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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4837222k>

### Journal

African Studies Review, 66(2)

### ISSN

0002-0206

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### Publication Date

2023-06-01

### DOI

10.1017/asr.2022.97

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# The Africa-Diaspora Orbit: Anani Dzidzienyo's Contributions to African/Black Studies and Black Liberation

Bright Gyamfi 

**Abstract:** Drawing on interviews and archival and published materials, Gyamfi reinterprets Anani Dzidzienyo's significance as a Black Studies scholar and activist. Dzidzienyo was a pioneer in academic African diaspora studies who institutionalized the inclusion of Africa and Brazil. For fifty years, Dzidzienyo created Black Studies and Afro-Latin American programs, designed Afro-Brazilian courses that expanded Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, and supported freedom struggles in Africa and Brazil. In so doing, he built a transnational network of scholar-activists and institutions. Yet, for all this, scholars have mostly neglected Dzidzienyo's work and wide influence on multiple fields of study and liberation movements.

**Résumé:** S'appuyant sur des interviews et des documents d'archives et publiés, Gyamfi réinterprète l'importance d'Anani Dzidzienyo en tant que chercheur et activiste des Black Studies. Dzidzienyo a été un pionnier des études universitaires de la diaspora africaine qui a institutionnalisé l'inclusion de l'Afrique et du Brésil. Pendant cinquante ans, Dzidzienyo a créé des programmes d'études noires et afro-latino-américaines, conçu des cours afro-brésiliens qui ont élargi les études portugaises et brésiliennes et soutenu les luttes pour la liberté en Afrique et au Brésil. Ce faisant, il a construit un réseau transnational d'universitaires-activistes et d'institutions.

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*African Studies Review*, Volume 0, Number 0 (2022), pp. 1–26

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doi:[10.1017/asr.2022.97](https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.97)

Pourtant, malgré tout cela, les chercheurs ont, en grande majorité, négligé le travail de Dzidzienyo et sa large influence sur de multiples domaines d'étude et mouvements de libération.

**Resumo:** Com base em entrevistas, em materiais de arquivo e em publicações, Gyamfi reinterpreta a importância de Anani Dzidzienyo como acadêmico dos Estudos Negros e como ativista. Dzidzienyo foi uma figura pioneira nos estudos acadêmicos sobre a diáspora africana, graças a quem a integração de África e do Brasil se institucionalizou. Ao longo de 50 anos, Dzidzienyo criou os currículos norte-americanos dos Estudos Negros e dos Estudos Latino-Africanos, concebeu cursos afro-brasileiros que alargaram o âmbito dos Estudos Portugueses e Brasileiros, e apoiou as lutas de libertação em África e no Brasil. Ao fazê-lo, desenvolveu uma rede transnacional de instituições e ativistas acadêmicos. No entanto, e apesar de tudo isto, o trabalho de Dzidzienyo tem sido largamente ignorado, bem como a sua vasta influência em diversas áreas de estudo e em vários movimentos de libertação.

**Keywords:** Pan-Africanism; Black Studies; Latin American Studies; Afro-Brazilians; African Diaspora; Anani Dzidzienyo

(Received 23 August 2021 – Revised 05 April 2022 – Accepted 01 July 2022)

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Anani Dzidzienyo joined the ancestors in October 2020, as quietly and unpretentiously as he had moved through his life. These qualities belied the role he played for half a century as a distinguished scholar of African Diasporic studies. Born and raised in the Gold Coast, modern-day Ghana, Dzidzienyo was a scholar-activist, teacher, Pan-Africanist, mentor, pioneer in the study of the African diaspora, and a guardian of shared values for his global intellectual community. Dzidzienyo was one of the first African scholars to extensively study Afro-Latin American politics in the late 1960s and 1970s (Dzidzienyo 1971, 1978, 1985; Dzidzienyo & Turner 1981). He built on the work of Brazilian scholar-activists who expanded his understanding about the political, economic, and social conditions of Afro-Brazilians as well as race relations in Brazil (Dzidzienyo 1971, 2011; Hernández 2021). In his scholarship, Dzidzienyo situated the lived experiences of peoples of African descent at the heart of Latin American Studies. He urged scholars of Latin America and the African diaspora to seriously consider the place of Africa in their analysis. For Dzidzienyo, a focus on Africa allowed for an exploration of what Africa meant to the identities and political mobilization of Afro-Latin Americans beyond the rhetoric of Africa as simply a distant heritage.

In addition to his own scholarship, Dzidzienyo spent fifty years creating Black Studies and Afro-Latin American academic programs and departments throughout the United States and Latin America. He designed courses that placed Afro-Brazilian experiences at the center of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, and supported liberation struggles in Africa and Brazil both

rhetorically and financially. Moreover, he built a diverse network of scholar-activists and trained students who would become top American professors of Latin American studies, especially experts on Brazil. Positioned intellectually at the nexus of African Studies, Black Studies, and Latin American Studies, Dzidzienyo was able to bring Africans and peoples of African descent into conversation with one another, thus fostering scholarly exchanges between the Global South and the Global North.

Dzidzienyo's career fills a gap in our understanding of African intellectuals' contributions to both Black Studies and Latin American Studies. By providing a link between the African intellectuals who shaped Dzidzienyo's own ideas and the US academic institutions where his influence was felt, this history will help scholars assess the effects of major Africa-based intellectuals, such as Kwame Nkrumah, in a new way. Dzidzienyo's story underscores how Nkrumah's ideas about Pan-Africanism and African liberation inspired young, exiled (and self-exiled) scholars to seek out global linkages around race and power, to uncover historical connections, and to forge new ones. Dzidzienyo contributed to exciting new directions within the academy. He used his research and teaching on the Afro-Luso Brazilian Triangle from the 1970s and 1980s to stress the significance of including Africa in the discourse of the African diaspora. He attempted to move academic conversation about Africa within Latin American studies programs away from an idea of a static point of origin, detached from the rest of the world, by highlighting the enduring connections and similarities between Africa and its diaspora. Dzidzienyo's approach centered Africa in discussion with other parts of the African diaspora. And yet, scholars have paid little attention to Dzidzienyo's scholarly or political work or his wide influence on a diverse array of individuals and institutions. To counter this scholarly neglect, I draw from his published and unpublished materials, archival documents, and interview data to explain the significance of Anani Dzidzienyo and offer an interpretation of his life's work in Black Studies, African Studies, Latin American Studies, and Pan-African liberation struggles.

As a scholar-activist operating in an era of African and Black diaspora political and intellectual decolonization, Dzidzienyo embodied the ideals of Pan-Africanism and Black internationalism. Though scholars often use the terms Pan-Africanism and Black internationalism interchangeably, the two are not necessarily synonymous. Pan-Africanism has a much longer history and wider use than Black internationalism. The roots of Pan-Africanism can be traced to the work of Black intellectuals such as Edward Wilmot Blyden during the 1860s (Odamtten 2019). The Trinidadian scholar Henry Sylvester Williams coined the term "Pan-Africanism" at the University Exposition of Paris in 1900. By the time the Martinican intellectual Jane Nardal invented the term Black internationalism (*internationalisme noir*) in Paris in the 1920s, the term "Pan-Africanism" was already in wide circulation (Edwards 2003). Black intellectuals and activists rarely used the concept of Black internationalism (Adi 2018:5). It was only in the twenty-first century that academics in the

United States started using Black internationalism as an alternative to Pan-Africanism (Adi 2018:5; Bedasse et al. 2020).

