

IN MEMORIAM

Ethiopian airlines plane crash: Legon-IAS eulogises prominent scholar

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“It is difficult to talk about Pius in the past tense,” says Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo of the University of Ghana’s Institute of African Studies (IAS) as she attempts to collect her thoughts. “I am still so distraught I can’t believe that Pius has passed.”

Professor Pius Adesanmi, a Nigerian-born Canadian scholar, died along with 156 other passengers and crew on board Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, which crashed shortly after take-off on March 10. The aircraft was bound for Nairobi, Kenya from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Adesanmi’s death has greatly saddened the global African Studies community and in particular the faculty and staff of IAS, where he spent a year as a visiting scholar.

Adesanmi was a founding member and head of the African Studies Department in Carleton University, Canada. Despite his station in North America he was a man on the go; always updating his social media handles with his trips across Africa and around the world to contribute to African scholarship. In November 2018, Adomako Ampofo said she met Adesanmi at a conference in Atlanta even though he was still recovering from a near fatal car accident in Ibadan, Nigeria where he had attended a conference.

She was first introduced to Adesanmi in 2011. As the then director of the IAS, Adomako Ampofo was looking for someone to spearhead the process to create new courses on African thinkers for the Institute. Adesanmi came in highly recommended. “Pius and I had a conversation and I liked him immediately. We hadn’t even met,” says Adomako Ampofo. “And from the moment we met we clicked, the chemistry was right. He was a formidable writer, scholar; just an amazing thinker committed to the continent. The program had a limited time of a semester but we all just fell in love with Pius and he stayed with us for a whole year through an extension we got for him.”

In Memoriam

Adesanmi was a man of literature: a writer, a critic and a columnist. On Facebook and Twitter, where he had thousands of followers, he was always discussing, debating, and philosophising on issues related to Africa, often with a dose of wit and humour. His debut book, *The Wayfarer and Other Poems*, won the Association of Nigerian Authors' Poetry Prize in 2001. In 2010, he won the inaugural Penguin Prize for African Writing in non-fiction with his book, *You're not a Country, Africa*.

Denji Abudullahi, president of the Association of Nigerian Authors described Adesanmi in a Facebook post as a “very cerebral, innovative, delightful and public-spirited intellectual who was at ease and profound in any discourse he handled or was involved in.”

Dr. Kojo Opoku Aidoo, a fellow at the IAS holds similar views about him: “He was quite enthusiastic. A great scholar with a passionate disposition towards African Studies,” said Opoku Aidoo. “He was cast in the mould of Chinua Achebe – very brilliant, very intelligent, and very passionate.” Opoku Aidoo was the first to shoot an email to his colleagues upon learning about the crash.

One of those who received the email was Professor Dzodzi Tsikata, director of the IAS. Tsikata recalls that she met Adesanmi for the first time in December 2018 in Dakar, though they had both heard about each other by reputation in the academic community.

“He was very friendly. Clearly a confident and expansive human being who spoke to me as though we had known each other for a very long time,” said Tsikata. “This was a scholar at the prime of his life making important contributions to the field of African Studies.”

Tsikata notes that the courses Adesanmi helped to develop during his sabbatical with the IAS are still being taught and have come up strongly to be modified as part of the new offerings of the Institute. She is sure the Institute will consider ways of honoring his legacy.

Adesanmi, restless about Africa, full of optimism, and at the prime of his career, died in service to the continent. His loss will be deeply felt.

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Tribute by the Institute of African Studies and the School of Performing Arts

Kwabena Nketia: a visionary pioneer in scholarly leadership

Path-breaking Scholar-

You were born an only child, filled with wisdom.

You were born with a discerning, generous personality.

That is why you have trained and mentored people the world over in African- centred scholarship.

For us at the Institute of African Studies,

the institution of higher learning with an enviable reputation in the study of Africa,

School of Performing Arts

The school of advanced studies in performance

which learners and nobility alike approach with eagerness

we know we stand on your shoulders!

Emeritus Professor Kwabena Nketia,

You have opened the way,

You have given us the capital with which to work

Go in peace,

for you have laid a firm and impressive foundation

Okyerɛkyerɛni-kwankyerɛfo

Yɛwoo wo bakorɔ nyansafo

Yɛwoo wo kanhwɛfoɔ a adɔɛɛ wɔ wo mu

Nti na wode wo nyansa de Abibirem nimdee

Atete mma apetepete Wiase amansan nyinaa so

Institute of African Studies:

Suapɔn a yɛagyɛ din wɔ Abibiman adesua mu

School of Performing Arts

Agoro ne ɔyɛkyerɛmu suapɔn

Asuafoɔ ne abremɔn nyinaa ara de ahopopoɔ hwehwe yɛn akyiri akwan.

