1992-1997 after he lost an election.
- We have had 31 coups/attempted coups since 2013, and over 200 attempted and successful coups since 1960, with over half of them in West Africa.
- There have been 12 cases of unconstitutional changes to national constitutions to enable the incumbent to remain in office.
- There is a belt of violent extremism across the Sahel from Mauritania to Chad in West and Central Africa involving Boko Haram, AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Dine, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Al Shabaab in East Africa and the Horn,
- Deforestation, pollution of water bodies as a result of mining and other environmental activities are pervasive.
- High rates of youth unemployment.
- Increasing cases of human rights violations are being recorded: declining (or not-improving) conditions for women and other minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual); overt or covert attacks on press freedom etc.

There are also the long-lasting effects of colonialism and structural racism, not only in Euro-America, but also in other parts of the world. It is a very dangerous time to be a black person in Tunisia. The country's president, Kais Saied, has put

authoritarianism to devastating use, blaming “sub-Saharan Africans” for all the country’s problems, leading to a wave of anti-black racist attacks.<sup>2</sup> We know the script; we have seen it in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> In the academic space, even though the call for decolonizing the academy has taken on a new force in the last decade or so, the unequal status and valorizing of African-based/centered/created/disseminated knowledge seems sharper than ever, with unequal research partnerships and increasing border regimes—both physical, structural, and ideological. For example, visa delays and denials serve to keep African academics out of spaces where their knowledge can be shared, privileged and valorized. This not only serves to downplay our contributions, but also has financial effects, since it helps to prop up the grant making politics that privileges academics from countries in Euro-America. It affects patents and intellectual property rights, which also affect financial returns.

Sometimes we are accused of whining. That is not what I am doing today—even if whining is sometimes cathartic. So, to borrow the probably tired cliché: we are either part of the problem or part of the solution. There is no third option—a dual citizenship of commitment is not available. Those of us in this room are super privileged, and that privilege must count for something.

## **Being True and Thriving**

My talk is not focused on a “how-to achieve anything” method. What I would like to do is nudge us towards a deeper commitment, or a reaffirmed commitment, to an African agenda. Permit me to start with a brief autobiographical note to illustrate two things: 1) that our specific academic training need not limit our location in the academy; and 2) that there is always a place to serve those who most need our service as we work in solidarity with others. I studied architecture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, but due to the interruption of my postgraduate training by one of several coups that had become ubiquitous in the 1970s and 1980s, I ended up leaving Ghana, and studied for a Masters in development planning in Germany. My plan was to complete my postgraduate diploma in architecture upon returning to Ghana, and to have two graduate degrees under my belt. However, by the time I had completed my masters in development planning, I was no longer interested in going back to architecture. I served a first year at the Regional Administration in the Ashanti region but found it extremely unfulfilling, and eventually managed to get reassigned to do the second year of my national service<sup>4</sup> in the geography department at the University of Ghana under the tutorship of the late Professor George Benneh. At the time, he was working on a project on women and access to land in different parts of Ghana; this offered me deep insights into the different ways that structural gender discrimination occurs. This led me to have conversations with him about my ca-

reer trajectory. He suggested I consider joining the Institute of African Studies and working with Takyiwaa Manuh, now Professor Emerita Takyiwaa Manuh, on “women’s issues.” I did join the institute and, together with Takyiwaa, started the Development and Women’s Studies program (DAWS); we worked both together and separately on several of the key concerns around women’s lives in Ghana and Africa. DAWS was a collective of scholars and gender advocates who supported each other’s work—the practitioners assisting us academics with their on-the-ground experiences and knowledge, the scholars among us assisting our colleagues “in the trenches” with conceptual and theoretical approaches, field studies, and findings from across Africa. Together, we used our combined resources to advocate for legal and policy reforms and supported each other through personal and institutional challenges. This is how a might-have-been-architect or development planner came to situate herself in the academy, in African Studies. This is also how my commitment to gender work in Africa was nurtured in the crucible of a decolonial agenda. We did not call it decolonial work at that time, but being a scholar at the Institute of African Studies and working with other scholars in African Studies, we were always seeking to dismantle the Eurocentric gaze, and seeking to foreground African perspectives as per Nkrumah’s charge to us when the Institute was established. I am an activist inside and outside the academy, and I have survived and even thrived as I have learned from others, worked in collectives, and lived in solidarity.