In a recent 2020 American Historical Review forum, there was no consensus among scholars regarding the definition and significant differences between Pan-Africanism and Black internationalism (Bedasse et al. 2020). Most scholars agree that the two concepts are deeply intertwined. Carlos Fernandes, for instance, argues that it is difficult “to singularize their heuristic power, as both originate from the same vital force: conscious and organized worldwide struggle for Black emancipation (from slavery, colonialism, racism, and Eurocentrism)” (Bedasse et al. 2020:1725). Pan-Africanism and Black internationalism are both rooted in the idea of global Black liberation in the struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and white hegemony.

Nonetheless, the shift from African to Black is inherently significant because it displaces a continent with a racial grouping. Additionally, it allows for the incorporation of the political aspirations of Black peoples throughout the diaspora who have zero interest in Africa. Moreover, by focusing on *internationalism*, it takes nations as an inalterable fact of the landscape that must be worked around or transcended, whereas Pan-Africanism aspired to dissolve such lines in favor of real unity. This aspiration was seen in Nkrumah’s attempt to establish the Organization of African Unity with the hope that it might lead to the creation of a United States of Africa. For this reason, Black intellectual activists, including Nkrumah, W.E.B. DuBois, and George Padmore, primarily used the term Pan-Africanism instead of Black internationalism as a framework to challenge colonialism and imperialism and to imagine a post-independence Africa (Adi 2018:5). Dzidzienyo described himself as a Pan-Africanist and not necessarily a Black internationalist because he saw himself as an inheritor of Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism which emerged after the Fifth Pan-African Congress. Nkrumah’s peculiar Pan-Africanist vision was influenced by the people who preceded him, including Edward Blyden and DuBois and contemporaries such as Padmore and C.L.R. James. Pan-Africanism in the way that Nkrumah envisioned it was based on African/continental unity in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism at the Fifth Pan-African Congress and throughout his tenure as the Prime Minister and later President of Ghana.

The Fifth Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester, in the United Kingdom, in 1945, was significant for several reasons. It was the first time that Africa was well represented, and calls were issued for immediate independence for African colonies. Since 1945, when Africans became deeply involved in the Pan-African movement, they had taken the mantle and located it within Africa. As a result, the Fifth Pan-African Congress was the last meeting outside Africa, and all subsequent Pan-African Congresses have been held in Africa. Dzidzienyo’s emphasis for Africa in the Africa-Brazilian equation, and for Africa in the Africa-diaspora equation, paralleled what was happening on the African continent—the importance of African unity.

Dzidzienyo’s life and work extended Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism, which was both continental and diasporic in scope. For Nkrumah, African unity

encompassed those on the continent and in the diaspora. He noted that “all peoples of African descent whether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean or any other part of the world are African and belong to the Africa nation” (Nkrumah 1970:87). Dzidzienyo took Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanism and institutionalized it in the Black Studies and Latin American Studies programs and departments at Brown University. He built networks to animate it, developed pedagogy to teach it, and crafted a research agenda to study it.

Scholars have documented the work and lived experiences of prominent African American and Caribbean thinkers, artists, and activists who traveled to Africa (Anderson 2015; Dworkin 2017; Gaines 2006; Talton 2019). However, with the exceptions of well-known African intellectuals including Nkrumah, James Aggrey, Julius Nyerere, and Cheikh Anta Diop, there is still little recognition of the vital role played by young thinkers coming from Africa to the United States. Ghanaian intellectuals played a critical role in shaping a lesser-known and often neglected global aspect of Black radicalism and Black internationalism (Gyamfi 2021). Dzidzienyo’s West African background and the ways he approached Black Studies programs in the US led to a different kind of understanding than would have been achieved by African Americans as the sole leading force in this project of the Black Atlantic intellectual milieu. Not only did Dzidzienyo bring a Ghanaian experience into the global Black liberation project, but he also influenced scholars and intellectuals to better understand the interconnectedness of Africa and the Americas. He foregrounded a strong engagement with modern Africa and its diasporas, moving scholarly discourse beyond a fixed, ahistoric view of Africa. Bringing these continents into conversation with each other through his research and teaching, Dzidzienyo’s work provided a comprehensive understanding of the global and diverse Black experience.

From his personal experience and research, Dzidzienyo was able to understand the diverse ways Africans were subjugated racially in colonial Africa, Brazil, and the US. Rather than simply identifying a common Black Atlantic experience, his research and teaching often emphasized the comparability of those experiences, while stressing that Africans had a different subjugated identity in all of those places. Through his lived experience, Dzidzienyo came to realize that the manner in which Africans were subjugated in colonial Africa was not the same as their subjugation in Brazil and the US, due to the different political economies and histories in each of these spaces. Bringing his Ghanaian experience to bear along with his deep understanding of Afro-Brazilian societies and engagement with African Americans, Dzidzienyo enabled Blacks to understand their own subjugated experience through comparative sharing rather than relying on a belief that all Black subjugation was the same. Dzidzienyo’s work manifested on a personal and on an intellectual level, a kind of triangular relationship between African, American, and Latin American colleagues. This was because he brought an African experience into the US academy, and into an engagement with African Americans that drew on his African experience,

a pan-Africanist outlook, and his thorough study of Afro-Brazilians. This enabled him to influence a generation of scholars on the African global experience.

### Local Context and Intellectual Formation

Anani Dzidzienyo was born on December 22, 1941, in Sekondi, an important colonial administrative seat in what was then the British colony of the Gold Coast. Sekondi was a cosmopolitan city of migrants. Its residents came from places such as Accra, the Western region, and Cape Coast. Dzidzienyo came of age in the middle of the cultural and physical destruction that accompanied British colonialism as well as the social and intellectual vibrancy of African communities. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Sekondi was a racially segregated city, and its majority African population endured unrelenting exploitation, violence, and insecurity (Plageman 2020). At the same time, many educated, literate, English-speaking Africans and peoples of African descent moved to Sekondi to work as clerks, secretaries, or interpreters for the city's European population. By 1920, the British colonial government had built the Gold Coast's first railway and port in Sekondi to assist foreign merchants and prospectors with increased access to the gold-mining centers within the Asante Empire. The colonial officials wanted the railway to transform Sekondi from an "unknown...native village" into a modern colonial city (Plageman 2020:1017). The railway, along with the creation of European Town (a white-dominated commercial and residential area), led to the forced resettlement of Africans without compensation. The establishment of European Town "was an act of epistemic and spatial violence," which included the demolition of historic and local structures (Plageman 2020:1017). For example, the colonial government replaced the town's *ahenfie* (palace) with a post office. These actions would later compel Nana Kobina Nketsia IV, the paramount chief of Essikado (British Sekondi) and Dzidzienyo's mentor, to help organize the railway workers to participate in Nkrumah's 1950 Positive Action program, a series of strikes to challenge colonial rule (Ashon 2012).

As an important figure in Nkrumah's cabinet, and a founding member of Ghana's Institute of African Studies (IAS), Nketsia, along with Dzidzienyo, later played a vital role in the development of Black Studies in the Americas (Gyamfi 2021). Over the course of the early twentieth century, Sekondi became the regional headquarters for different government departments, including two courthouses, a large central police station, cable companies, and Posts and Telegraphs Department. The colonial government introduced an ordinance that placed the city's African population under the authority of an all-European Town Council to confine Africans to their "proper" place (Plageman 2020:1018). The British prohibited Africans from entering certain parts of the city. Between 1900 and 1920, the African population in Sekondi had formed many organizations, including the Fante Social Club, the Ladies' Mutual Society, the Sekondi Literary and Social Club, the

International Club, and the Sekondi Optimism Club. The goal of these organizations was to enhance the education and social standing of the African population, but more importantly to discuss local conditions, criticize colonial spatial logics and policies, and advance possible alternatives (Plageman 2020:1024). Furthermore, railway workers greatly contributed to the political environment of the town (Cooper 1996:225–71; Jeffries 1978). The segregated nature of Sekondi, the discrimination that Africans endured, and the political protests would shape Dzidzienyo's scholarly outlook on race, power, and empire, as well as the importance of situating one's lived experience within academic discourse.