Yɛnim sɛ yɛgyina w'abatire so.

Obenfopɔn Kwabena Nketia

Woabue kwan

Woahye yɛn dwetire

Kɔ asomdwoɛɛ mu ɛfiri sɛ w'akyiri ayɛ fɛfɛfɛ

Early Influences

By the time J.H. Kwabena Nketia was invited to move from the Archeology Department of the University of Ghana to the Institute of African Studies in 1961, he had had the opportunity to undertake a considerable amount of field work pursuing Ghanaian and Akan music in particular within its cultural setting. He was set on the path of establishing African music (ethnomusicology) as a field in Ghanaian academia. This was made possible by the foresight of Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia in the Sociology Department who saw the link between the study of culture and the arts, with the study of society. From his position as Research Fellow in the Sociology Department in 1952, he became Senior Research Fellow in 1959 and, accepting an appointment at the Institute of African Studies in 1961, very quickly ascended to the professorial rankings of Associate Fellow in the same year and Full Professor in 1963.

Three major elements of Nketia's experience as a scholar and nationalist were to stand him in exceptional stead to take on a leadership role in the Institute of African Studies. The first was his commitment to field work as a researcher. For him, fieldwork was to be approached with a sense of both rigour and delighted discovery. The second was his meticulous documentation of his findings and his scholarship which often involved offering alternative perspectives to the prevailing dominant discourse in academia. Thirdly, he was already working within an interdisciplinary paradigm, bringing together fields such as music, linguistics and anthropology. This was to become one of the defining features of programmes at the Institute. Nketia was an educator and remained preoccupied with issues of methodology throughout his career. Additionally, he was in touch both with custodians of the indigenous cultures as well as national authorities. In this regard Professor Nketia always remembered the sheer depth of critical thought demonstrated by his grandmothers. He was therefore involved in establishing a supra-ethnic culture aimed at realising unity in diversity. With this particular constellation of experiences, and the recognition he was beginning to attract, Nketia was set to steer the Institute and the School of Music and Drama later known as the School of Performing Arts.

J.H Kwabena Nketia as Director of the Institute of African Studies: The Challenge

Starting his administrative career at the Institute as Deputy Director in 1961, Nketia was assigned the particular mandate of establishing a music and drama unit. He was confirmed as Director of the Institute of African Studies in 1965, concurrently holding the position of Director of the School of Music and Drama whose programmes had by then been developed enough to warrant a semi-independent status.

It must have been plain to Nketia that, alien as it may have been to conventions in the academy, the Institute's praxis should embody an unequivocal commitment to the centrality of creative expressions of culture in African life. The tongues that coined the disparaging rubric 'Dondology' to represent the efforts to bring African performance into mainstream academia were soon stilled as the Institute of African Studies and its School of Music and Drama began to attract streams of students from across the world.

Under Nketia's leadership, the University was assisted by the Institute to recognize in Ghanaian heritage and creativity, a sense of identity and vast, unexplored fields of enquiry which were to add exponentially to knowledge production about Ghana and Africa. Additionally, the ceremonial life of the university, whose uniqueness is greatly admired, has many features which display Ghanaian iconography and expressions. Indeed, Nketia was directly responsible for conceptualizing many of these features including the University of Ghana Anthem, of which he is the proud composer.

Professor Nketia's approach to developing the faculty needed to operationalize the Institute's mandate is revealing of his understanding of what it would take to build an African research hub founded on both rigor and innovation. Under his direction faculty in the University of Ghana were encouraged to become fellows at the Institute. Academics such as Kwame Daaku (History) became associated with the Institute. These were complemented by individuals engaged in groundbreaking intellectual and artistic work outside academia. The appointments of Mawere Opoku, Ephraim Amu and Efua Sutherland created a powerful force of emerging national icons with a keen interest in research and its application as well as creativity. The Institute became an essential fulcrum for the creation of a new national culture. This made it possible to establish a multi-layered programme of studies geared towards the doctorate, masters, undergraduate, and diploma as well as a variety of extra mural short courses in areas such as music composition and creative writing. The post-graduate programmes particularly revealed the scholarly potential of several crops of students out of whom outstanding members of the Institute's alumni include Professors George Hagan, Irene Odotei and Albert Awedoba.

