

BLACK LIVES EUROPE



(Photo by Johny Pitts)

A Series of Events Exploring Issues and Experiences of the African Diaspora in Europe Today

The Department of European Languages and Studies, together with UCI's Africana Institute for Creation, Recognition, and Elevation and the School of Humanities Equity Advisor, is sponsoring speakers at the beginning of the spring quarter, 2022, who will offer unique insights into the study of Black Lives in contemporary Europe.

While understandably much of the racial reckoning and analysis in recent years has focused on the United States, Europe has also undergone its own examination of its long historical engagement with Africa and people of African descent. Although—or perhaps *because*—the US and European contexts are by no means identical, a comparative analysis can yield important insights.

The first event will take place on:

Thursday, March 31st – Humanities Gateway 1010, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Baba Badji (Rutgers University)

“The Afterlife of Négritude and Black Lives Matter”

Introduced by Prof. Ngugi wa Th’iongo, Department of Comparative Literature

In this talk, Badji meditates on his processing of cultures, people, and (Négritude / Blackness at home and abroad) in *Ghost Letters*. The talk dwells for a moment on his growing up in

Casamance, Senegal, West Africa. In passing, he discusses what it was like to be a political refugee from a little town in Senegal, West Africa and how he moved to New York City at the age of eleven to reconnect with his father, whom he had not seen since he was two years old. Above all, he explores how in one sense, the Wolof in his poetry is his way of reaching out to his roots; and he thinks without the Wolof in it, the poem becomes a European poem or an American poem. In another sense, without the Wolof in a poem that also does not have French, that poem strictly becomes an American poem. But for him, a diasporic poem or a universal poem must have Wolof, must have English, and must have French together. It is all to say that *Ghost Letters* helps him reimagine the identities he embodies.

Baba Badji is currently a Postdoctoral Associate in Comparative Literature at Rutgers University–New Brunswick and at the Rutgers Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice. He holds a MFA in Poetry and Translation in French from Columbia University (2015) and earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Washington University in St. Louis in 2021. Badji is a Senegalese-American poet and translator who came to America when he was eleven years old. His research and teaching interests center on the links between various forms of practice, with a particular focus on debates about postcolonial translation theory and Négritude in Anglophone and Francophone cultures. In addition to English and French, Badji is fluent in Wolof, Mending, and Diola, and he calls on these languages in his writing. His research examines négritude in cultures. His volume of poetry, *Ghost Letters*, was Long Listed for the National Book Award for Poetry in September, 2021.



Events are cosponsored by the Department of European Languages and Studies, the Department of Comparative Literature, the Department of African American Studies, the UCI Africana Institute for Creation, Recognition, and Elevation (AICRE), the International Center for Writing and Translation, UCI Illuminations, History+Poetics+Theory, and the generous support of the School of Humanities Equity Advisor.