The cosmopolitan nature of Sekondi provided Dzidzienyo with an ethnically diverse network of mentors. Dzidzienyo was an ethnic Ewé with roots in the southeastern Gold Coast, but he was also Sekondi-born. Hannah Kudjoe, a prominent political activist and a close friend of Dzidzienyo's family, was born in Busua, adjacent to Sekondi, and attended Sekondi Methodist School. Dzidzienyo's parents were active in Nkrumah's Convention People's Party. Dzidzienyo first met Nkrumah when the latter visited his father's shop during the independence struggle. Dzidzienyo's stepmother, Grace Ayensu, was one of the first women in parliament, and she forged diasporic linkages and solidarity with the Black diaspora. Dzidzienyo grew up under the tutelage of Nketsia and Efua Sutherland, a prominent Ghanaian pan-Africanist, playwright, and activist, as well as a founding member of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana.

Dzidzienyo attended Mfantsipim, located in Cape Coast, a town which was in some ways an extension of the Sekondi's cosmopolitanism. His education at Mfantsipim, Ghana's oldest secondary school and a breeding ground for political and cultural activism, equally shaped his intellectual foundations. Established in 1876, Mfantsipim was a product of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society and the intellectual ferment in the coastal towns during this period of colonial consolidation. Mfantsipim was founded and administered by local Cape Coast Methodists. John Mensah Sarbah, an alumnus of Mfantsipim, wrote, "to be wholly African in outlook is not incompatible with being a good Christian" (Tenkorang 1974:167). Sarbah's assertion reflected the aspiration of many western-educated Africans across West Africa and elsewhere, who embraced European notions of civilization and modernity (Zachernuk 2000).

Not only did western-educated Africans endorsed European ideals, they also believed they could hold leadership positions. With the advent of racist evolutionary thinking, which ascribed to Europeans a racially superior position, students at Mfantsipim began to challenge European dominance. This is because evolutionary thought advanced the idea that the European race had established a modern civilization into which Africans, as an inferior race, were incapable of assimilating. For African elites, the evolutionary idea made it impossible for them to reach any significant positions within the colony. Consequently, African elites concluded the best way forward was to demonstrate that Africans were indeed capable of self-governance by producing



works that stressed African customary laws, political systems, and other aspects of their culture. Sarbah and his colleagues argued that it was vital that Mfantsipim should teach African histories, languages, and cultures so that these tools could be used to challenge racist ideas and counter the idea that Africans lacked leadership capabilities (Tenkorang 1974:168).

Mfantsipim became both a training ground for the colonial bureaucracy and a crucible for cultural nationalism (Tenkorang 1974:170). The colonial government wanted Mfantsipim to train Africans to serve within the colonial administration. However, the African students felt that despite their educational credentials, the government erected barriers that would hinder them from attaining higher positions within the administration. In 1915, Kobina Sekyi, another Mfantsipim alumnus, published *The Blinkards* to promote African cultural nationalism by interrogating the notion of western superiority and African inferiority (Sekyi 1997). Mfantsipim produced many Gold Coast nationalists and Ghana's first politicians, including J.E. Casely Hayford, Kofi Busia, and Paa Willie Ofori-Atta, who profoundly shaped the trajectory of the Gold Coast and the newly independent Ghana (Boahen 1996). It was at Mfantsipim in 1955 where Dzidzienyo studied with Kofi Annan, the first Black African Secretary-General of the United Nations, and formed a long-lasting relationship with Ato Sekyi-Otu, a Harvard-trained scholar who would later have a significant impact on the study of the Africana world at York University. Sekyi-Otu recently recalled it was his and Dzidzienyo's experiences in the African diaspora that would turn them away from the overly Eurocentric education they received at Mfantsipim from 1955 to 1960. Those experiences would also lead them to foreground "the African world, homeland, and diaspora" as a core part of their intellectual and personal endeavors (Sekyi-Otu email message to author, March 9, 2021).

Outside the classroom, Dzidzienyo developed an interest in Africa-diaspora relations and discourse through stories of sailors and through reading African American memoirs, such as Richard Wright's *Black Power* (Harper, 2008). In 2015, Dzidzienyo told his Afro-Brazilian friend Jose Luiz Pereira da Costa that he "was sufficiently interested in the connections between homeland and diaspora though [he] did not have those words at [his] disposal at that time to recognize the significance of conversations involving folks from both sides." Dzidzienyo explained that the harbor made Sekondi the gateway to the country, which enabled him to hear stories from people who traveled to the US. He remembered that the travelers often raised "the issue of the complexities of relationships." He wondered, therefore, "could these be taken for granted? Were there ties which bind also in need of comprehension and modesty all around?" Dzidzienyo maintained that he found aspects of *Black Power* problematic because Wright's "opinionated positions...were based either on arrogance or ignorance in terms of how he viewed and opined about [Gold Coast subjects]." "His manners were off-putting and reading the text was no joy," Dzidzienyo continued. "Over the years," he explained, "I have read the book over and actually recommend it to students as an example of a text which is important for when it came out and

which is an example of a certain genre which problematize relations between Continental Africans and Diasporic Africans” (Dzidzienyo email message to Costa, July 29, 2015). Dzidzienyo noted that around the time that *Black Power* was published, a Gold Coast musician and performer, Guy Warren, produced an album of jazz music titled “Africa Speaks, America Answers.” Guy Warren was a pioneer in Afro-jazz, “the reuniting of African American jazz with its African roots” (Lusk 2009), who played a key role in the jazz scene in the United States (Kelly 2012:17–40). For Dzidzienyo, this conversation between Africa and its diasporas was fascinating because it highlighted shared influences throughout the Black world.

### Political Engagement and International Travels

Dzidzienyo was among the scholars who kept Nkrumah’s pan-African ideas alive in ways that allowed them to develop, spread, transform, and adjust to new circumstances. In his conversations with African American and Afro-Latin American activists, scholars, and students, Dzidzienyo shared his lived experience in Nkrumah’s Ghana and introduced them to traditional Ghanaian clothing and food. While he proudly embodied his Ghanaian identity, the political culture of the United States erased and reduced it, labeling him merely as “Black,” an unresolved issue he would grapple with until his death. This conundrum was a reminder that part of the exile experience is never belonging anywhere, and that home changes while one is away from it. Exile is not a one-way transformation, either fitting in or not; it is about keeping connections but never necessarily belonging in one place (Lawrance & Carpenter 2018). Reflecting upon his life in exile, Dzidzienyo stated, “in a certain sense I think some of us have all made contributions to Ghana although people don’t necessarily realize it because sometimes Ghanaians think that if you are not there in Ghana you are not. We have tried. As we used to say in Sekondi: we try small.” When asked by Ghanaian friends why he chose to study and teach Latin America, Dzidzienyo lamented, “It is like folks don’t realize the importance of the interconnection” (telephone interview Dzidzienyo, April 24, 2019). Dzidzienyo’s political engagement and international travels shaped how he approached the study of the African Diaspora because it allowed him to see the importance of knowledge about modern Africa in understanding the plight of Afro-Latin Americans and race relations in the Americas.

