

# ***Nekht: Writing the Choice Award Book Titled Multidisciplinary Explorations of Corohysteria Caused by the COVID-2019 Pandemic and Other Achievements by Scholars in the CODESRIA College of Mentors***

## **Introduction**

**O**n November 30, 2022, I received an e-mail from Courtney Morales, Senior Acquisitions Editor at Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group in the United States, stating that the book titled *Multidisciplinary Explorations of Corohysteria Caused by the COVID-2019 Pandemic*, authored by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) College of Mentors (CCoM) scholars, had won the prestigious Choice Reviews award. Accompanying the notification was the following laudation by the very well-respected *Choice Reviews* (a publication of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association) and a top publication for scholars and librarians:

Though this book's approach is interdisciplinary, the contributed chapters are primarily case studies from African nations, particularly Kenya and Nigeria. This focus is by no means a weakness even for readers who experienced the impact of COVID-19 elsewhere. The book showcases ways to analyze the pandemic from numerous angles and offers a model to scholars who wish to conduct similar studies in other geographic contexts. Recommended. Lower- and upper-division undergraduates. Graduate students and faculty. General readers. (Choice Connect 2022: 1)

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So, the immediate question that emerges here is this: What factors motivated CCoM scholars to achieve this and other feats? To provide an answer to this question, I do three things. First, based on a Diopian perspective, I suggest a Kemetic/ancient Egyptian conceptual framework that is conducive to capturing the essence of the achievements. Second, given the available and needed data, I tender an appropriate research methodology. And third, I discuss the major factors that underlie the successes. The three aspects are addressed sequentially in the ensuing sections for clarity. At the end, I draw conclusions based on the findings.

## **Conceptual Framework**

As I have noted in several of my writings (see, for example, Bangura 2021a), the Pharaoh of Knowledge, Cheikh Anta Diop, insisted that we Africentric or African-centred scholars must get back 'the historical and Promethean consciousness' encompassed in the achievements of Kemet or ancient Egypt. Our failure to do so, he averred, would leave the history of Black Africans in particular and

humanity in general to 'remain suspended in air'. Diop went on to implore us that 'until African historians dare to connect Black Africa with the history of Egypt, Black African history cannot be narrated correctly' (Diop 1974: xiv-vi; Bangura 2021a: 46). He further implored that even the study of institutions, languages, etc. could not be adequately investigated until this was done: 'in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, as long as the relationship does not appear legitimate' (Diop 1974: vi; Bangura 2021a: 46). It is within this Diopian purview that I use the Kemetic idea of *nekht* to serve as the conceptual framework for this paper. What, you may ask, is *nekht*? The remainder of this section addresses this question.

In the Kemetic ciKam/hieroglyphic language, the term *nekht* means 'resilience'. In English, this term connotes (a) 'strong' – having the power to move heavy weights or perform other physically demanding tasks, able to withstand great force or pressure, very intense; (b) 'hardy' – robust, capable of enduring difficult conditions, able to survive outside during winter; (c) 'quick to recover' – fast to return to a normal state of health, mind or strength; (d) 'quick to bounce back' – fast to return to a normal condition after a difficult situation or event; (e) 'buoyant'

– involving or engaging in much activity; (f) ‘impressive’ – evoking admiration through size, quality or skill, grand, imposing or awesome; (g) ‘adaptable’ – able to adjust to new conditions; and (h) ‘flexible’ – ready and able to change so as to adapt to different circumstances. The ciKam denotation of the term *nekht* surpasses this Eurocentric conceptualisation because it encompasses the above connotations and more.

Also, *nekht* denotes the following homologous terms: (a) ‘victorious’ – having won an act of defeating an enemy or opponent in a battle, game or other competition; (b) ‘horn of Horus’ – a Kemetic god in the form of a falcon; (c) ‘to be mighty’ – possessing great and impressive power or strength, especially on account of size; (d) ‘to be powerful’ – having control and influence over people and events, having or producing great force or energy; (e) ‘strength’ – the quality or state of being physically strong; (f) ‘might’ – great and impressive power or strength, especially of a nation, large organisation or natural force; (g) ‘warrior’ – a brave or experienced soldier or fighter; (h) ‘divine power’ – power of relating to or proceeding directly from God or a god; and (i) ‘strength as one of the fourteen kaU of Ra’ – fourteen spirits of the Kemetic god of the sun order, kings and the sky, which are (1) ‘Word of Power’, (2) ‘light’, (3) ‘strength’, (4) ‘power’, (5) ‘vigour’, (6) ‘abundance’, (7) ‘majesty’, (8) ‘burial’, (9) ‘preparedness’, (10) ‘stability’, (11) ‘sight’, (12) ‘hearing’, (13) ‘feeling or perception’, and (14) ‘taste’ (for details on the fourteen kaU of Ra, see Budge 1989).

