

Mr Vice Chancellor, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

AUSTIN BUKENYA AND ARTHUR GAKWANDI: ACHIEVEMENTS, CONTEXTS AND CONCERNS

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Not very long ago, we gathered in this very place to celebrate the life and work of Professor Timothy Wangusa at 80. We have also in the past used this platform to celebrate and acknowledge David Rubadiri, Okot P'Bitek and others. This activity is our way of using our dynamic present to reminisce on our glorious past, and to illuminate the future. I want pay tribute to my colleagues who are central to this activity Susan Kiguli, Dominica Dipio, Ernest Okello Ogwang, Okot Bengé, Eve Nabulya, Cindy Magara, Isaac Tibasiima, Danson Kahyana and others. This is a good tradition. In the Igbo proverb brought to us in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo tells us that: "A man who pays respect to the great, paves the way for his own greatness." I also express our gratitude to the University administration for making it possible for us to use University structures to make these celebrations, and for continuing to honour us with their presence.

As in the case of Timothy Wangusa, whose venerable presence in this audience I gratefully acknowledge, we are privileged today to be celebrating the lives of living persons. It is an opportunity for them to know that we value them, and will continue to do so. On a very personal note, I consider the continued presence of Arthur Gakwandi, Austin Bukenya, Timothy Wangusa and Ruth Mukama (my linguistics teacher) in our midst a great privilege. For as one grows older, one begins to experience a shortage of walking teachers. I still vividly recall Arthur Gakwandi's lessons in literary research, which I have now made my pet subject.

Professor Gakwandi may or may not recall, but I was among the first crop of students that he taught when he had just returned from Nigeria.

As for Mwalimu Austin Bukenya, he continues to be my source of inspiration in the understanding of the role of Oral literature in society. Long before we met Austin Bukenya in person, we had learnt to define oral literature as:

those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression.

Just the ability to use this high powered definition alone made us feel we were on the threshold of something very important.

The literary achievements of both Bukenya and Gakwandi have been widely recorded. All you need is a good search engine. But I will tell you what they have in common, which you will not find on any website (at least before this ta is uploaded): they are both passionate about literature as a subject, they both treat their students as friends, they both speak French as a language, and they are eighty and still going strong.

In order to put our celebration today in context, we need to describe their achievement in a way that puts them both in the African literary context. Arthur Gakwandi's seminal work, *The Novel and Contemporary African experience* in Africa was published in 1977, it came hot on the footsteps of iconic African literature critics like Eustace Palmer, G.D Killam, Eldred Jones and others. The following texts were texts that every student of African literature new and used:

G.D Killam African Writers on African Writing (1973)

Eustace Palmer An introduction to the African novel (1972)

Edred Jones The Writing of Wole Soyinka (1973)

Chris L. Wanjala, ed. Standpoints on African Literature (1973)

Ulli Biere The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths (1966)

Arthur Gakwandi's *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (1977) established itself among them. It was published in the same year that Byron Kawadwa was killed, presumably for writing the play "Oluyimba Lwa Wankoko" (Song of the Cock), an intriguing work that still refuses to fully surrender its secrets. The death of Byron Kawadwa had a chilling effect on both the practice and the development of Art in Uganda. Gakwandi's work was one of those that helped to define direction for literature as a discipline, and to keep its fire going in the midst of the political turmoil of the 1970s and early 1980s that was decidedly hostile to the subject. On the broader African scene, the work was one of those that commanded the waves of the African literary critical movement. It offered guidance on the way one could systematically study, evaluate, and interpret literature.

Like Killam, Palmer, Wanjala, Jones, and to some extent Ulli Biere, before him, Gakwandi dialogued with the African writers that had established themselves at that time - Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (then James Ngugi), Ali Mazrui, Sembene Ousmane, Nadine Gordimer and others to establish the relationship between the novel and real life experience.