After winning a 1959 essay contest, Dzidzienyo left Ghana to represent the country at the *New York Herald Tribune* World Youth Forum, where he witnessed US segregation and the civil rights movement first-hand. Through his experiences in Sekondi and the US, Dzidzienyo came to understand colonialism as a racialized phenomenon that depended on separate and segregated schools, churches, hospitals, and neighborhoods for Europeans and Africans.

Dzidzienyo was part of a generation of intellectuals who came of age as Ghana fought for independence under Nkrumah’s leadership. Some of

these members included Ama Ata Aidoo, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Kwaw Ansah. These friends were either born in Sekondi or spent significant time there. Following independence, the work of these friends would reflect the Pan-African nature of Nkrumah's Ghana. Aidoo would later become a prominent Ghanaian author, poet, and playwright; Armah would also become a well-known novelist and scholar-activist; and Ansah would become an award-winning filmmaker, writer, and director. Dzidzienyo later brought Aidoo to teach at Brown University for several years. Dzidzienyo would also help his students perform Aidoo's play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (Pearson 1980), at the Rites and Reason Theatre for the Brown University community. Additionally, he would use Armah's novels, including *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Heinemann 1989) and *Fragments* (Per Ankh 2006), and Ansah's films such as *Heritage Africa* (1989) and *Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade* (1994), in his courses. Dzidzienyo would use these plays, novels, and films to help his students grapple with life in the post-independence period and to better understand Ghana-Diaspora linkages.

The ongoing US Black struggle against racism and discrimination and his undergraduate studies at Williams College beginning in 1961 stirred Dzidzienyo's research interest in Afro-Brazilian studies. The segregation that Dzidzienyo witnessed in the US was similar to that which he had experienced in colonial Sekondi. For Dzidzienyo, the interplay between Blackness, race, and empire were fundamental in understanding the lived experiences of Blacks on both sides of the Atlantic. While studying political science at Williams, a professor showed slides of Afro-Brazilian women celebrating the Afro-religious Candomblé Festival of Our Lady of Bonfim. These images reminded him of cultural celebrations from Ghana, which sparked his interest in the connections between Africa and peoples of African descent in Brazil, and more broadly in Latin America (Hernández 2021:2). For Dzidzienyo, these observations made him question the African American scholar E. Franklin Frazier's assertion that there were "no rigid, consistent patterns of behavior that c[ould] be traced to African culture" (Frazier 1942:478). While Frazier's interlocutor Melville Herskovits compared diaspora practices with historical ones shaped by transatlantic slavery, Dzidzienyo became interested in the place of modern Africa in understanding Afro-Latin American experience and its meaning for their political movements and identity.

After completing his undergraduate studies in 1965, Dzidzienyo began his graduate studies at the University of Essex that fall, concentrating on politics in Latin America, specifically in Brazil. In the mid-1960s, scholars and activists considered Essex to be one of the best universities for the study of politics and government as well as one of the most important hotbeds of political activism in Europe (Hoefflerle 2013:86–90, 192). Dzidzienyo's time at Essex coincided with an increase in Black liberation struggles in the UK. For example, the British Black Power movement emerged out of the specific racial and class tensions that the Black community in London experienced in the late 1960s (Angelo 2009:19). The activism of Obi Egbuna,

a British Nigerian and the leader of the UK Black Panthers, reveals the ways in which the fight for Black liberation has been a collaboration between Africans and peoples of African descent rather than a solely diasporic endeavor, as some scholars tend to suggest. After graduating from Essex in 1968, Dzidzienyo spent three years as a research fellow at the Institute of Race Relations in London, during which time he first visited Brazil in 1969.

When he returned from Brazil in 1971, Dzidzienyo produced a groundbreaking report on “The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society” to generate a diasporic consciousness between Afro-Brazilians and Africans (Dzidzienyo 1971). Dzidzienyo noted that Euro-Brazilians described Afro-Brazilians, especially those considered “darker” in complexion, and their cultural practices as “primitive” and “backwards.” These descriptions mirrored the words that Europeans in Sekondi had used to describe its African inhabitants. He observed how many Brazilians, including “mixed-bloods,” consented (in a way) to European’s racial hierarchy by drawing differences between subtle variations in skin tone (Twinam 2015).<sup>1</sup> His observations were unsurprising, because before the military coup of 1964, some Afro-Brazilian intellectuals, including Abdias do Nascimento, had supported Brazil’s ideologies of racial harmony, “recasting them as shared ideals of racial inclusiveness and demanding that these ideals be substantiated in reality” (Alberto 2011:4). However, with the advent of a military government, these Afro-Brazilian intellectuals believed that racial inclusiveness was no longer possible. Consequently, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dzidzienyo joined Nascimento and other Afro-Brazilian scholar-activists who exposed the fallacy of Brazil’s image as a “racial democracy.”

Dzidzienyo argued that it was important for scholars not to simply characterize race relations as white and Black. As a result, he opposed the term “people of color” because it affirmed the false narrative of Brazil as racially egalitarian (Dzidzienyo 1971:7). Using official policies such as *branqueamento* (whitening), the Brazilian government sought to address its racial makeup, where peoples of African descent were a majority, by making whiteness a social and political ideal (Dzidzienyo 1971:12). The government’s attempt to portray Brazil as a racially egalitarian society, Dzidzienyo opined, excluded Afro-Brazilians from embracing global “Black consciousness” (Dzidzienyo 1971:5). For Dzidzienyo, the wave of independence in Africa created an avenue for Afro-Brazilians to link their struggles for equality and recognition with African independence movements while maintaining their “Brazilianness” (Dzidzienyo 1971:19). In fact, Dzidzienyo’s close friend Nascimento presented a paper titled “‘Racial Democracy’ in Brazil: Myth or Reality” at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 in Lagos, Nigeria, which outlined Afro-Brazilian scholars’ critique of the Brazilian government’s racial egalitarianism ideology (Alberto 2011:14). Thus, Dzidzienyo’s appeal for diasporic unity was based on both racial cooperation and on activist liberatory politics.

Simultaneously, Dzidzienyo’s report challenged scholars to center the lived experiences of Afro-descendants within Brazilian studies (and Latin

American studies more generally) at a time when the right-wing ideas of Gilberto Freyre still dominated intellectual discussion of race in Brazil (Dzidzienyo 1971). The dominant narrative was that the demise of colonialism and slavery in Brazil uprooted all societal racial conundrums. By contrast, Dzidzienyo's report directly challenged this assertion by arguing that for many Afro-Brazilians, the end of colonialism and slavery did not radically restructure Brazilian society (Hernández 2021:2). Dzidzienyo noted that only a few social scientists in Brazil "who publicly expounded a view contrary to the accepted traditional, official and popular concept of race relations" were published in prominent Portuguese journals (Dzidzienyo 1971:10). Dzidzienyo's engagement with the work of radical Brazilian social scientists, including Nascimento, Florestan Fernandes, Otavio Inanni, Coasta Pinto, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (who argued that racism existed in Brazil) was "quite political" (Hernández 2015:3). Dzidzienyo's views ran counter to "conventional wisdom but also because Brazilian elites and distinguished U.S. scholars had long been invested in portraying Brazil as a location with 'better race relations,' where racial disparities were attributed solely to economic factors" (Hernández 2015:3).