In addition, *nekht* is related to eight ciKam expressions: (1) *Uast* – ‘strength, strong, term of Horus’; (2) *aati* – ‘strong’; (3) *au* – ‘to be

strong’; (4) *ãmãm* – ‘to be strong as a term of Horus’; (5) *ãba* – ‘strong and courageous, endow with soul, to be filled with strength’; (6) *ãa nekhtut* – ‘most strong’; (7) *ãnTch* – ‘to be strong, sound, healthy, firm, strong’; and (8) *ãt* – ‘sound, strong, see’ (for these translations, see Budge 1978).

## Research Methodology

The methodological grounding of this paper is based on the qualitative descriptive case study approach. We define qualitative methodology in our CCoM text titled *Conducting Research and Mentoring Students in Africa: CODESRIA College of Mentors Handbook* as a scientific/systematic approach, which places ‘emphasis on words’ (Bangura et al. 2019: 21). We denote the descriptive case study approach as

one that is focused and detailed on propositions and questions about a phenomenon that is carefully scrutinised and articulated at the outset ... it is a means to provide tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts ... and it is conveyed through robust propositions and questions such as ‘What is?’, ‘Where is?’, and ‘When is?’. (Bangura et al. 2019: 63–64)

The data collection process used two types of primary sources. One was the unstructured interview, which we delineate as possessing the following attributes: (a) everything that forms the research process – objectives, design, sample and the questions that the researcher asked respondents – is not predetermined; (b) it allows flexibility in all aspects of the research process; (c) it allows a researcher to explore the nature of a phenomenon under investigation – in other words, variation/diversity, issue, problem or attitude towards an issue is interrogated; and (d) it is

open and has greater flexibility and freedom for both the interviewer and interviewee, because the interviewer is more likely to follow up interesting developments and let the interviewee elaborate on various issues (Bangura et al. 2019).

The second source comprised many Internet communication tools. These included the CODESRIA website, the CCoM listserv, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

## Major Factors that Motivated the CCoM Scholars

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, CCoM scholars recorded many very remarkable achievements. First, in addition to the award-winning book that is the main focus of this paper, the chapters for the following four volumes were also authored by CCoM scholars and published by mostly top-20 ranked scholarly presses – that is, university and academic presses combined – in the world: (1) *African Isms: Africa and the Globalized World* (Bangura 2021d); (2) *Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter: A Multidisciplinary Primer* (Bangura 2021c); (3) *Great Books Written by Africans across the Academic Disciplines* (Babatunde and Bangura 2023); and (4) *Theoretical Grounding in African Research: CODESRIA College of Mentors Handbook II* (Bangura, Mensah and Bizo, in press). Second, six scholars were the sole authors of seven books and three were editors and/co-editors and contributors of five other books. Third, the ninety-one CCoM scholars authored and/or co-authored 483 articles (an average of slightly more than five articles per scholar), published

in top-tier refereed journals. Fourth, five scholars won lucrative research and training grants. Fifth, more than fifty scholars received scholarly and/or service awards. And sixth, more than thirty scholars received funding to present papers at conferences and make presentations at workshops within and outside Africa.

So, the question that arises here is this: What are the major factors that motivated the CCoM scholars to achieve these accomplishments? The answer is that the personal unstructured interviews and my own observations made it possible to identify the following four major factors that undergirded the successes of the CCoM scholars during the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) CCoM guidelines for mentors; (2) earlier publishing initiatives; (3) professional and social media; and (4) support from CODESRIA staff. I discuss these aspects one at a time in the rest of this section. But before doing so, it makes sense to first provide a brief description of the CCoM programme for those who may not be familiar with it.

The CCoM, which is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) and is the brainchild of Ebrima Sall and Ibrahim Oanda Ogachi, and strongly embraced and promoted by Godwin R. Murunga, is a component of CODESRIA's African Diaspora Support to African Universities (ADSAU) programme. The CCoM comprises senior academics from the diaspora and within Africa in higher education, the humanities and social sciences. Its aim is to link highly competitively selected doctoral candidates and their supervisors to mentors for the purposes of benefiting the candidates in their doctoral progress. The college endeavours

to complement and strengthen the support for capacity-building in African universities in which CODESRIA is engaged through the Small Grants Programme for Thesis Writing, the Institutes and the research methodology workshops (Bangura et al. 2019).

CODESRIA's ADSAU programme aspires to mobilise African academics in the diaspora to contribute to the strengthening of African universities, the nurturing of new generations of scholars in Africa in a culture of excellence, and the revitalisation of the social sciences, higher education studies and the humanities. The specific aims of the programme include (a) 'the strengthening of doctoral programmes and the curricula in the social sciences and the humanities'; (b) 'contributing to the filling of gaps and dealing with shortages in teaching'; (c) 'mentoring of young social science scholars in Africa, more generally'; and (d) 'strengthening relations between African academics in the Diaspora and the institutions where they are based and African universities' (Bangura et al. 2019: xv-xvi).

