



Promoting Excellence in Knowledge

GHANA ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

INAUGURAL LECTURE 2017

TOPIC:

**"WHO ARE WE AND WHOSE ARE WE?
IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMING THE NATION"**

SPEAKER:

**PROFESSOR AKOSUA
ADOMAKO AMPOFO, FGA**

*Professor of African and Gender Studies,
Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana*



DATE: FRIDAY AUGUST 25, 2017 | **TIME:** 5:30 PM

VENUE: GHANA ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AUDITORIUM
*#1 Research Crescent, Casely Hayford Road, Airport Res. Area,
Near Water Research Institute, CSIR; Behind Golden Tulip Hotel, Accra*

CHAIRMAN: PROF. KOFI ANYIDOH, FGA,

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

PROFESSOR AKOSUA ADOMAKO AMPOFO , FGA

Professor Akosua Adomako Ampofo attended Aburi Girls' Secondary School; the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology where she studied Architecture (BSc) and later Development Planning (MSc); the University of Dortmund (PG Spatial Planning); and Vanderbilt University where she received a PhD in Sociology. Her teaching, research and activism address issues of African Knowledge systems; Higher education; Identity Politics; Gender relations; and Popular Culture. She has been a Visiting Fellow/Professor at Universities around the world including the University of Cape Town; Concordia University, Irvine; University of Birmingham; and the Pennsylvania State University. Of her numerous publications, a recent few include:

“Re-viewing Studies on Africa, #Black Lives Matter, and Envisioning the Future of African Studies” *African Studies Review* (59)2: 7-27 (2016).

With Deborah Atobrah, **“Expressions of Masculinity and Femininity in Husbands' Care of Wives with Cancer in Accra”** *African Studies Review* (59)1: 175-197 (2016).

With Michael PK Okyerefo, **“Men of God and Gendered Knowledge”** in Brenda Cooper and Robert Morrell (Eds.) *Africa-Centred Knowledges: Crossing Fields and Worlds*. Oxford: James Currey, 163-178 (2014).

With Cheryl Rodriguez and Dzodzi Tsikata she co-edited the 2015 volume, **Transatlantic Feminisms: Women's and Gender Studies in Africa and the Diaspora**. Lanham, MD, Lexington Books (2015).

Professor Adomako Ampofo has an eclectic mix of academic and civic engagements. At the University of Ghana where she teaches, she has been a two-time elected member of the Council; the founding Head of the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy, CEGENSA, (2005-2009); the Director of the Institute of African Studies (2010-2015), and has served on most of the University's statutory boards and committees. She is the Founding Vice-president of the African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA, www.asaa.org); Co-President of the Research Committee on Women and Society of the International Sociological Association; Co-Editor, *Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa* blog (www.cihablog.com) and an honorary member of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa. She is the Chairperson of the youth-led organisation Excellent Leadership Group (ExLA); and Vice-Chair of the Advisory Board of the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT). Some other Boards and committees on which she has, or still serves are the Editorial Boards of the African Perspectives series at the University of Michigan; and the journals *Feminist Africa* and *Gender and Society*. She is the immediate past co-editor of the journal *Ghana Studies*, and in-coming member of the African Studies Review editorial team. Others are the boards of the Centre for African Studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa;

ActionAid Ghana; Christian Rural Aid Network; the Ghana National AIDS Commission; the Ghana National Theatre; DataBank Foundation; Legacy Girls High School; Mentoring Women Ghana; Participatory Development Associates, Ghana; the Social Science Research Council (New York)'s Next Generation Africa Fellowships; and Transatlantic Roundtable on Religion and Race.

Professor Adomako Ampofo is a member of diverse national, regional and international professional associations and civil society organisations including the Ghana Domestic Violence Coalition; the Network for Women's rights in Ghana; the Council for Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA); the (US) African Studies Association (and two of its cognate bodies, the Women's Caucus, where she has been co-convenor, and the Ghana Studies Association). Additionally, she has consulted for organizations such as the Ghana Ministry of Finance; Save the Children; UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNICEF. As a public intellectual Professor Adomako Ampofo is frequently invited as a speaker on University campuses and other critical sites around the world. She has received research grants from organisations such as CODESRIA, DFID, the Rockefeller Foundation; the Mellon Foundation and WHO; and been variously recognized for her work. She was a Junior Fulbright Scholar in 1995-96; a New Century Fulbright Scholar in 2004-2005; and a Senior Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence in 2015-16. In 2010 she was awarded the Feminist Activism Award by Sociologists for Women and Society; and in 2015 she delivered the African Studies Review Distinguished lecture at the African Studies Association's meetings held in San Diego. As a public intellectual, she is open to engaging with social and other media. Follow her on twitter [@adomakoampofo](https://twitter.com/adomakoampofo). She is the daughter of Joseph and Hanna Adomako, married to Kwame Ampofo, and mother of many young people including her two daughters with Kwame: Yaa Oparebea and Akosua Asamoabea. She fellowships at Calvary Baptist Church, Teshie; and enjoys swimming, travel, reading biographies and watching biopic movies. She is an occasional painter and will not turn down a meal of cocoyam fufu and *ɛbunubunu* with snails.