In fact, in the 1950s the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) viewed South America (and Brazil in particular) as a better model of race relations than the US (Alberto 2011; Hernández 2015:3). As a result, it supported a research exploration into race relations in Brazil with the expectation that it would provide a "paradigmatic model of 'harmonious race relations'" (Hernández 2015:3). Though the UNESCO report revealed damning evidence of racial discrimination against Afro-Brazilians, its impact was limited (Hernández 2015:4). Almost twenty years after the UNESCO report, Dzidzienyo's observation that "the black Brazilian's position in white-dominated Brazil differs from that of blacks in similar societies elsewhere only to the extent that the official Brazilian ideology of non-discrimination—by not reflecting the reality and, indeed, by camouflaging it—achieves without tension the same results as do overtly racist societies" deepened his understanding of comparative race relations (Dzidzienyo 1971:14). He urged comparative race relations scholars to "transcend the reductionism characteristic of earlier works that impose[d] a simple binarism," and to "insert a politically active Afro-identity into the public discourse" (Dzidzienyo 1995:355).

These and other statements distinguished Dzidzienyo from other comparative race relations scholars. His emphasis on Africa as a vital analytical framework was influenced by his engagement with Afro-Brazilian intellectuals, his African background, and his observation of the Brazilian government's attempts to form diplomatic relations with newly independent African countries during the era of African decolonization. Indeed, the works of Brazilian scholars including Octávio Ianni and Fernando Henrique Cardoso's *Côr e Mobilidade em Florianópolis* (Companhia Editôra Nacional Brasileira, 1960) and Luiz de Aguiar Costa Pinto's *O Negro no Rio de Janeiro* (Companhia Editôra Nacional Brasileira,

1952) provided Dzidzienyo a better understanding of the political, economic, and social conditions of Afro-Brazilians and the racist nature of Brazilian society (Dzidzienyo 1971:10, 20–22).

For Dzidzienyo, what was absent in this groundbreaking scholarship was a robust engagement with Africa. As he contributed to this important scholarship on race relations, Dzidzienyo maintained that “fundamental to any understanding of Afro-Latin America [w]as...the question of Africa” (Dzidzienyo 1995:357). For Dzidzienyo, the demonization of Africa, though rarely considered, had played a significant role in shaping the complex relations among peoples of African descent and the societies in which they lived. Consequently, he stated “the real and imagined meanings of Africa in all its richness and contradictoriness beg to be contemplated not as aspects of a single phenomenon but as factors in the dynamics of Afro-Latin American life today” (Dzidzienyo 1995:357). Dzidzienyo influenced a generation of students including Jerry Dávila, the Jorge Paulo Lemann Chair in Brazilian History at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and author of *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization, 1950–1980* (Duke University Press, 2010), to produce scholarship that strongly engaged with the question of Africa within their analysis of Latin American history and politics.

Dzidzienyo became committed to exploring connections and fostering awareness between Africans and peoples of African descent. Dedicating his life to investigating the world that had emerged in the post-Atlantic slave trade and the contemporary Black experience, Dzidzienyo became a link between Africa and its diasporas, Black studies and African studies, as well as Portuguese and Latin American Studies.

### **Dzidzienyo’s Contributions to Brown University’s Academic and Intellectual Life**

At Brown University, Dzidzienyo helped move the curricula of the newly formed Black Studies programs of the 1970s and 1980s beyond a US-centric focus. He developed courses to include the lived experiences of Afro-Latin Americans and Africans within Brown’s Black Studies program. Dzidzienyo saw his teaching as a political endeavor to create a political consciousness and address the assumptions that colonized peoples had benefited from colonialism. Additionally, Dzidzienyo played an important role in the creation of Brown’s Center of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and Bilingual Education and broadened its scope to focus on Afro-Portuguese communities in Africa and Latin America.

Outside of the classroom Dzidzienyo, brought many Afro-Latin American activists to Brown in an attempt to bridge the academic and non-academic worlds. For Dzidzienyo, the presentations of Afro-Brazilians about their lived experiences helped to expose the Brazilian government’s claims of Brazil as a racially egalitarian society. Dzidzienyo’s contributions to Brown extended beyond academics to include emotional and financial support for



students and scholars. As a result of his efforts, Dzidzienyo helped shape the trajectory of Black/African Diaspora Studies in the United States and made significant contributions to Brown's academic and intellectual life.

Dzidzienyo returned to the US in the early 1970s at a time when Cold War politics and Black nationalism had turned Africa into an abstract symbol for many African American activists, rather than understanding it as a place of ongoing political struggle and sociocultural transformation. The Black Power era marked an important period in American political and intellectual history. As part of a national campaign, Black students during the 1960s and 1970s demanded a curriculum that confronted the Euro-American focus within American universities and called for the establishment of Black Studies programs and departments (Biondi 2014; Baumgartner 2016; Kendi 2012; Williamson 2013). Concurrently, the marginalization of Black scholars within the African Studies Association (ASA) unearthed a significant conflict over who had the authority to interpret African history and cultures—white or Black scholars. This contention led to Black scholars such as John Henrik Clarke breaking away from ASA to form the African Heritage Studies Association (AHTSA) in 1969 (Clarke 1976:5). AHTSA's objectives were more focused on the US than on Africa (Clarke 1976:7). Many African Americans, faced with pressing domestic issues for equality and inclusion, remained focused on US-based struggles rather than broader fights for freedom in the Black world.

Nonetheless, some Black scholars, such as Clarke and Michael Thelwell, welcomed a more Africa-centered approach to Africa's history and its modern conditions. Clarke formed a close relationship with Dzidzienyo's closest Ghanaian mentors, Nketsia and the Columbia University-trained scholar Wentworth B. Ofuately-Kodjoe. Like Nketsia, Ofuately-Kodjoe also played a key role in the development of Black studies. Ofuately-Kodjoe, who served as president of AHTSA from 1985 to 1989, helped establish the Africana Studies program at Queens College, City University of New York (CUNY), and the graduate programs in African Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.<sup>2</sup> The work and lived experiences of Dzidzienyo as well as his Ghanaian cohort of exiled intellectuals offer us the opportunity to rethink the Black Power era as a combined effort between African Americans and Africans in the struggle for Black liberation in the United States. Equipped with a practical vision for emancipation, these Ghanaian intellectuals embraced the radical and activist nature of the Black student movement in the United States, which enabled them to connect political education with pan-African mobilization.

In the early 1970s, Dzidzienyo's African American and Afro-Latin American interlocutors, who were also interested in questions about race, class, and power in Brazil and who had helped to shape his thinking about Afro-Brazilian history and politics, persuaded him to return to the US and contribute to Black liberation in the United States. These interlocutors included Michael Mitchell, the then-director of the Black Studies program at St. Peter's College, and Michael Turner, a former program officer in the Rio de Janeiro field office of the Ford Foundation. It was Turner who convinced Dzidzienyo

to apply for a faculty position at Brown University (telephone interview Dzidzienyo, April 24, 2019). Through his deliberations with these scholars, Dzidzienyo realized the importance of bringing Africa into the African diaspora, particularly alongside Brazilian and more broadly Latin American discourses. In his scholarship and activism, Dzidzienyo focused on what Africa meant for Afro-Latin Americans and worked to mobilize Afro-descendants in Latin America in the fight against worldwide white supremacy.