The CCoM programme obtains credibility from CODESRIA's authority as the leading Pan-African social science council of the African continent and its duty to assist in addressing the shortage of qualified academic staff in many African universities, both for teaching and for doctoral studies supervision. This challenge has become worse with the establishment of hundreds of new public and private universities in Africa. The shortages in academic staff have resulted in a lack of capacity in most of the social sciences and humanities departments and schools in African universities to organise quality postgraduate programmes and

conduct research. In certain cases, the capacity for postgraduate supervision is non-existent, which leads to doctoral and master's students taking longer to complete their programmes (Bangura et al. 2019). Nonetheless, as we point out,

the existence of a large African academic Diaspora has been documented in numerous studies. Many of these scholars are willing to lend a hand in the revitalisation of universities in their home countries or elsewhere in Africa. Other highly qualified academics are circulating outside the universities, within Africa itself, and it would be important to have an initiative that taps into the knowledge and skills they have. Therefore, one effective way to address the shortage of qualified senior academic staff and PhD supervision capacity in African universities is to mobilise the academic Diaspora to support universities in Africa. (Bangura et al. 2019: xvi)

In addition, CCoM scholars are linked to the mentors for two years. CODESRIA evaluates the programme twice a year to get feedback from the mentors and the scholars on how the relationships are proceeding and what needs adjusting (Bangura et al. in press).

The inaugural institute of the CCoM was convened at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, from 10-20 April 2017. The second institute was held at the Kenya School of Monetary Studies in Nairobi, from 21 October to 1 November 2019. The third institute, which was scheduled to take place in August 2020, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CCoM currently has twenty-six senior academic mentors linked to ninety-one former and current doctoral candidates in African universities. In addition to other achievements mentioned

earlier, such as winning scholarly and service awards and grants, and publication and conference attendance, the first cohort of forty-nine scholars was linked to mentors in the college in 2016. About 95 per cent of this initial cohort completed their doctoral studies within four years – our challenge to them. This completion rate is far superior to the global average indicated by Statistics Solutions.

Astonishingly, the completion rate of ten years after students begin their doctoral program remains low at 56.6%. What does this mean? Well, first it means that after years of graduate study, and thousands of dollars spent working towards your doctoral degree, 43.4% of students will not complete their program. (Statistics Solutions 2023:1)

### **CCoM guidelines for mentors**

The scholars admitted to the CCoM have to apply and be nominated by their schools/deans and involve their primary supervisors. A mentorship relationship, although virtual, involves three people: (1) the scholar, (2) the primary supervisor, and (3) the mentor. The mentors have to copy any advice to students to the primary supervisors, and to CODESRIA for the purposes of monitoring the relationship. The primary supervisors likewise are requested to do the same (Bangura et al. in press).

The six-point CCoM contract for mentors enjoins each to agree to the following:

1. 'link and be available to advise the students assigned to him/her on issues regarding their doctoral studies';
2. 'work with the primary supervisors, especially through sharing his/her comments to the students to ensure this relationship is mutual and to the benefit of the students';
3. 'share and offer advice regarding relevant literature, read and comment on draft chapters of theses/dissertations in preparation';
4. 'liaise with the primary supervisors of the doctoral candidates based at African universities and share their views about the work of the students';
5. 'initiate the students to academic publishing through co-publication of articles based on the students' work'; and
6. 'initiate the doctoral candidates and primary supervisors to scholarly networks in ways that contribute to enriching academic life in African universities' (CODESRIA 2017: 1).

### **Earlier publishing initiatives**

During the first CCoM Institute in Nairobi, scholars were divided into nine groups to work on various chapters for *Conducting Research and Mentoring Students in Africa: CODESRIA College of Mentors Handbook*. Towards the end of the event, they made group presentations and received feedback from fellow scholars, resource persons and CODESRIA staff to help them revise the chapters.

The text of this handbook has replaced Norman K. Denzin's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000) as the most cited and used research methodology book around the world. For example, on 18 July 2023, a concentrated Google search conducted by placing quotation marks around a title in order to isolate only those places where it is mentioned

yielded about 10,600,000 results in 0.44 seconds for Denzin's text and about 22,500,000 results in 0.05 seconds for the CCoM text. This was made possible by having the handbook available on the websites of CODESRIA, ResearchGate and Academia.edu and promoted on the CCoM listserv, with the information forwarded by the scholars to their colleagues, friends and family members; LinkedIn and Facebook. I was pleasantly surprised when I read a very positive commentary on the book made by a scholar in Tibet on ResearchGate.

