Africa in the Classroom:
Pedagogy, Community, Decolonization

University of Pittsburgh Center for African Studies
2023 Spring Conference | May 5-6, 2023

Presentation Abstracts

Panel 1A: *Literature as Liberation, Both Inside and Beyond the Classroom*

Friday May 5, 11:00am-12:30pm

"The Study of Africa Today: Africanizing Knowledge About Africa"
Eric Beeko (University of Pittsburgh)

African Studies has had to combat the treacherous interpretations of various theories used to justify the domination and colonization of the continent. The term Africa has long been represented as a featureless void, a mysterious place about which little is known but much is speculated. Africa is seen through webs of myth, which has changed from time to time and place to place, depending on the needs and prejudices. Some scholars have not appreciated the fact that the flourishing cultural production that had characterized Africa in the past continues and draws on the global circulation of ideas, images, and people. My aim is to address these issues, by first looking at how these preconceptions about Africa can be derailed; second, how we can push our focus in studying Africa beyond stereotypes and convenient familiarity, and find a way of transforming the disparate and ineffective ways that Africa is taught; third, how we can use the study as a catalyst to change the traditional paradigm into a more cultural relevant model for African studies; and fifth, how we can provide motivation and justification as to why learning about Africa is important and introduce the conceptual framework that provides a better understanding of the continent and its societies.

"Literature of Protest & Revolt Against Patriarchy in Mace Mutum"
Nura Abubakar (Ohio University)

In a male-dominated society, Hausa women authors utilize writing as a subversive tool to express their displeasure and attract attention to their predicament and what they consider to be an unfair traditional authority. Their narratives about female heroines who fight against existing traditional systems assist female readers to comprehend the fury felt by other women in comparable

circumstances. In addition to other gender-related injustices, forced marriage and polygyny are at the center of these women's experiences. In this paper, I suggest that Rahama Abdul Majid's Mace Mutum not only confronts patriarchal inequalities that subjugate women in Northern Nigeria, but also challenges clerics to give meaning to exergies in translations and interpretations of sacred texts. As the text unveils, Northern Nigeria's misogynistic notion of patriarchal dominance and biases towards women were created by the misreading of some Qur'anic/Hadiths scriptures and cultural impact.

"Swahili for All: Bridging Divides and Integrating Learners within U.S. Classrooms and Beyond"
William J. Schoy IV (University of Pittsburgh)

In this study we reviewed the literature pertaining to the relevance and benefits of Swahili Language and Culture instruction for students in American classrooms, cutting across demographic boundaries. Our main research questions center on 1) What is the state of Swahili language and culture instruction within the K-12 setting? What is its value for students? We came to our findings through review of past literature and conversation with Swahili practitioners. In our findings, we discovered that while Swahili has great potential in American classrooms for language instruction and representation of African topics, there are significant policy concerns related to its implementation, at least in formal educational settings. Future research may involve greater study of the policy concerns and the potential of more investment of Swahili language and culture instruction in informal settings and through relationships with university Swahili programs and schools.

Panel 1B: *Approaches to Music and Arts Pedagogy*

Friday May 5, 11:00am-12:30pm

"Writing the Music of Contemporary Africa"
Carol Muller (University of Pennsylvania)

I have recently been writing a book on the Music of Contemporary Africa. By "contemporary" I mean in the present moment, even if the traditions can be traced back hundreds or thousands of years. By Africa I am include North, Southern, East, Central and West Africa, the Sahel, and the islands with a chapter on multiple African diasporas. Writing a single book is almost impossible, because of the size and age of the continent, its language and cultural diversity, and centuries of engagement with the Arab world especially via the Mediterranean and Indian Oceans, and the Red Sea; Asia along the Indian Ocean, in addition to more conventional understandings of transatlantic African engagement. And I should add, when I was asked by Routledge to write the book I was told that nobody in the global north actually teaches whole classes on Africa, usually Africa is included in "world music" courses, but she wanted a book on Africa regardless.