As part of the national fervent demands of Black students, Rhett Jones, an African American scholar, hired Dzidzienyo in 1973 to help create and develop an Afro-American studies program at Brown University. The first tenure-track position, and Jones's employment of Dzidzienyo, was, according to Jones, the reason "Brown's Black Studies unit was among the pioneers in what now is called the study of the African diaspora" (Jones 2006:48). Fluent in English, Ewe, Fante, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, Dzidzienyo's leadership and pedagogy, which introduced students at Brown to the study of diaspora, was genuinely hemispheric in outlook.

Dzidzienyo used his courses to move conversations beyond the lived experiences of African Americans in the United States. During the late 1970s, he created two year-long courses: "African History and Society" and "Blacks in Latin American History and Society." Referring to his classes as examples, other faculty in the Afro-American Studies program then created two other year-long courses: "Afro-American History and Society" and "Caribbean History and Society" (Jones 2006:48). These multidisciplinary courses focused on the past experiences of Black people, as well as contemporary issues across the African diaspora. For Dzidzienyo, it was vital that the study of Africans, and peoples of African descent, exist outside of the framework of the global North. He asserted that a study of the contemporary political, social, and economic networks between African and Latin American countries offered an important space to rethink Black radicalism and Black liberation. As a result, Brown University became one of the leading pioneers in the study of the African diaspora.

His courses such as "Black in Latin America" included diverse sources, providing students with the ability to interrogate the question of the status of Blacks and race in Latin America. One former student, Tanya Hernández, recalled that in the 1980s, Dzidzienyo assigned important canonical texts such as Roger Bastide's *The African Religions of Brazil* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), Florestan Fernandes's *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (Columbia University Press, 1969), Leslie Rout's *The African Experience in Spanish America* (Markus Wiener, 2015), Richard Jackson's *The Black Image in Latin American Literature* (University of New Mexico Press, 1976), Winthrop Wright's *Café Con Leche: A Brief Look at Race Relations in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Venezuela* (University of Texas Press, 1993), C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (Vintage, 1989), Franz Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks* (Grove Press, 2008), and George Reid Andrews's *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). He used these texts as a starting point for his students to engage



the standard works of Gilberto Freyre, Frank Tannenbaum, and Jorge Amado (Hernández 2015:7). Dzidzienyo used such course readings to explore broader realities and struggles for equality in the Americas and to nurture a holistic view of these struggles among his students.

In 1975, two years after his arrival at Brown, Dzidzienyo played a critical role in establishing the multidisciplinary Center for Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and Bilingual Education. Working with faculty members in the departments of English (George Monteiro), Portuguese (Nelson H. Vieira), Anthropology (George Hicks), History (Robert Padden), and Sociology (Peter Evans), Dzidzienyo and his colleagues departed from the traditional area studies paradigm, a post-World War II model that tended to divide the world into discrete spheres of US interest and influence, and to conceive the field more broadly. They believed that “placing scholars and students of the different parts of the Portuguese-speaking world and from different fields side by side would energize one another, and generate more dynamic teaching and research.”<sup>3</sup> For this reason, Dzidzienyo and his colleagues decided, for example, to posit the study of Brazil not simply as a branch of Latin American Studies, but within a transatlantic and global context that placed Portugal, Lusophone Africa, and Lusophone Asia in conversation with each other.

Dzidzienyo’s approach made Brown’s program a prominent center for research and teaching about the Portuguese-speaking world, especially for Afro-Portuguese communities. At a time when most universities did not focus on Afro-Brazilian issues, Dzidzienyo foregrounded those issues at the heart of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. Dzidzienyo encouraged African American students to learn Portuguese. It was within this context that Dzidzienyo created his Afro-Luso-Brazilian Triangle course. This course examined the last stages of Portuguese colonialism in Lusophone Africa, the relationship of African liberation movements, and efforts to forge new transnational relations among Portugal, Lusophone Africa, and Brazil.

This course treated Portugal, Portuguese Africa, and Brazil as a single, integrated system, joined rather than divided by the Atlantic Ocean, to explore migration, colonialism, the slave trade, and race relations. Vieira explained Dzidzienyo’s “connection to Africa made him very unique to Afro-Brazilian Studies because you either get an Afro-Brazilianist or an Afro-Americanist, but to have someone who had all three was rare... and that is what afforded him to become a well-known and dynamic professor.” Indeed, as Vieira explained, “he really brought the idea of Black Studies to different territories of the world and understood the dynamics and problems involved” (interview Vieira, February 12, 2021).

Dzidzienyo brought many Afro-Latin American activists to Brown to share their lived experiences with race and racism in their respective countries. Some of the speakers included Afro-Brazilian feminist Leila Gonzalez, Afro-Cuban author Carols Moore, Patricia Sellars (an African American Ford Foundation officer working in Brazil), and Barbosa Gomes (the first Afro-Brazilian jurist of the Federal Supreme Court) (Hernández 2015:8). One of

the reasons Dzidzienyo was able to invite these speakers was because he was well-known in the Federal University of Bahia and by faculty in several institutes for Afro-Brazilian studies in Brazil.

Vieira, who traveled to Brazil with Dzidzienyo, argued that Dzidzienyo helped to formulate an Afro-Brazilian studies program in Brazil. Dzidzienyo worked closely with the prominent Brazilian scholar Thales de Azevedo, who played an important role in increasing the number of Afro-Brazilian students in the social sciences in Brazil.<sup>4</sup> Scholars and community activists constantly invited Dzidzienyo to speak in Bahia, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia. Vieira maintained it was Dzidzienyo's expansive connections in Brazil, especially in Bahia, which cemented Brown University's decision to create a Brown and Brazil study-abroad program at the Federal University of Bahia (interview Vieira, February 12, 2021).

Dzidzienyo also supported both female scholars and students. Lina Fruzzetti, an Eritrean intellectual and the first tenured Black woman professor at Brown, stated that Dzidzienyo supported her whenever she had issues with the university or with a colleague. A year before Fruzzetti arrived in 1975, the Department of Anthropology had denied Louise Lamphere academic tenure, citing that "her scholarship was theoretically weak."<sup>5</sup> Navigating this atmosphere in the Anthropology department was challenging for Fruzzetti. She recalled that when she had a conundrum "the first person [she] would call would be [Dzidzienyo], and he would come and the two of [them] would sit and solve that problem and then it was no problem." "What I am trying to say [is that] he had a kind of judicious way of how to see the world with all of its imperfections and problems that he could resolve things. In a way, he was a young man, but he was a very old man in terms of the wisdom that he carried with him," Fruzzetti explained (interview Fruzzetti, February 10, 2021). Aggie Hernandez, Dzidzienyo's former student, stated "his course, Blacks in Latin American History and Society, gave me life. Growing up, Afro-Latinos were practically invisible. Anani saw us. He validated our history and contributions."<sup>6</sup>

Jointly, Dzidzienyo and Fruzzetti supported students both financially and emotionally. Minority students came to them with their issues regarding discrimination and lack of resources to travel home for the holidays or to participate in a study abroad program (Hernández 2015:8). Beau Gaitors, Dzidzienyo's former student, recalled that he almost left Brown university, but Dzidzienyo offered him a position as an office assistant and encouraged him to remain at the university. Gaitors cited Dzidzienyo's compassion and care for others as the reason why he became a professor, because he "wanted to be like Anani."<sup>7</sup>