The Institute of African Studies was also staffed with research assistants who became an invaluable resource both for conducting field work and documentation in a variety of formats for future reference. Documenting societies and cultures in real time involved the training of audio technicians and professional photographers with an eye and ear for the subtleties of cultural expression.

The Institute also developed modalities for recruiting indigenous intellectuals and artist(e)s to bring their knowledge and skills to bear on the

task of integrating African knowledge systems into academia.

In addition to this diversified staffing base, the Institute extended its influence by absorbing or collaborating with initiatives outside of academia as part of its extension work. The University of Ghana Drama Studio and the Manhyia Archives (housing the private archives of the Asantehene) in Kumasi are prime examples.

A highly successful collaboration between the government's Institute of Arts and Culture and The Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana created the Ghana Dance Ensemble in 1962. From its inception, the Ensemble was to be Ghana's flagship for the professional, world-wide promotion of the music and dance heritage of Ghana, undergirded by solid field work and experimental research.

The Ghana Dance Ensemble has a tradition of identifying young, talented artistes with mastery of particular dance forms from different parts of Ghana, and training them to express a dazzling variety of dances. Many of these dancers have gone on to set up their own companies or worked with companies all over the world.

The School of Performing Arts: A Dream Come True

Professor Nketia's accomplishments as educator, administrator, writer and a repository of African traditional knowledge bodies and values were crucial assets for bringing in African performing arts into the realms of the academy. As first director of the School of Music and Drama, he made sure that knowledge transmission was understood as the art of cultivating the moral, emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of developing an individual, a group or a nation. He also demonstrated with many musical compositions how this holistic education could be achieved by drawing on cultural forms such as music, dance and dramatic fusion.

The then School of Music and Drama at its inception represented a revolution in bringing indigenous artistic culture and epistemologies into a university based on a European model. The programmes developed included subjects such as African Dance Forms, Drama in African Societies, Ghanaian Folklore and Traditional African Songs, alongside Western standards such as Choreography, Dance Technique and Theory of Music. Nketia led and mentored a group of hardworking faculty members including dramatists like Joe DeGraft, musicians like N.Z.Nayo together with visiting scholars such as dancers Deborah Bartonoff of Israel and Drid Williams of the USA to make this move a reality.

With this strong team of performing arts practitioners and scholars, the School of Music and Drama under the directorship of Prof. Kwabena Nketia began to engage in experimental productions and works with African arts as

the focus. These laid a firm foundation on which the current Creative Industry in Ghana relies on for its materials and tools. The School of Performing Arts could not have been a reality without a strong pillar like Professor Nketia indeed Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's dream of setting the basis for the academic study of traditional intangible heritage forms like music, dance, dramatic enactment and other cultural practices would not have been actualized.

Within a few years of taking on the mantle of Director of the Institute African Studies, there is evidence of institutions, particularly in the United States of America, making tempting offers to have Nketia leave the Institute of African Studies to settle in these institutions. Offers included full professorships on a negotiated salary, regular sabbaticals, etc. Correspondence with these institutions clearly portray Prof Nketia's anxiety to see to it that programmes initiated would become properly established under his watch. This resulted in fairly complex arrangements to ensure that he could spend the time required in Ghana to provide consistent leadership in research, teaching, mentoring and institution-building.

In the meantime, the Institute had developed a healthy interdisciplinary programme of work in linguistics, history, social anthropology, development studies, literature and music. Over the years for example, Professor Nketia made regular contributions to the literary magazine, *Okyeame* with essays such as translations of pieces from the oral tradition as well as creative works in Twi which brought the Ghana Writers Association into close association with the Institute. The Institute's journal, *The Research Review* (now known as the *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*) and its associated *Occasional Paper Series* reflect Nketia's influence and contributions. The School of Music and Drama was evolving into a fully fledged independent institution, now School of Performing Arts.

Professor Nketia retired from the Institute of African Studies as Director in 1979. He was however appointed Professor Emeritus and maintained an active scholarly engagement, working on his compositions and papers. Most importantly, he made himself available for consultations and responding to a very heavy demand on his time by scholars and artistes from around the world.

Legacies of Professor J.H.Kwabena Nketia.