I explain in this presentation is the hugely transformative experience it has been digging into contemporary online resources, reading literature on Africa and its deep history—we all come from Africa is the current understanding from genetic, fossil, and archeological evidence—which also means it is likely that both human music and language developed first on that continent. Including a

chapter on Islands and African Diasporas means thinking more broadly about African slave trades both inside the continent (across the Sahel); and surrounding oceans—Indian, Mediterranean and Red Sea. Teaching the Music of Africa is about understanding the origins of humankind, of language, and music, and its contemporary musical manifestations, something we could all be interested in doing.

"Indigenized Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching African Popular Music in American Classrooms"
Alaba Ilesanmi (Florida State University)

African popular music often bears intra- and intercultural influences at varying degrees. When we listen to African popular music, we recognize specific "non-African" instruments and hear a resemblance of another foreign genre. Our quest to trace origins is central to this phenomenon of allusive listening and the ways we teach. In our "world music" classes, we engage in what I refer to as "origin listening," engaging with various concepts that highlight "borrowing" and barely discussing the process of indigenization, how musicians embody "local" and "foreign" influences, and actively negotiate and transform them. We teach our students the acts and arts of listening to African popular music and hearing others when we engage in "origin listening." At what point does a foreign material become local? How can we celebrate and elevate the "local"? How does the concept of indigenization challenge the inherent power interplay or (re)shape our understanding of concepts like "crossover," "exchange," and "appropriation"? Using the Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti as a case study, this paper will propose using ideas of musical indigenization to create indigenized pedagogical approaches to teaching African popular music in ways that place Africa and African musicians at the center.

"Information Literacy and Archival Materials from East Africa: Piloting a Multifaceted Pedagogical Program at the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center"
Melanie Zeck (Library of Congress American Folklife Center)

The Library of Congress's American Folklife Center (AFC) houses archival materials in over 500 languages, documenting cultural practices on six continents. The AFC also provides unparalleled research and informational support by (1) connecting patrons with relevant materials and (2) facilitating responsible and informed usage of these materials in classroom and community settings.

In 2020, the AFC embarked on a multifaceted project to raise awareness and usage of its East African collections. This project culminated in an instructional video, a hands-on research workshop, and an online research guide, each of which was presented bilingually (English and Swahili) to enhance usability by fluent speakers and language learners across the globe. This paper offers an overview to the project's rationale and implementation, an assessment of its reception, and implications for future projects. I will argue that the project was successful largely because it wove fundamental principles of pedagogy and librarianship, thereby supplementing (but not duplicating) the approaches employed by educators of African studies, languages, and allied disciplines. This project also generated awareness of and interest in ethnographic and archival materials from other regions of Africa, for which new online research and pedagogical guides are currently in progress.

Panel 2A*: Linguistics and the Language of Change*

"Heritage Linguistics: African and African Diasporic Languages in K-12 U.S. Curricula"
Chelsea Jimenez (University of Pittsburgh)

While African and African diaspora descendants fill classrooms across the nation, their languages and literacies often are not welcome in those same spaces. In many cases, languages that come from Mother Africa and their diasporic community countries are not accessible in academia. Very few K-12 spaces have these languages available for foreign language acquisition. It is within higher education where some may encounter the ability to learn and interact with such rich languages. This unfortunately excludes masses of people from not only learning with their heritage languages in schools, but also limits people of other diverse languages and literacies to learn about the brilliance that comes from the African and Black community. Through investigating academic language standards, education language law, policy, and practices, it is evident that antiblackness is central to the exclusion of these languages and literacies, thus silencing and excluding them from mainstream inclusion and celebration. Reimagining the ways students are engaged and educated around African and Black languages, literacies, and culture, schools have the power to enhance the curricula and teaching practices through this centering. This presentation will provide an analysis for the current context of language education, as well as suggestions for inclusion in the classroom.

"Assignment Tutorial: Podcasting for Accessibility"
Lauren Taylor (Pennsylvania State University)

While teaching a class on Architectural History in Africa, my students noticed the general paucity of information available online about African cities and buildings. The most rigorous information about these histories so often lived behind the paywalls of European and North American academic databases. Though disappointing, these barriers to accessibility sparked productive in-class conversations about systemic impediments to the equitable circulation of knowledge. Students were interested in sharing their final project research in a format that was internationally accessible and free-of-cost. To this end, they created podcasts, now available online and on iTunes/Stitcher under the title "Afritechture."