WHO ARE WE AND WHOSE ARE WE? IDENTITY AND TRANSFORMING THE NATION

“This God made us in all our diversity . . . allowing each culture to have its own time to develop, giving each its own place to live and thrive in its distinct ways” – Acts 17:26 (VOICE).

The quest to stake a claim to one's identity has obvious value for people who identify as minorities and are treated as inferior. At the same time, today's identity politics can be pushed to absurd limits when it is suggested that individuals have no inherited identity, that we can “be whoever we want to be”, basically “discovering” our identity(ies) or even creating one (them) from scratch. For what does it mean to be a “trans-autistic pangender asexual demiromantic trans-Asian cat otherkin” (Michael Bird, 2017)? The notion of self-claimed identities also has practical limitations. So, while a white British woman who speaks Ewe fluently, and prepares akple with distinction may be well received as an (at least honorary) Ewe, a black Krobo man has zero chance of being received as an Anglo-American no matter that he was born and raised in Brooklyn, nor how adequately he rolls his Rs.

Thus, in a world where individuals and nations do not all share equal access to resources, or grading of their humanness, national, ethnic and racial identities remain indispensable parts of the whole within which we constitute who we are and fight for our share of the global cake. From early childhood (some would say from the womb), as we are immersed in the cultural traditions, values and customs of our societies we typically develop a positive sense of identity and confidence in who we are as a people—Adangbes, Akans, Dagmobs, Ewes, Guans, Ghanaians, Africans, Blacks and so forth. With time, the images and messages conveyed in our social world can reinforce our comfort with our identity(ies), or lead to a sense of uncertainty and discomfort about who we are and our value in the collective of humanity. This happens explicitly—such as via media representations—or more surreptitiously—through what is endorsed or rejected in our everyday life. The truncated story of Africa is that we have guided ourselves not just from our own unique perspectives, but also by how we think we might (and should) be perceived by the outside (read: white/Euro) world. Examples abound. Why, for example, would we (still) sing a song about the “bleak mid-winter” at Christmas, or acquire

an unshakeable “Bostonian” accent after a short time spent in the U.S (but never a Xhosa accent after an extensive period spent in South Africa)? When a so-called Western source of knowledge about our own societies is privileged over a Ghanaian's, both by Westerners but also by Ghanaians, this reinforces notions of cultural superiority/inferiority and undermines our ability to uphold a healthy self-identity. This damaged self-image, what W.E.B. Du Bois described as a “double consciousness”, then shapes our developmental trajectory in very real ways; to borrow an old cliché, any people who don't know and appreciate who they are, cannot develop.

“It surely must be as clear as the price of plantain that there are certain things that cannot be legislated out of existence” – Elizabeth Obene (1978)

Ghana, and Africa's rich social and economic history, our strong and proud kingdoms, have been well documented. While our identities are not embedded in our DNA, they are pregnant with inherited significance and value. However, today it would be difficult to argue that our country, and much of the continent, is not in a place of developmental crisis. Diverse governance systems and governments have come and gone, and yet a simple survey of news reportage over the last half century reveals intransigent problems that cannot be legislated away. In my lecture, I will argue that we are in a place of identity crisis, and that this is intricately linked with our socioeconomic status. The lecture will suggest examples of the “double consciousness” that reflects others’ ownership of who we are, and how this is further associated with socioeconomic regression. I will conclude by pointing to innovative forms of resistance and reclaiming, that can guide a wider transformation project. The historic characteristics of who we were can be reconciled with contemporary human needs, and deployed strategically through formal and informal education for our national wellbeing and progress.

History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again” – Maya Angelou

5:30 PM

■ **Introduction of Chairman**

*Prof. P. K. Turkson, FGA,
Honorary Secretary, GAAS*

■ **Chairman's Remarks and Introduction of Speaker**

*Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, FGA;
Vice President, Arts Section, GAAS*

■ **Lecture**

■ **Chairman's Closing Remarks**

■ **Honorary Secretary's Remarks**

■ **Refreshments**

THE ACADEMY

The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences is Ghana's Premier Learned Society. It was founded in November 1959 by Government Instrument of Incorporation. Its aim is to bring together the highest level of intellectuals, experts, professionals in the country to constitute a 'Think Tank' in the Arts and Sciences to enable it advise government and other relevant bodies on issues of importance to national development.

Mission

The mission of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences is to encourage the creation, acquisition, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge for national development through the promotion of learning.

Objectives

The Academy's objectives are to:

- Promote the study, extension, and dissemination of knowledge of the Arts and Sciences;
- Promote the establishment and maintenance of proper standards of endeavour in all fields of the arts and sciences;
- Recognize outstanding contributions to the advancement of the arts and sciences in Republic of Ghana;
- Contribute actively to the advancement of Ghana and Africa in particular and the world in general by examining and addressing issues of development; and
- Do any other things that are conducive or incidental to the attainment of all or any of the foregoing objects.