We read Gakwandi's before meeting him. It was good reading, and it offered answers to examination questions. I personally used parts of it in preparation for my A-level examinations in 1978. But at that time, the name Gakwandi simply referred to a book. When we finally met Arthur Gakwandi, we – I and my contemporaries Robby Muhumuza, Fred Alibatya Nsadha, and others, were surprised to see that he was actually a real human being, and not a book. He was disarmingly self-effacing, soft-spoken, had a magnetic reserve about him, and did not throw his Edinburgh or Ibadan experiences in our faces, as many of his colleagues would do. He went about his work gently, and at the end of every contact hour, you could easily see what he set out to achieve in that hour. We got the feeling that he wanted those around him to regard him as ordinary, even though

the evidence on record said otherwise. As we got to know him better, we discovered the gentle humour that made him tick as a human being. We discovered this humour in very much the same way that Speke discovered the Nile – I mean it had always been there. It was almost unbelievable that we were being taught by Arthur Gakwandi whose praises our secondary school teachers had sung on the basis of *Contemporary experience*, as we fondly shortened his work. To our disappointment however, he said nothing about *The Novel and contemporary experience in Africa*, and he did not give us chance to bring it up in our first lecture. It was research methods all the way. He taught us to instantly record the sources of our ideas and quotations; otherwise, he warned, “you might forget where you got it from and pass it off as your own at the time of writing up.” This, he stressed, in the commonest cause of *inadvertent plagiarism*. A beautiful phrase that I would always remember. In my adult research life, I always to instantly record the source of my ideas, and I closely guard this lesson that I received from Arthur Gakwandi. But that was not all - he walked us to the Makerere library, and taught us to practically find books using the then manual catalogues that the University operated. We also learnt from him that we could go to any other sections of the library, including the science sections, if that is where you thought you could find the information you needed. And you remember the gentle humour I referred to above? Well, he advised us that our education system is capable of great surprises, to the extent that if you are looking for *Animal Farm*, you should thoroughly check the Agriculture section before you call off the search.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Novel and Contemporary African Experience*, Gakwandi publishes Kosiya Kifefe. The publication of this novel was like the completion of a scholar-creative artist life cycle. There is a sense in which it is a true contemporary experience, with Kosiya Kifefe starting from humble origins in an African village and rising to confront contemporary political realities. By so doing, Kosiya Kifefe joins other troubled child characters in African fiction, whose adult life replicates similar trouble, which Gakwandi himself characterizes as “the total life of an individual (being) affected by the conditions in which [she/he]

lives” Nabutanyi (36-37).

The excerpt below is an indicator of where Kosiya Kifefe came from – a background where parents still have to be threatened before they take their children to school.

You there, what are you doing? The voice came from where the village path entered the compound. Kifefe turned round only to see a fat man in trousers and a tie.

“Nothing sir”

“What do you mean nothing? Come here,” the stranger commanded. And Kifefe came sauntering cautiously forward.

“Where is your father? The man demanded as if he had no time to waste.

“In the hut.”

“Bahemuka!” the man shouted as in a rebuke. Bahemuka hurried out of the house.

Bahemuka why is this boy not at school?

“He will go one day”

“ONE DAY” This man who is old enough to impregnate a woman! And you say he will go to school one day! And you say he will go to school one day? The chief glowered, giving Bahemuka piercing look straight in the eyes, making the later blink and turn his eyes to the ground.

“I am giving you two weeks. If this boy is not at school by the end of that period, you will not get any licence from me for beer-brewing. Nor will I renew your licence for fishing when it expires. Heard me?”

“Yes sir”

And look at your compound! Grass growing up to the hut. Come let’s go and inspect your pit latrine.”

Through *Kosiya Kifefe*, the author takes us through the years of the African youth with its dreams and uncertainties. At the same time, he projects the images of a rapidly disintegrating society as he takes the character through political intrigues and the lust for power and wealth.

Gakwandi is also a short story writer. He writes with that keen attention to local detail, for which his predecessors have been famed. The difference is that the Gakwandi details are details of his times. The other aspects of his career, such as Gakwandi the diplomat and judge at the commonwealth writers’ competition, are we earned tribute for which writing and teaching career has prepared him.

Gakwandi the pan African Political theorist believes in a re-imagined African continent, because "political restructuring of the continent is a more important priority that needs to be addressed before economic restructuring can bring about the desired results." Quoted by Falola, Toyin (2004). Gakwandi argues that the colonially-inherited borders are the causes of African poverty because they are too small, and economically unviable. They therefore keep Africa trapped in a cycle of poverty, dependency, underdevelopment, and ethnic conflict. He therefore proposes the creation of a new political map of Africa consisting of seven African conglomerate states to represent the critical regions of Africa. These seven new

states consisted of the Sahara Republic, Senegambia, Central Africa and Swahili Republic, Erithomia, Swahili Republic, Mozambique, and Madagascar. The Sahara Republic state would encompass North Africa, Senegambia would encompass West Africa, the Central Africa and Swahili Republic would encompass Central Africa, Erithomia would encompass modern-day Eritrea, Ethiopia as well as somalia. The Swahili Republic would include East Africa and part of Central Africa, Mozambique would include Southern Africa. In Gakwandi's imagining, Madagascar would remain as it currently stands.¹ It is a very ambitious proposal, but at least it comes with the comfort that somebody is thinking on behalf of Africa.