At "Africa In The Classroom," I hope to explain how I introduced this podcasting assignment to students in my course titled Architecture and Urbanism in Africa. In addition to sharing the goals and outcomes of this assignment, as well as short audio clips from student work, I will provide a brief tutorial on how to use this assignment format in one's own teaching. As a part of this presentation, I will share a link to all of the materials that I used to organize this assignment, including grading rubrics, research guides, and a how-to packet regarding recording/editing a podcast. By sharing this work, I hope to make a podcast-based assignment more approachable to conference attendees who are less comfortable with the medium.

"Righting Writing and Community Engagement: Bringing Africa to the
English Composition Classroom"
Leonora Anyango (University of Pittsburgh)

Content on Africa remains scanty in pedagogical realms of American education. In the K12 context, students hardly learn any content that would bring them any knowledge of Africa. While it was satirical, "The Onion" online magazine carried a story where the Florida Board of Education purportedly "removed" Africa from world maps. This satire may be based on the general absence of African content in educational institutions. Students, therefore, join higher institutions of learning with no prior knowledge of anything about the continent.

In this presentation, I will showcase two courses that I developed and taught at the English Department, University of Pittsburgh. Both courses were centered on exposing students to knowledge about Africa. First year students, most of whom had indicated that they had no prior knowledge with Africa, were given an opportunity to develop semester long research projects about a topic of their choice close to their own academic interests. In this presentation, I will describe and discuss the classes, the assignments, and how students carried out research among people born in the African continent and agencies that resettle refugees. In my conclusions, I will show the need for similar courses as a way to engage students with Africa.

Panel 3A: *African Futures and the Politics of Motion*

Saturday May 6, 9:45-10:45am

"An Ecocritical Analysis of Sugarcane Monoculture in Martinique"
Joanne Ezibe (University of Pittsburgh)

Sugar played a principal role in the expansion of the European world economy, being the most sought-after commodity in the New World. By the eighteenth century, even when the extractive industries declined, sugar continued as the source of colonial wealth, as it was the main crop cultivated in the Caribbean colonies. This governing transformation of the world sugar market would redefine the function and significance of colonialism and slavery in both new and complex ways throughout the world economy, leaving lasting impacts on enslaved Africans, indigenous peoples of Martinique, and the environment. In this sense, sugar acts as a catalyst, the incendiary device that catapulted the destruction and reshaping of Martinican land and its people. The disputed histories, social divisions, and political conflicts constitutive of human existence on Earth are necessary prerequisites for comprehending global environmental issues, and it is through the history of the production and export of sugar that one can reveal the ways in which ecological history and human history are one in the same, shaped by intricate entanglements of power relations and materiality. The topic of this paper analyzes how, through the production and exportation of sugarcane, French colonialism transformed the current physical and social climate of Martinique, as well as addresses the impact French colonial powers had on Martinique, and to what extent this interaction affected the region, both ecologically and socially.

"A Failure to Decolonize? The Continued Phenomenon of Disputed Elections and "Party Jumpers" in Kenyan Politics"
Robert Maxon (West Virginia University)

The paper seeks to locate key features of contemporary Kenyan politics as reflective of a failure of decolonization paying particular attention to the phenomenon of "party jumpers." These are political candidates who "cross the floor" by changing their party affiliations soon after the completion of national elections. The paper will illustrate that Kenya's recent, and on-going, experience with this has numerous parallels with the politics of decolonization in the 1950s and early 1960s as well as the early independence period. Key goals for democratization were ignored and forgotten. Examining past examples will help to identify the conditions that have caused such party changing as well as the motives of those involved. Such an exercise should enable teachers in US and Kenyan classrooms to find the means to explain the reasons for this continuing trend in Kenyan politics. It will also hopefully provoke discussion of the meaning of democracy in the current context by reference to traditional and colonial politics and the key ideas that there are no final victories or defeats in political contestation, but rather continuing debates and renewed opportunities to find consensus on national issues and/or wait your turn to control the state apparatus.