Thorsen (2004:201) partly attributes '...interdisciplinary studies emerging with the growth of Institutes of Music and Music Research all over the African continent' to J.H.Kwabena Nketia's initiatives in Ghana.¹

It is beyond the scope of this brief tribute to list the entire oeuvre of Professor Nketia which consists of more than 200 journal articles, books and monographs, but a few land-mark titles exemplify the knowledge production

¹ See Mitchel Strumpf 'Professor J.H.Kwabena Nketia :Ethnomusicologist and Educator' in Ampene et al.(2015)

in which he was involved: *Drumming in Akan Communities*, published by Thomas Nelson, London, in 1963 demonstrates the insightful documentation of cultural phenomena by the African scholars of the time; *The Music of Africa*, commissioned by WW Norton and Co., 1974, is perhaps the most renowned of his works, and remains an exemplar of balancing between breadth, depth and accessibility in scholarly writing. He has several essays suggesting the re-direction of theory towards a deeper understanding of expressive cultures in Africa. His book *Ethnomusicology and Africa Music Modes of Inquiry and Interpretation* Vol.1., assembles a number of key ideas in this respect.

His works in Akan must be highlighted as a contribution to building the literature necessary for scholarship in Ghanaian languages. Anthologies of traditional poetry such as *Ayan*, *Amoma*, *Ab'fodwom* as well as his own creative work such as *Anwonsem* and *Akwansosem bi*. Together his works set the standard for framing the scholarly output of the Institute of African Studies and the School of Performing Arts.

Nketia was not one to walk away from epistemological controversies. In response to disparaging remarks about the 'authenticity' of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, Nketia stated that the objective of the Ensemble's work 'was not to present an anthropological specimen; it was to create art.' Nketia comments on the view of a particular anthropologist by saying 'That was the old way thinking about it, sentimental perhaps.' Nketia insists '... the dances acquire another meaning in the context in which it is being performed. And for us the national meaning is extremely important.' (Schauert in Ampene et al., 2015: 586). This line of argument clearly sets up the parting of ways between the Eurocentric external gaze and an African-centred position on knowledge production about Africa.²

The Institute and School's programmes under Professor Nketia attracted students and scholars from around the world. It is significant that after retirement from a long stint at universities abroad, Professor Nketia resettled at the University of Ghana by creating the International Centre for African Music and Dance. This unique programme attracted a large number of graduate students from around the world and also built an impressive library of audio visual and reading materials. In 2008 Professor Nketia through a memorandum of understanding gifted the audio visual library of ICAMD to the Audio Visual Archive of the Institute. Added to his research materials and documents from the 1950s and 60s originally housed at the Institute, Professor Nketia can be said to have made by far the most significant individual contribution to the Institute of African Studies' audio-visual archive which currently houses about 6000 items. The unit aptly named after him is known as the J.H. Kwabena Nketia Audio-Visual Archive.

² This issue is discussed extensively by Paul Schauert in his article "Nketia, Nationalism and the Ghana Dance Ensemble" in: Ampene et al. (2015) J.H Kwabena Nketia Festschrift: Discourses in African Musicology.

We at the Institute of African Studies have sought to express our indebtedness to Professor Emeritus Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia in a number of ways. One of which we are very proud was to present to him a festschrift titled *Discourses in African Musicology*, based on papers presented at a two-day international conference held in the ‘Kwabena Nketia Conference Room’ at the Institute in September, 2011 on the theme “*The Life and Works of Emeritus Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia*”.

Additionally, through the vibrant creativity of the School of Performing Arts and its alumini your initiative reverberates throughout the world with the chant of their final farewell:

1. We have a story

Let the story sound-

***Behold your servant departs
From Earth to join the Ancestors
And there he shall find rest
In the blissful abode of the creator***

2. We have a story to tell

It is a story of great significance
At the sound of bells, shakers and drums
Our story will surely echo in music.
Let the story sound

***Behold your servant departs
From Earth to join the Ancestors
And there he shall find rest
In the blissful abode of the creator***

3. Permit us to tell you our story

It is a story of multiple dimensions
Disseminating across many nations
From Accra the capital of Ghana
To the four corners of the globe
Let the story sound-

***Behold your servant departs
From Earth to join the Ancestors
And there he shall find rest
In the blissful abode of the creator***

In Memoriam

4. Listen to the story

It is a story you can see, touch and feel
And there goes your servant in musical compositions
And there goes your servant in choreographic fabrications
And there goes your servant in dramatic and theatre productions
And the School of Performing Arts rejoices
Over the Anthem at University Congregations
Let the story sound

***Behold your servant departs
From Earth to join the Ancestors
And there he shall find rest
In the blissful abode of the creator***

5. It is a story of a particular day

Some days may be amazing with sound
Some days may indeed be difficult with rhythm
But what a shocking day it was with vibration?
Your servant slept on this day Without a movement or gesture

Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia
Da yie, Da yie, Da yie!