Mwalimu Austin Bukenya is a man of numerous accomplishments. He is also Ngugi wa Thiongo's model East African because he speaks and writes his mother tongue (Luganda), speaks and writes the East African regional language (Kiswahili) with relish and his use of the international language and Ugandan language of education (English) is phenomena. In addition, he speaks French, and has also studied Latin.

He is a household literary name in all the three primary East African countries of Kenya Uganda and Tanzania. He is a graduate of the University of Dar es Salaam, has taught in Nairobi for a long time, and Uganda is his ancestral home. He is also credited with being among the pioneers in the teaching of Oral literature, the icons who actually coined the term "Orature" to capture the essence of African oral literary expression. All these attributes aside, he reads widely and wildly, and has

¹ Falola, Toyin (2004). [Nationalism and African Intellectuals](#). University Rochester Press. [ISBN 978-1-58046-149-8](#).

as travelled the word in search of and in transmission of knowledge. His work in oral literature makes his contribution to education in East Africa remarkable. His plays *The Bride* and *A Hole in the Sky* have been widely read in East Africa, and the *Bride* in particular, has been a setbook in the Kenyan school system for a long time. In addition, Bukenya is a published literary critic, poet and an accomplished stage and screen actor. We shall to his novel *The People's Bachelor* later.

Before the publication of *Understanding Oral Literature*, 1994, *Oral Literature Theory*, 1991 *African Oral Literature for Schools*, 1983, studies of Oral literature in English speaking Africa were dominated Ruth Finnegan *Oral literature in Africa*. The work needed updating and supplementing with a native familiarity that Bukenya and provide from their East African background and upbringing with the publication of *African Oral Literature for Schools* in 1983. These achievements have given Bukenya an international platform. He has taught at the Universities of Stirling in the UK, Bayreuth in Germany, Madagascar, and was for many years Director of Kenyatta University's Creative and Performing Arts Centre. He is also a founding Associate Member of FEMRITE, the Uganda Women Writers Association, and he writes the long-running *Saturday Nation* column, "Reflections of a Scholar." All these achievements give him a formidable profile that we at Makerere have benefitted from over the years.

The context of *The People's Bachelor* and *Kosiya Kifefe*

Let me now establish the context of *The People's Bachelor* and *Kosiya Kifefe* .

Post-colonial African writing occurs in generations and thematic trends. The generations do not have any rigid barriers in between them, but for purposes of

establishing an analytical working order, we have loosely characterised them as first, second, third generation, with the first generation running from about 1956 when Sembene Ousmane first published in the white man's language up to about 1970. The second generation would then run from 1970 to about 2000. And the third generation would start from here and continue to the present. The obvious dilemma is, of course, that some of the writers we have placed in the first generation continued to write into the third generation. But if we adopt this as our analytical framework, the first generation would include writers like Sembene Ousmane, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Ama Ata Aidoo, and J. P. Clark. Sembene Ousmane's first novel, *The Black Docker* was published in 1956, while his most celebrated work *God's Bits of Wood* was published in 1960. Christopher Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (a poetry collection) was first published in 1962. Some of Wole Soyinka's best known works includes the plays *The Trial of Brother Jero* (1963), *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), as well as the novels *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973). He also has collections of poetry, namely *Poems from Prison* (1969), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988).