Panel 3B: *Coverage, History, and Perspectives from Beyond the Canon*

Saturday May 6, 9:45-10:45am

"Everyone Should Learn About Africa: A Medievalist Teaching Africa in Modern World History"
Ethan Birney (Spartanburg Methodist College)

At a small teaching-focused college, you teach whatever needs to be taught. When I, a European medievalist, was assigned Modern World History in my first year, I kept the previous instructor's textbook and was at least a day ahead of my students. We realized together that we were simply covering Western Civ with some non-Western points of interest. I set out to change the course. The next year I introduced a different textbook and received a grant from the African Studies Center at Boston University to redesign my course with more African-focused content.

The shift made sense as my college's on-ground population is majority minority and many students want to learn about non-Western cultures and their vitality and contributions. And those students with little interest in history can sometimes be engaged through the presentation of novel information.

In this paper, I first discuss my experiences incorporating non-Western information, especially African-focused information, into a narrative of World History that normally simplifies value of study into a binary of worthy-dominant and unworthy-dominated cultures. Secondly, I explore student feedback and how it demonstrates the importance of non-Africanists exposing students to African cultures and histories since many students will never take an African-focused course.

"Perspectives on Decolonial Pedagogies in Teaching African History"
Fatuma Guyo (University of Tennessee-Knoxville)

The African continent aspires to global agency and is primed for key socioeconomic changes with more than 1 billion people along with human- and natural-resource prospects. However, the history of the continent, its peoples and diverse cultures do not reflect this shift and trend. African studies in the Global North remains an under-represented field. We must ask the question of how these trends and shifts can be repurposed and used as a classroom tool to deconstruct misrepresentation of the continent in the Global North academia.

In my presentation, I provide a critical analysis of how gross misrepresentations of the African continent persist today. I draw on my pedagogical experiences as a female Africanist historian in the Global North to question the persistence of the colonial mindset.

I argue that mitigating challenges in the way of the growth of African Studies, it is imperative to understand (1) experiences of Africanist educators in the classroom, and (2) explore African ways of knowing and interdisciplinary approaches to build theories that best serve teaching and research interests of Africanists. These will go a long way in decolonizing African history and provides alternative ways to rethink the position and growth of African Studies in the Global North academy.

Panel 4A: *African Studies and the Practice of Pedagogy*

Saturday May 6, 11:00am-12:00pm

"Africa in Transition: Social and Cultural Issues"
Macrina Lelei (University of Pittsburgh)

Africa's many different societies and cultures have shown great resilience in the face of significant challenges. The continent's traditional social structures and mores were greatly disrupted by the slave trade and colonization. During the last half of the 20th century, Africans weathered tremendous political and economic upheaval. The fact that 55 national identities have emerged, albeit some stronger than others, is one of the success stories of the post-colonial era. The African Union, although a work in progress is a model of unity and solidarity between African countries and the people of Africa.

This paper explores the complex mix of tradition and change that pervades Africa's many societies and cultures today. Several key topics important in helping us understand African societies and cultures amid an ever-changing world, but where also customs, mores and rituals remain strong. Ties between extended family members, clans and ethnic groups are central to everyday existence; religion permeates individual and cultural life; children are cherished as bonds between families and generations. Many of these social and cultural realities are the subject of African literature, music, and cinema, which largely originate in urban areas. Indeed, the dynamism of Africa's complex mixing of tradition and change is clear in Africa's expanding cities.

"Debates and Issues: Teaching African Studies"
Louis A. Picard (University of Pittsburgh)

Discussion of Historical Debates: 1) Historical Issues; 2) Resistance to African Studies 3) Imperial vs. African Studies 4). The Anthropology debate) 5) African Studies At Pitt 6) Teaching graduates in African Studies 1987-2023.