Today is the 66th anniversary of Ghana’s independence. The Gold Coast nationalists, and especially those at the forefront of the independence movement, were relatively young by today’s standards of formal leadership—Kwame Nkrumah was 43 when he became prime minister in 1952 and 48 when he became president of independent Ghana. Ghana’s Mabel Dove Danquah was only 26 when she started writing for *The Times of West Africa*, Ghana’s first daily newspaper. The members of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) nationalist movement founded on 4 August 1947 by Gold Coasters known as The Big Six, ranged in age at the time from 31 to 52: 31 (Ebenezer Ako Adjei), 37 (William Ofori Atta), 38 (Kwame Nkrumah and Edward Akufo Addo), 40 (Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lampitey) and the oldest, at 52, was JB Danquah. In Ghana, from Pan-African political engagement and the promotion of African popular culture to African-centered scientific, culturally relevant innovations, the years leading up to independence and immediately thereafter were rich with hope in ways that resonate with what we might today call an Afro-futurist agenda. However, a rather checkered national psyche has emerged in the intervening years. Today, despite state interventions such as the Year of Return,<sup>5</sup> that brought much cultural excitement and celebrity Ghanaians in the diaspora home,<sup>6</sup> a flagging economy, obvious and unpunished corruption alongside huge wealth disparities, and high rates of youth unemployment seem to have generated a sense of hopelessness and cynicism among many young people.



I prefaced Ghana because that is my home, and we are in Ghana. Permit me a word on big brother Naija (Nigeria), however. The Nigerian youth have been protesting the actions of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), for years due to their alleged abuse of power, extrajudicial killings, and human rights violations. The protests intensified in October 2020, when a video surfaced of SARS officers shooting a young man in Delta State. The protests were largely peaceful, and led to a nationwide outcry followed by concrete calls for police reform. In response, the government disbanded SARS and promised to reform the police force. However, many believe that the government has done very little to address police brutality and human rights abuses. The 2023 elections have been controversial. A high turnout was predicted for the general election, and initial voting was peaceful. However, as the day progressed, voting was marred by reports of voter buying, voter intimidation, attacks on polling units in certain areas, and electoral officials arriving late but not extending the time for voting. In some cases, there were not enough ballot papers for voters in the queue. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labor Party, a former Governor of Anambra State, and a youth favorite, came in 3rd with 25.4 per cent of the vote (the first place went to Bola Tinubu of the ruling All Peoples Congress (APC) with 36.6 per cent of the vote and a great deal of controversy about his age, among other things).<sup>7</sup>

Strikingly, in both Ghana and Nigeria, one response to the chaotic state systems has been a youth-driven explosion of creativity and innovation. From the arts and entertainment, through African cuisine, to innovations in medicine and engineering, young people are innovating and creating often without the infrastructure and resources that their counterparts in the so-called global North have. Afrobeats can be heard at major events around the world, Afro-centered fashion and cuisine are being celebrated on catwalks, and in restaurants from London to New York. Nollywood is now mainstream. When the COVID19 epidemic struck, the continent's youth responded swiftly with diverse social and technology-driven innovations to help understand, test for, and diagnose the virus, as well as treat COVID-19 patients.<sup>8</sup> These innovations were good news, so why didn't we read about them on the front pages of "international newspapers?"

So, when I ask the question, "Can we be true to self, a decolonial agenda, and thrive in today's Academy?" the question makes some assumptions: 1) that we share certain values as scholars that we seek to be true to; and 2) that those values include a decolonial agenda. I am not going to spend time on the values because I believe I am speaking to those who care about the continent and who want to build knowledge that ultimately improves the lives of Africans globally, as well as marginalized people everywhere. I am going to assume we want to be diligent and thorough in our work, and that we want our scholarships to be



creative, original, and exciting. I am going to assume we want to treat others as kindly and honestly as we want to be treated as we carry out and disseminate our work. All this of course, anticipating that our work as scholars will also put our foods like Kenkey and Chapati and Eba and Matoke and Injera and Pap on the table, whether in the academy or outside of it.