An additional contribution of Dzidzienyo's work was to help establish Brown University's study abroad program in Brazil. Largely due to Dzidzienyo's influence, the program was based in Salvador, Bahia, the heart of Afro-Brazilian culture and the home of many Afro-Brazilians. Dzidzienyo encouraged many Black students to learn Portuguese and to participate in the program. Rachel Harding, a former student of Dzidzienyo, recalled that

navigating the racial landscape of Brazil was challenging and emotionally draining during her study abroad experience. Upon her return, she went to Dzidzienyo to process her experience. She recalled that Dzidzienyo said, “Rachel, if I had told you what it was really like, would you have gone?”<sup>8</sup> She noted, reflecting upon that conversation, “It was precisely the experience I needed to be able to later do the work I have done as a historian of African movement, culture, and religion. It provided me some visceral understandings of the context of Brazil.”<sup>9</sup>

Dzidzienyo had a profound impact on the field of Afro-Latino Studies through his teaching and mentorship. He supervised countless dissertations and research projects on the issue of race in Brazil. His students, who were inspired to study race relations in Latin America, have shaped and are continuing to shape the field. Some of his former students include Melissa Nobles, author of *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford University Press, 2000); Jerry Dávila, author of *Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil* (Duke University Press, 2003) and *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization* (Duke University Press, 2010); Ollie Johnson, author of *Race, Politics and Education in Brazil: Affirmative Action in Higher Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Rachel Harding, author of *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Indiana University Press, 2003). Other notable former students include Jeffrey Lesser, author of *Immigration, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Brazil* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Seth Racusen, the author of numerous important articles on the development of affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws in Brazil; and Paul Zimmerman, the General Counsel for the Inter-American Foundation. Hernández dedicated her first book, *Racial Subordination in Latin America*, to Dzidzienyo, with the statement, “For Anani Dzidzienyo who made it possible for me to be a scholar of comparative race relations” (Hernández 2013:v).

### On the Study of Afro-Brazil: Research & Archiving

Informed and influenced by the works of Afro-Brazilian scholars as well as by his interactions with them, Dzidzienyo’s contributions to the field of Latin American studies was his emphasis on the place of modern Africa in examining Afro-Latin American history and politics. Dzidzienyo argued that a strong awareness of Africa’s decolonization and history would enable Afro-Latin Americans and Africans to effectively combat colonialism and imperialism. His scholarship and activism placed him at odds with the Portuguese colonial administrations in Africa and the Brazilian military government, because he helped produce evidence as well as broadcasting the work of Afro-Latin American scholar-activists to undermine the rhetoric of racial egalitarianism and racial democracy. Additionally, Dzidzienyo’s travels across Africa and Latin America enabled him to gather important collections such as rare books, newspaper clippings, and music records. For Dzidzienyo, these

collections were instrumental in equipping scholars and students with primary sources to undermine white supremacy and to foster political consciousness.

Through his research interests, Dzidzienyo began to explore the connection between Africans and Latin Americans, as well as what the memory of Africa had come to represent for identity and liberatory political movements throughout Latin America (telephone interview Dzidzienyo, April 24, 2019). Concentrating mostly on Brazil, Dzidzienyo investigated both historical and contemporary linkages to Africa and other diasporic spaces. He suggested if those in the diaspora were to connect with Africa, they would be able to develop a globally attuned racial political consciousness in their struggle against white supremacy worldwide (Dzidzienyo 1985). He observed that Afro-Brazilians had been largely excluded from Brazil's growing political and economic relationship with Africa. He asserted, however, that African decolonization and the subsequent arrival of African diplomats in Brazil in the 1960s had begun to increase interest and awareness among Afro-Brazilians in contemporary African political, economic, and social developments. This, in turn, had begun to weaken Afro-Brazilian political seclusion. For this reason, Dzidzienyo urged scholars to shift their attention from a "frozen Africanity," which simply valorized specific African historical, cultural, and religious retentions, to a study of the diaspora as a "dynamic variant," one whose crosscurrents shaped the sociopolitical realities of contemporary Africa and Latin America (Dzidzienyo 1985:139).

Dzidzienyo's scholarly attempts to connect the experiences of Africans and peoples of African descent placed him at odds with Brazil's military dictatorship. Dzidzienyo struggled against the military's efforts to limit and confine Afro-Brazilian political mobilization, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, with its attempts to advance the idea of Brazil having better race relations than the US. He played a vital role in sustaining scholarly conversations among Afro-Brazilian intellectual activists such as Nascimento, a leading critic of the government (Dzidzienyo 2011). As noted earlier, Dzidzienyo maintained a lifelong partnership with Nascimento, so much so that Dzidzienyo was writing a biography of Nascimento before Dzidzienyo himself died. Indeed, Afro-Latin American intellectuals such as Nascimento profoundly shaped Dzidzienyo's own insights. In 1980, Dzidzienyo traveled to Brazil as part of a delegation of the American Friends Service Committee to report on the state of labor, student, and religious organizing for democracy. It was during this trip that he met with Dom Helder Camara, a major figure in liberation theology and a persistent critic of the military dictatorship.<sup>10</sup> These alliances furthered Dzidzienyo's commitment to the politics of liberation and the practical value of research and scholarship.

Dzidzienyo's work and activism contradicted Portuguese officials, who used the rhetoric of a "racial democracy" to defend its continuing colonial domination of Angola and Mozambique. For these governments, the idea of a unified Black experience was in opposition to the official rhetoric that their race relations were based on equality for all. Due to Dzidzienyo's efforts, both

the Brazilian and Portuguese intelligence surveilled him in the 1970s and labeled him as a “very dangerous” person (Dávila & Lesser 2019:2–3).

Some academics have painted male Black Studies scholars as patriarchal. Dzidzienyo’s scholarship and activism, however, provide another view. Dzidzienyo’s view on gender, or what we may now call intersectionality, within Black Studies was not simply his own celebration of himself. Former students and others noticed the same during their studies with him. For example, Tanya Katerí Hernández, the Archibald R. Murray Professor of Law at Fordham University, noted in a 2015 essay that Dzidzienyo “was incorporating intersectional gender perspectives long before it was common to raise the issue of intersectional analyses” (Hernández 2015:6). Hernández maintained that in the early 1970s Dzidzienyo “described the gendered subordination that Afro-Brazilian women encountered as the presumed sexual subjects for white males” (Hernández 2015:6). Furthermore, she stated that Dzidzienyo’s “intersectional analysis was also astute in its ability to deconstruct the ways in which the presumed national celebration of the mixed-race ‘mulata’ did not alter the low status of dark and black women confined to clearly defined roles as housemaids and cooks” (Hernández 2015:6). Nonetheless, in his other scholarship, Dzidzienyo did not provide a thorough analysis of gender. In later years, his colleagues including Keshia-Khan Perry and graduate students would push him to think more deeply about Black women’s activism.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, Dzidzienyo and Fruzzetti centered Africa and the colonial experiences in Africa and elsewhere within their courses. While Fruzzetti’s research focused mostly on India and Dzidzienyo’s on Brazil, the two also covered West Africa and East Africa. Drawing on their lived experience and research, they jointly taught a course that explored British colonialism and its impact on the two port cities of Sekondi and Calcutta. Before colonialism, these cities were not necessarily important. The class investigated what it meant to create the two cities and the history, literature, and culture that surrounded them. They also used the course to uncover the legacies of colonialism and imperialism while inviting students to think deeply about the ways in which colonialism was still embedded in the present and the importance of centering one’s lived experiences in academic discourses.