Panel 4B: *Applied Case Studies from the Continent and Beyond*

Saturday May 6, 11:00am-12:00pm

"PYD in Africa: A 4-H Ghana Case Study"
Muriel Go-Maro (Penn State University)

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a western framework that emphasizes the positive contributions youth make in their communities when they experience positive development. To promote PYD adults must provide environments with resources and opportunities where youth can develop their competencies and agency. Many organizations in western nations have implemented a PYD approach to create a positive impact in youths' lives. For example, 4-H is one the largest youth organizations that has established itself as a PYD-informed organization. Over the years, 4-H has expanded to many countries, including multiple African nations. However, there is a dearth of research examining how PYD has been implemented in non-western nations and the challenges these nations face around the implementation of the PYD framework. This gap is important to address to ensure these programs can implement PYD effectively and positively impact youth. This qualitative study provides examples of how PYD has successfully been implemented in Ghana through 4-H and how the organization is helping Ghanaian youth experience positive development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the organization's executive director and former organization members. Since being established in 2000, 4-H Ghana has transformed the lives of more than 60,000 Ghanaian youth, and 20,000 club advisors. Despite these successes, 4-H Ghana faces many challenges, primarily a lack of funding to offer adequate training to club advisors and support club members with their projects. This study on 4-H Ghana is relevant to the North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) 2023 Conference because it highlights the impact that PYD-informed programming can have on the lives of youth in rural and urban communities in non-western nations. This study showcases how PYD has been implemented within a non-western cultural context to assist African youth experience positive development. When Ghanaian youth who participate in 4-H Ghana experience positive development, they are equipped to become effective leaders that will usher in radical change within their communities and countries. To this extent, this study also seeks to urge youth development scholars to study how PYD can be further leveraged to help African youth experience positive development within their specific cultures and communities.

"Community-Based Design Thinking for Social Change in Marginalized Communities"
Sylvanus Wosu (University of Pittsburgh)

Community-Based Design Thinking for Social Change in Marginalized Communities is framed as a combination of technical-empathetic and socio-psychological thinking toward designing solution to drive organized implementation plan for social change. Empowerment leadership process is integrated into human design thinking mindset that empathetically engages the individuals, followers, and community to discover, define, decide, design, and deliver the desired social change. With regards to the growth of individuals and communities as an outcome of societal impact, empowerment is presented as a means of empowering people and organizations through personal empowerment that supports community well-being and the mechanism for effecting broad-based socio-economic transformation; strategies that change agents can adopt/adapt to improve the quality of life and well-being of humanity are presented. The key empowerment leadership attributes with respect to developing leaders for social change in marginalized situations are presented in the context of a transformational leadership process that empowers individuals and followers for maximum productivity in other- or community-centered services. Full discussions on leadership empathy set up the groundwork on empathetic understanding in the first value-based imperative that prepare future leaders for social change service work through direct and hands-on engagement in the lives of the individuals and community.

Panel 5A: *Power and Empowerment: Listening to Younger Voices*

Saturday May 6, 12:15-1:45pm

"The Power of African Children Book Biographies in the Dreaming Process"
Nosakhere Griffin-EL (The Young Dreamers Bookstore)

Children books are tools that aid in the holistic development of children. As the Young Dreamers Bookstore, we have found that when children read biographies, it has offers them a deeper understanding of what it takes to develop and advance their dreams. In this presentation, Dr. Griffin-EL will analyze 4 biographies and provide 4 reasons why educators, parents, and community members should use biographies to inspire children to dream. This presentation is for educators, parents, and community members working with children in the age range from 3-10 years of age.

"PlayLab as Ritual to Build Community"
Jerone Morris (Faison Elementary School)

Believing that African Philosophies can serve as an anecdote to trauma that Black children experience in and out of schools, several teachers examined the definition and role of "community" as a safe sanctuary that nurtures human development. The research project resulted in PlayLab, a sacred, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sustaining ritual that develops community-mindedness in a first-grade classroom. The purpose of the presentation is to describe how one teacher used PlayLab as a ritual to build community by infusing African principles in his classroom.

Using photographic documentation and student journals participants will see how the African principles of Being, Belonging and Becoming took root in an urban public school primary classroom.