### **Side-step: Decolonize!**

Before I return to the subject of being true to self and thriving, allow me a few words on a decolonial agenda. The Decolonial project concerns the entire colonized world. However, in this lecture, I focus on Africa—that collection of states and kingdoms that were parceled out for European nations by European powers in 1884. The Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa, which began in early 2015 and was initially directed against the presence of a statue of the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT), probably most famously illustrates recent calls for the decolonization of the curriculum, university administrative structures, and education in general on university campuses. The South African student protests inspired students around the world. Throughout 2015 and 2016, student protests rocked university campuses in the USA (over one hundred by some counts) and Europe. Common demands included addressing the hostile environment and racist treatment of black and other “students of color,” decolonizing the curriculum, and acknowledging and correcting institutional links to slavery, including the removal of racist symbols like statutes of slave owners and naming buildings after slave owners. More recently, following a slew of deaths of Black people in the USA at the hands of the police and thanks in part to the work of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, such actions gained renewed political urgency as universities and corporations struggle to retain their reputations or rebrand their images. Street names have been changed, statutes toppled,<sup>9</sup> curricula revisited, Black people hired, and a multitude of Diversity and Inclusion (DEI) projects begun. Yet the ongoing fallist and decolonial movements are returning to old and unresolved questions about what we know, how we know it, whose knowledge counts, and implications for the “formerly colonized” that activists and scholars have taken up since the onset of the European Empire building.<sup>10</sup>

It is important for me to explain how I employ the term decolonize, including my understanding of the differences between decolonial and postcolonial approaches, a distinction on which several scholars have already written. I borrow here from a paper I am developing.<sup>11</sup> Both decolonial and postcolonial scholars condemn the destructive role of colonialism on the civilizations, cultures, identities, and lives of the colonized. attacks from Islamist groups that have infiltrated from Niger and Mali. Both challenge the racialized and

racist narratives of the “other.” Where the two approaches differ, it seems to me, has to do in part with periodization: Latin Americanists were among the earliest decolonial scholars, computing the colonial project from the late 1400s onward, while most postcolonial scholars begin with more recent European, especially British, imperialism. However, decolonial scholars also argue that there is no postcolony since epistemic power is still centered in the European metropole and the displacement of specific communities, and their diverse forms of knowledge, continues. Further, they argue that colonialism not only impacted the lives of those in the colonies but also created fictions of what the metropole is.

Thus, whereas postcolonial approaches have a strong political focus on emancipation to “do things our own way,” a decolonial approach goes further to emphasize epistemic diversity as an ongoing project of recovering and rearticulating indigenous forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, and cataloguing knowledge, both in the former colonies and in Europe and North America. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang insist that decolonization is not merely about social justice or educational equity, nor does it provide closure on the past, thereby foreclosing future conflict. They write that it “cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Frantz Fanon put it best when he famously stated in *Wretched of the Earth*,<sup>13</sup> that decolonization sets out to change the order of the world. Thus, when we ask for statutes of colonizers to be removed or for curricula to be decolonized, what we propose may incorporate a decolonization agenda, but it may also enable symbolic gestures, important as they are, while leaving colonial structures intact.

I also use decolonize in its verb form as a call to action. Firstly, to decolonize means 1) to recognize the historical fact of European political and economic domination and 2) to also recognize the cultural domination that has valorized European civilization, including viewing methodological and analytical forms as superior to indigenous approaches to enquiry. It disparages them as unscientific, or worse, denies that indigenous people had a history or culture worth investigating. This is what Walter D. Mignolo, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe, and Gatri Spivak, along with others, have referred to as epistemic violence. Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to this as an invasion of the mental universe of colonized people—the process of removing the hard disk of African knowledge and memory, and downloading into African minds the software of European knowledge and memory.