Right after the Institute, we started encouraging the scholars and their supervisors and linking them to opportunities that would help them write books and top-tier refereed journal articles based on their theses/dissertations and/or other topics of interest to them. We also assisted them in applying for and getting research grants and funding for presenting papers at conferences convened in and outside Africa.

### **Professional and social media**

When one is passionate about an initiative, one must be a cheerleader for the endeavour. Accordingly, CCoM scholars and I have been quite diligent in sharing the success stories of the scholars and the programme within the community and other places across the globe. These can be seen in postings on the CCoM listserv, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram.

Also, the scholars acknowledge CCoM in their publications and during conference and other public presentations. Lengthy videos of the presentations can be seen on YouTube and brief extracts can be found in other Internet media.

## Support from CODESRIA staff **Conclusions**

CODESRIA staff members, especially Coumba Ndoffène Diouf, Leonide Azah Awah and Dominique Tania Sambou-Tchikaya, provide invaluable support in many ways. First, before an Institute is convened, they communicate to the scholars the excellence expected of them, provide them with a programme for the conference activities, which include the development of state-of-the-art research oral presentation and writing skills, and send them reading materials dealing with various research methodologies.

Second, during an Institute, the CCoM staff organise the scholars in groups, provide them with the necessary resources to take notes, and encourage them to be active during the sessions. They also make arrangements with libraries and the hotel venue to provide spaces where the scholars can study and meet to discuss group assignments.

Third, after an Institute, the staff members check on and evaluate the scholars' progress in their doctoral dissertations. They also provide the scholars with information about research, publication and grant opportunities.

In addition, CCoM staff develop profiles of the scholars and write frequent news items about their works and other meritorious activities, which the staff members send to their CODESRIA colleagues in the Department of Publications and Communication for posting on the organisation's website and social and professional media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. These posts motivate the scholars to work harder and be very productive.

The preceding analysis makes it possible to reach some conclusions. To start with, the Kemetite concept of *nekht* is quite efficacious in explaining the extraordinary achievements of the CCoM scholars during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because, following Uroš Matić's explanation of the Kemetite notion of 'resilience', for Kemetics the idea was frequently 'associated with decentralized decision-making and empowerment at the local and community level', was 'conceptualized as adaptability than as stability', and could be found in 'the intersectionality of identity and life experiences' (Matić 2021: 1).

Next, the Diopian perspective makes it possible to contextualise the foregoing analysis, in that – as Diop himself encouraged us in his groundbreaking work, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1974) – it is imperative to embed our analysis of Africa within the perspective that Kemet and its citizens were Negroid in origin. He stated this certainty as follows: 'In contemporary descriptions of ancient Egyptians, this question is never raised. Eyewitnesses of that period formally affirm that the Egyptians were Black' (Diop 1974: 1; also quoted in Bangura 2021b: 79). And, as I show in my essay, 'From Diop to Asante: Conceptualizing and Contextualizing the Afrocentric Paradigm' (Bangura 2012), 'without the notion of context, there would be no theory of pragmatics, much less a theory of ethnomethodology. This is one reason pragmatics calls for some explicit characterisation of the concept of context, despite the difficulty encompassed in such an activity' (Bangura 2021b: 78).

It behoves me to add here that 'pragmatics' refers to the branch of linguistics that deals with language in use and the contexts in which it is used, including such matters as *deixis* (the function or use of deictic words, forms or expressions), the taking of turns in conversation, text organisation, presupposition (a thing tacitly assumed beforehand at the beginning of a line of argument or course of action) and implicature (the action of implying a meaning beyond the literal sense of what is explicitly stated).

Also, the CCoM has the potential of being CODESRIA's most lasting legacy. The signs of the college having an enduring impact on the world are already visible. In essence, it is a gift that can be passed down through generations of scholars. Leaving a lasting legacy calls for dreaming big and changing the world for the better. The college therefore, must be sustained at all costs.

In addition, the exceptional achievements of the CCoM scholars are fuelled by the genuine passion of the scholars, mentors and staff. In fact, it was Frantz Fanon who reminded us of the benefits of passion in his famous book, *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1961), in which he stated that,

The passion with which native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement; but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested. (Fanon 1961: 209)

Indeed, as Dr Shaka Ssali, retired host of the Voice of America worldwide television show named

Straight Talk Africa, used to say, 'The global brain power is shifting to Africa'. To which I add, 'The CCoM is helping to make it happen'.

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# 16<sup>TH</sup> CODESRIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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4<sup>TH</sup> – 8<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2023

T H E M E : \_\_\_\_\_

**SOCIAL SCIENCES AND  
'PANDEMICS' IN AFRICA**

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**DAKAR, SENEGAL**