"Afrocentric Engagement Strategies from a School Social Worker Perspective"
Detria Dixon (Pittsburgh School District)

I am proposing to present a model for school social work prevention using an Afrocentric approach. Building off the work of the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and The Association of Black Psychologist (ABPsi), I developed an Afrocentric framework, that mirrors the medical model used by school districts, to disrupt the decolonization of Black youth.

My theoretical model suggest that structural racism and oppression has caused Black people, in particular Black youth, to be disoriented, dislocated, de-centered, and spiritually alienated from their culture, which has resulted in self-hatred, ignorance, dissonance, and anger. The engagement strategies I propose will help a person of African descent to expand their foundational consciousness that leads to psychic liberation and cultural reclamation.

It is my hope that attendees will take away a few engagement strategies in their intent to deliver African content in their practice.

Panel 5B: *Practices of Participation*

Saturday May 6, 12:15-1:45pm

"Diplomacy Lab -- Africa"
Karin Warner (University of Pittsburgh)

Launched by the Department of State in 2013, Diplomacy Lab is a public-private partnership between the Department and U.S. colleges that enables the State Department to "course-source" research related to foreign policy challenges by harnessing the efforts of students and faculty experts at colleges and universities across the United States. The University of Pittsburgh is part of this! Dr. Karin Warner was selected by the State Department to lead a student research team to address current challenges in Africa and propose creative and innovative Diplomatic ways the United States can enable STEM progress in Healthcare, Cyber, Infrastructure, Energy, access to water, Housing, and other issues.

Over the course of Spring semester 2023, students collaborated across schools and disciplines to develop innovative and creative recommendations and present their findings to the State Department. Dr. Warner will share the synopsis and research findings/recommendations of this dynamic interdisciplinary team of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh and how her experience of facilitating Diplomacy Lab Groups on topical areas in Africa has been transformational for students.

"Developing an eLearning tool to Improve Cervical and Breast Cancer Screening and Diagnosis in
Nigeria"
Abi Fapohunda (University of Pittsburgh)

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. According to the World Bank in 2021, the population of Nigeria is over 213 million, approximately 20% of Africa's population. It also has one of the highest incidence rates of breast and cervical cancers in South of the Sahara Africa (also known as Sub-Saharan Africa) in 2020. The Global Cancer Observatory reported that these two cancers combined accounted for over one third of all new cancers across both sexes. It is estimated that by 2030, there will be 26 million new cancer cases and 17 million cancer deaths per year. With the rising rates of cancer, it is crucial that the public health community identifies ways to effectively increase cancer awareness, prevention, and early diagnosis of the most common female cancers in Nigeria. Many health practitioners received training with an inadequate preventive health approach through all phases of training, whether in medical or nursing schools. eLearning tools can play an important role in scaling up necessary skills for healthcare professionals to increase screenings and referrals, and to enhance their knowledge of cancer control in Nigeria. To meet these imminent challenges, we are developing an eLearning platform that will train up to 500 healthcare practitioners.

"NyƆŋmƆ aha ni ehishi: An Analysis of the Role of Linguistic (In)justice in Influencing how Ga

people Navigate their Relationships to Land and Community"
Kella Merlain-Moffatt (Teachers College, Columbia University)

Drawing on the case of the Ga people of Ghana, whose ancestral land is the capital Accra, this study seeks to investigate whether Ga youth have the "skills needed to build the nation" and what role, if any, does language play in civic responsibility. Building on a conceptual framework rooted in linguistic justice, decolonial theory, and civic engagement, this is explored through 22 semi-structured interviews with Ga people ages 22- 58 with a focus on youth ages 18-35. I consider changes in mother tongue based-multilingual education policy in lower primary school between the years of 1970–2002 and 2004–2006 to understand youth educational experiences, Ga people's perception of the vitality of their language that bears the same name, and their responsibility to community. Contrary to the notion that there is a disinterest in and ineptitude towards civic engagement, this study finds that Ga youth find their civic responsibility to lie in passing on the Ga language. While this sentiment exists, their remain barriers to civic access. Additionally, participants find the loss of land and language to be tied to asymmetric bilingualism. I conclude by examining the implications of these results for mother tongue and civic education scholarship.