Secondly, to decolonize means to actively dismantle Eurocentric structures

that continue to underpin knowledge production as the fundamentals. It requires that we recognize the oppressions inherent in epistemological orthodoxies in order to dismantle them, and move closer to building an emancipatory world for all. This act of de- and reconstruction applies to concepts, theories, our research questions, how we ask them and of whom we ask them, the languages we ask questions and write in, where we disseminate our work, and so forth.

Thirdly, to decolonize involves consciously replacing colonial ways of seeing, knowing, and acting with applicable indigenous modes. Lastly, to decolonize means to recognize the pain and trauma of the people and communities that were exploited and robbed, in order to provide restitution by returning what was stolen, provide compensation by way of reparations and repatriations, and to support communal healing projects led by Black and Brown people.

### **Coming Back: Overcoming and Thriving**

In the academy, multiple “crazy things” abound. The question is, how can we thrive? One such challenge is the instrumentalism that abounds: the increasing pressure to produce measurable outcomes, such as through research grants and publications, sometimes at the expense of more open-ended exploration and discovery. Consciously or inadvertently, the goals of a grant-awarding organization can push or encourage a researcher to a certain approach methodologically and epistemologically. The pressure to publish in so-called “international” (read: Euro-American) and high-impact (read: as measured by citation matrices) journals can impact what we work on such that it can be supply-driven (promotion criteria) rather than demand-driven (based on the relevance for our local conditions). This pressure can lead to losing focus on what I believe should be the true purpose of scholarship—to improve the conditions of human beings in our communities in some specific way. This could range from improving locally-relevant knowledge to impacting policy.

Another crazy thing in the academy is the proliferation of new technologies and digital platforms for research and teaching. While these tools offer various benefits, they also bring with them new challenges and complexities, such as the need to navigate complex data privacy laws, pay walls, and the potential for technological bias and discrimination.

The internet has made it easier to access vast amounts of information, but the quality of that information may not always be reliable. We must learn to navigate and evaluate sources carefully. With so much information available, it can be challenging to process and synthesize it all. This can lead to a sense of being overwhelmed and make it difficult to identify the most relevant infor-

mation. The availability of digital platforms and technologies has also led to new research methods and data sources, but this also means that researchers must adapt to new tools and approaches to remain current, and this pressure can also be overwhelming, and lead to shortcut approaches to addressing deep societal problems.

Digital platforms have made it easier to share and distribute content, but they have also created new challenges related to intellectual property and copyright infringement. Then along comes generative AI that enable us to generate content based on a variety of inputs and leading to a variety of possible outputs including text, images, sounds, animation, 3D models, or other types of data. I love it—but this raises serious concerns about ownership, originality, impact on critical thinking, and so forth. Digital platforms have also enabled new forms of communication, such as online forums, video conferencing, and social media, which can improve efficiency by reducing delays and bringing people from across the globe together in real time. However, they also require new skills in digital communication to avoid misrepresenting, mistranslating, or simply mishearing—and normally we are not taught these, but rather are simply compelled to learn as we go along.

In addition, the academy is facing increasing scrutiny and criticism from outside groups, from the righteous, or moral, right and the woke, or liberal, left.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes politicians and the media question the value and relevance of academic research and expertise. Colleagues in the academy have become increasingly critical, especially on platforms like Twitter<sup>15</sup> (now known as “X”) with “cancellations”<sup>16</sup> at an all-time high. It is important to call people out for infractions; however, we must also do the verification work and ask ourselves important questions. Who determines what an infraction is? Who checks if the infraction, indeed, even occurred? Who decides what the punishment should be? Who decides how widely the details of the infraction should be disseminated? This process of “cancellation” and verification can create a sense of chaos and uncertainty among scholars, who may feel that their work is being unfairly dismissed or marginalized, as well as among scholars who no longer know which sources to trust.

And yet, as Tems chants,  
*Try, try, try*  
*I try, try*  
*I just wan' turn my back tonight, tonight ...*  
*Ooh you try to make me run insane*  
*But you know that you know I'm not the same*  
*I just think I can do better...*

We all can do better than the “craze” people placed on us from the discordant places they seem to inhabit.