Dzidzienyo viewed his teaching as a political endeavor—one that was aimed at creating political consciousness and addressing the underlying assumptions that colonialism had a positive impact on colonized societies. In the fall of 1975, Dzidzienyo taught an advanced seminar on “The Colonial Experience in Africa.” The course was composed of a diverse cohort of students, including some who had traveled to Africa, others who came from Latin America, and some Portuguese white women who were married to colonial officials and had lived in Angola and Guinea-Bissau. These Portuguese women were trying to get certified to teach bilingually in the US, because they had immigrated due to the ongoing wars of liberation in the Portuguese African colonies. Dan Khan, a student in the class, recalled that the Portuguese women objected to Dzidzienyo’s analysis of the conditions of

Africans under Portuguese colonial rule. They argued that Africans were happy under the colonial regime because “they danced, cooked, and recited praise songs for the Portuguese soldiers.” Dzidzienyo responded by saying “that was what they did for them, but they may have had other things going on.” Khan noted that Dzidzienyo made a point of “asking really quiet but pointed questions of people that would sort of stop them in their tracks” (interview Khan, February 9, 2021). Dzidzienyo saw the classroom as a battleground to effectively combat racist and imperialist beliefs and to cultivate political consciousness among his students.

To help advance and sustain scholarship on Africans and peoples of African descent, Dzidzienyo collected and preserved many cultural artifacts from around the Atlantic. He believed that the preservation of these materials would provide an important evidential base for academics and students to investigate the impact and legacy of colonialism and imperialism on the lived experiences of Africans and peoples of African ancestry and to confront white supremacy. For this reason, his office served as an important archive for African and African diaspora history and culture. Many of his former students described his office as a spectacle. It overflowed with newspaper clippings, memorabilia from Ghana’s independence, gifts, letters, magazines, old assignments, and a multitude of books: rare books, out-of-print books, books signed by African or Latin-American leaders, and books by former students, inscribed with gratitude for Dzidzienyo. There was always African and African diaspora music playing in his office. For those who came to his office, both students and scholars alike, “the office is the rich embodiment of a lifetime of scholarship.”<sup>11</sup> In the spring 2021 semester, Keshia-Khan Perry taught a class called “Archiving the African Diaspora: The Life and Works of Anani Dzidzienyo,” in which students worked to archive the contents of Dzidzienyo’s campus and home offices. Some of his books and materials were donated to Tougaloo College, a private, historically Black liberal arts institution, while the rest remained at Brown. Vieira opined that Dzidzienyo’s archive is a unique and a massive collection, which would serve as an important archival base for those interested in Afro-Latin American, and especially Afro-Brazilian, history and culture (interview Vieira, February 12, 2021).

In recognition of Dzidzienyo’s outstanding activism, scholarship, mentoring, and teaching, the Brazilian Studies Association (BRASA) awarded him BRASA’s Lifetime Contribution Award (LCA) in 2020. The LCA recognizes a leader in the field of Brazilian studies with a record of both outstanding scholarly achievement and significant contributions to the promotion of Brazilian studies in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Dzidzienyo was the first African scholar to receive such an honor.

## Conclusion

As a pioneer in the study of the African diaspora, Anani Dzidzienyo made significant contributions to African Studies, Black Studies, and Latin



American Studies. He built on the scholarship of Brazilian scholar-activists, including Abdias do Nascimento, Waldir Freitas Oliveira, Vivaldo da Costa Lima, and others who influenced his thinking and awareness on the political, economic, and social conditions of Afro-Brazilians as well as race relations in Brazil. Dzidzienyo's work placed peoples of African descent at the center of Latin American Studies. Investigating what Africa meant for the identities and political movements of Afro-Latin Americans, Dzidzienyo urged scholars to seriously consider the importance of Africa, because understanding Africa was fundamental to understanding the plights of Afro-Latin Americans. In his scholarship, teaching, and activism, he challenged the idea of an Africa frozen in time, detached from realities of the diaspora, to promote a more dynamic version of Africa. Dzidzienyo's impact is seen in the fields he pioneered, the programs he created, the courses he designed, the students he trained, and more importantly, the networks he formed that stretched from Africa to the United States to Latin America. Standing at the nexus of African Studies, Black Studies, and Latin American Studies provided Dzidzienyo the platform to bring Africans and peoples of African descent into conversation with one another, thus resoundingly affirming scholarly discourses between the global South and the global North.

Dzidzienyo used his research and teaching on the Afro-Luso Brazilian Triangle from the 1970s and 1980s to emphasize the importance of bringing Africa into the discourse of the African diaspora. Consequently, he sought to shift scholarly conversation about Africa away from a vision of a static continent, cut off from the rest of the world, by emphasizing the ongoing connections and similarities between Africa and its diasporas. His emphasis on the inclusion of modern Africa within African Diaspora Studies and Black Studies offered a more inclusive and nuanced approach to the study of Africa and its diasporas because it placed Africa in conversation with various diasporas.

Dzidzienyo's life and work reminds us of the important moment when a few Black scholars attempted to conceptualize the project of Black liberation beyond the shores of the United States. They followed an extensive line of scholars and activists who had done the same, going back a century or more. Dzidzienyo was one of several Ghanaian intellectuals active in the US, Grenada, Suriname, and Senegal from the late 1960s through the 1980s. These scholars were bonded by their admiration of Nkrumah's pan-Africanist ideas, their nationality, and their forced or self-imposed exile. They all brought portions of Nkrumah's political and intellectual vision and adapted it to their new locales. Their collective contributions to the global development of Black Studies have been largely ignored, but their legacies within the institutions where they worked remind us that there were spaces in which radical African intellectuals emphasized that the liberation of Africa was fundamental to Black radical intellectual pursuits worldwide.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Kwasi Konadu, Sean Hanretta, Benjamin Talton, Miles Larmer, Jesse Shipley, Mariam Sabri, Azmar Williams, Harry Odamtten, Hermann Von Hesse, Patricia Abijah, Kim Fernandes, Keisha-Khan Perry, and Nii Addy for their generous comments, feedback, and edits on this article. I am also thankful for the anonymous reviewers' feedback and the editors who worked on this article.

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## Notes

1. These variations were connected to one's position vis-à-vis three axes: Europeaness, Africaness, and Indigeness.
2. William Sales, "Passing of Wentworth Ofuatey-Kodjoe" 19 March 2009 < <https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-afro-am&month=0903&week=c&msg=QOXpvg5kKW7ix265C9a%2B6RA&user=&pw=>>
3. The Department of Portuguese & Brazilian Studies, "Excerpt from 2012 Departmental Self-Study," p. 2.
4. <https://library.brown.edu/collections/skidmore/portraits/thalesDeAzevedo.html>.
5. <https://www.brown.edu/initiatives/pembroke-oral-histories/interview/louise-lamphere-faculty#:~:text=An%20assistant%20professor%20of%20Anthropology,her%20scholarship%20was%20theoretically%20weak>. This case resulted in a lawsuit in the United States District Court.
6. Aggie Hernandez, zoom event "Celebrating the Life of Anani Dzidzienyo," May 1, 2021.
7. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/2020/11/20/prof-anani-dzidzienyo-beloved-brilliant-dies-79/>.
8. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/2020/11/20/prof-anani-dzidzienyo-beloved-brilliant-dies-79/>.
9. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/2020/11/20/prof-anani-dzidzienyo-beloved-brilliant-dies-79/>.
10. <https://sites.google.com/brown.edu/ananiDzidzienyo/memory-wall>.

11. <https://www.browndailyherald.com/2020/11/20/prof-anani-dzidzienyo-beloved-brilliant-dies-79/>.
12. 2020 BRASA Lifetime Contribution Awarded to Professor Anani Dzidzienyo. <https://brasa.org/2020-lifetime-contribution-awards/>.