In my 2013 lecture I noted that scholars and academics are not born, they are made. Further, I argued that it is possible to survive, thrive, and contribute to an Africa we want. While I need to be honest and concede that I believe the world, and the academy, looks more challenging now than it did a decade ago, the call on us is no different. And yes, despite the structural inequalities and power dynamics that exist within the academy, particularly for us as African people, I believe it is possible to be true to oneself, pursue a decolonial agenda, and thrive in today's academy. Traditional ways of doing things are no longer sufficient and new approaches are needed to navigate the challenges of the present and future.

To pursue a decolonial agenda, we must purposefully challenge the dominant narratives and power structures that have historically privileged certain groups over others. This cannot be left to happenstance. It can—and should—involve challenging long-held and accepted, but problematic or inaccurate, ways of knowing and knowledge production. It can involve actively advocating for diversity, the inclusion of underrepresented groups (yes, affirmative action!), and promoting social justice in research, teaching, and service. As Yolande Bouka asserted, we must reject framing such initiatives around concepts of “capacity building” and the need to bring “local perspectives” into global theorizing, as if African knowledge needs upgrading to Euro standards.<sup>17</sup>

Let us publish in multiple outlets—both the conventional and non-conventional, such as blogs, podcasts, and new multi-faceted journals that favor more eclectic collections that include creativity through poetry and art, for example. These avenues of publishing can include indigenous knowledge that has not (yet) acquired the status of more acceptable forms in academic jargon or by high-profile academics. Such an approach can also be cathartic and build confidence among scholars as we reflect on our realities, and read our realities through the eyes of others.

We must approach “international collaborations” initiated by others more prudently than we have been doing by carefully reading and questioning their intent, negotiating them so they are genuine partnerships. We must insist that knowledge transfer is a two-way street, and move beyond a methodology that relies solely on metrics and technology. We must insist that the many less obvious contributions to knowledge such as language skills, linguistic sophistication, and inter-generational transfer of knowledge are valorized and counted. We must also restore forms of knowledge transmission that lie outside of traditional scholarship, such as the arts—music, theatre, dance, and painting,

and more, to their rightful place within these collaborations.<sup>18</sup>

To thrive in the academy while pursuing a decolonial agenda, it is essential to build networks of support and seek out allies who share similar values and goals. It is also important to be proactive in seeking out resources, such as mentorship, professional development opportunities, and funding, that can help support our work. In all of this, we need to be truthful and generous. I cannot overstate this in today's era of fake news and "alternative facts"; an era where knowledge is weaponized to build individual personas rather than communities. As such, it requires willingness of us all to live with discomfort, danger, anger, pain, and loss, because we must work with others who are different. We may have to risk what is dear and familiar, even when it may be something good, for something even better that will serve the progress of other humans. We must truthfully confront our pain and trauma, acknowledge the brokenness, and (re)imagine a future built on principles of an inclusive, socially just society that is devoid of the imposed hierarchies of colonialism and capitalism that are based on wealth, political power, exclusion, and all forms of othering, including sexual orientation and identity, ethnicity, religion, national origin, skin color, and accent. While intersecting identities must be recognized, this is not an identity politics project, but a project to restore humanity through valorizing what others know and recognizing that how we know things differs.

I conclude by asking us to prepare now, if we have not begun already, to become an ancestor by asking, and then acting on the answer: What do I want to be remembered for? I leave you with this video from the *Playing For Change Project*—a multimedia music project, featuring musicians and singers from across the globe, co-founded in 2002 by the American Grammy award-winning music producer/engineer and award-winning film director Mark Johnson, working with film producer/philanthropist, Whitney Kroenke. In this multi-artist rendition of Higher Ground (original by Stevie Wonder) I hope to remind us that it "won't be too long...as we keep on trying that we reach higher ground."<sup>19</sup>

## NOTES

1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og1SfJ7nOAU&ab\\_channel=TemsVE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og1SfJ7nOAU&ab_channel=TemsVE)
2. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans/> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/tunisia-presidents-racist-speech-incites-a-wave-of-violence-against-black-africans/s>
3. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/south-africa-un-experts-condemn-xenophobic-violence-and-racial>
4. The National Service programme is a compulsory one-year service (two years at the time I entered) required of all citizens of Ghana who are 18 years and above who have completed tertiary education. The Scheme

- which was introduced in 1973 operates by law under Act 426 (of 1980)
5. See <https://www.yearofreturn.com/>
  6. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Year-of-Return-was-profoundly-transforming-Boris-Kodjoe-832084>"<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Year-of-Return-was-profoundly-transforming-Boris-Kodjoe-832084>
  7. For a summary see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023\\_Nigerian\\_presidential\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Nigerian_presidential_election)
  8. <https://techpoint.africa/2020/04/23/african-innovations-covid-19/>
  9. At the University of Ghana where I teach, we had our own successful Gandhi must fall movement. See here for the petition <https://www.change.org/p/the-members-of-the-university-of-ghana-council-gandhi-s-statue-at-the-university-of-ghana-must-come-down?redirect=false> See here a story on the outcome
  10. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/06/ghana-academics-petition-removal-mahatma-gandhi-statue-african-heroes>"<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/06/ghana-academics-petition-removal-mahatma-gandhi-statue-african-heroes>
  11. For a discussion see Adomako Ampofo 2016. "Re-viewing Studies on Africa, #Black Lives Matter, and Envisioning the Future of African Studies" *African Studies Review* (59)2: 7-27.
  12. Adomako Ampofo, Akosua. (being developed). "Elvis Presley, Miriam Makeba and Bob Marley walk into a Bar: Cross-examining Epistemic Violence and Working towards Epistemic Freedom" (work in press).
  13. Eve Tuck & K.Wayne Yang. (2012). "Decolonization is not a metaphor", *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40
  14. Fanon, Frantz. (1968). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
  15. I use these adjectives tongue-in-cheek to reflect the ways in which politically polarized opponents view and describe each other.
  16. Now known as X at the time of editing this piece in August 2023.
  17. This refers to the act of withdrawing support to someone—usually a well-known person, and especially on social media—for something unacceptable they said or did. The act of canceling could entail boycotting the person's work and calling others to do same so as to make them irrelevant or no longer important.
  18. Yolande Bouka, "Collaborative Research as Structural Violence," *Political Violence at a Glance*, July 12, 2018, <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2018/07/12/collaborative-research-as-structural-violence/>"<https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2018/07/12/collaborative-research-as-structural-violence/>
  19. In March 2023 a charter for more equal partnerships, led by the Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC) at the University of Bristol was launched. See <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230315085144945>



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Adomako Ampofo is Professor of African and Gender Studies at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana (UG). She describes herself as an activist scholar and at the heart of her work are questions of identity and power—within families, political and religious spaces, and the knowledge industry. Her areas of interest include African Knowledge systems; Higher education; Race and Identity Politics; Gender relations; Masculinities; and Popular Culture. In 2005 she became the foundation Director of the University's Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy and from 2010-2015 she was the Director of the Institute of African Studies. Adomako Ampofo is President of the African Studies Association of Africa; an honorary Professor at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Birmingham; and a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2023-2024 Adomako Ampofo was the Wangari Maathai Visiting Professor at the University of Kassel (2023-2034). She is the Editor-in-Chief, Contemporary Journal of African Studies and Co-Editor, Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa blog. Her recent book co-edited with Josephine Beoku-Betts is titled Producing Inclusive Feminist Knowledge: Positionalities and Discourses in the Global South (Bingley: Emerald Publishing 2021). She co-produced the documentary When Women Speak with Kate Skinner (directed by Aseye Tamakloe, 2022) as part of a project titled, an "Archive of Activism: Gender and Public History in Postcolonial Ghana". The goal of this project is to constitute a publicly accessible archive of, and documentary on gender activism and "political women" in postcolonial Ghana. Adomako Ampofo's work has been variously recognized and in 2010 she was awarded the Feminist Activism Award by Sociologists for Women and Society (SWS)*

*Follow her: @adomakoampofo.*

*Website: <https://adomakoampofo.com/>*