Kofi Awoonor's *Rediscovery* (a poetry collection) was published in 1964, Ngugi wa Thiongo's (then James) first novel (*Weep Not Child*) was published in 1964, and Ama Ata Aidoo's first play (*The Dilemma of a Ghost*) was published in 1965, making her the first published female African dramatist. John Pepper Clark's *Poems* was published in 1962. And of course there is our own Okot P'Bitek (with *Song of Lawino* 1966, whose complex publication history goes as far back as 1956). Similarly, Grace Ogot (referred to in African literary circles as "the lettered woman of East Africa,") secures her place in the first generation with the novel

The Promised Land (1966) and the short story collection *Land Without Thunder* (1968). Her other publications, *The Other Woman* (1976), and *The Island of Tears* (1980), all cement her position as the lettered woman that hit the ground running. We also have, in this period, Bessie Head who is best known for her three novels - *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1974). Bessie Head was born to a (then) “forbidden” union involving a black man and Scottish woman. Her writing deals with the issues, pains, struggles and questions of racial identity and notions of belonging, as well as the trauma, of being a mixed-race woman within a predominantly patriarchal and racist society.

The other writer in this period, but who prefers to keep out of the public limelight, is Uganda’s Violet Barungi. Her earliest publications are short stories, coming out as far back as 1968, but has two major novels in print: *Cassandra* and *The Shadow and the Substance*. In addition, she is the author of eleven full-length plays.

The other big name in the first generation of African writers is that of Ayi Kwei Armah, whose first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), is one of the most celebrated works in Anglophone African literature. It features the pains of witnessing the stark betrayal of Ghana’s independence dreams. His other works, *Fragments* (1970), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), *The Healers* (1978), *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006) all invariably deal with themes of betrayal, and secure Armah’s position as one of the most prominent and distinctive African writers.

All these writers already had to their names some publications in the form of short poems or short stories, which had made them eligible to attend the famous 1962 conference of African writers of English expression.

Under this loose periodization, the second generation, running from about 1970 to 2000, features big names in African literature like Nurudin Farar , whose *From a Crooked Rib* was published in 1970, Isidore Okpewho with *The Victims*, (1970)², the prolific Kenyan writer Meja Mwangi, whose novels *Kill Me Quick* and *Carcase for Hounds* were published in 1973 and 1974 respectively. We also have Frank Chipasula (with *Visions and Reflections*, 1972), Tanure Ojaide (with *Songs of Myself* 1973), Femi Osofisan (with *Kolera Kolej* 1975), and Timothy Wangusa whose poetry collection *Salutations: Poems 1965-1975* (1977) and novel *Upon This Mountain* (1989) fall within this period. Festus Iyayi with *Violence*, 1979, Jack Mapanje (with *Of Chameleons and Gods*, 1981), Mariama Bâ, author of *So Long a Letter* (1981), and Niyi Osundare (with *Songs of the Marketplace* - 1983) all belong to this generation. In this same group is Buchi Emecheta, author of *In the Ditch* (1972) and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974). Her work features the struggles of Nigerian women and children trying to adapt to a home in the diaspora. We also have, in this period, Bessie Head who is best known for her three novels - *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971) and *A Question of Power* (1974). Bessie Head was born to a (then) “forbidden” union involving a black man and Scottish woman. Her writing deals with the issues, pains, struggles and questions of racial identity and notions of belonging, as well as the trauma, of being a mixed-race woman within a predominantly patriarchal and racist society. Using the same yardstick we have already established, Yvonne Vera also belongs to the second generation of African writers, and she is one of the leading writers of her generation. She published a short story collection, *Why Don't You Carve Other*

² Isidore Okpewho is known to us in East Africa for his African Oral Literature, but he is a prize-winning novelist with novels to his name. *The Victims* (1970), is a tragedy of domestic conflicts. His second, *The Last Duty* (1976), set in the Nigerian civil war, won the African Arts Prize for Literature. His third novel, *Tides*, is his most recent publication.

Animals (1993), and novels that include *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1996), *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). In her work, she confronts issues of sexual abuse, as well as infanticide. Another writer in this league is Goretta Kyomuhendo. Writing with unprecedented honesty about issues of gender, sex and relationships, the author of *The First Daughter* (1996), *Secrets No More* (1999), and others is a game changer in Ugandan and African writing.

Published in 1972, *The People's Bachelor* puts Bukenya in the earlier phase of the second generation. The novel satirizes Africa's new universities as misdirected, and a wasteful irrelevance. They are a betrayal of the struggle for freedom from colonial oppressors in which the ordinary people engaged for a better life. Instead, the University élite, both students and lecturers, engage in distractions that are wasteful of the nation's time and money, pursuing paper socialism and setting their target as paper qualifications that will not solve Africa's problems. Austin Bukenya is humorous but bitingly frank. He attacks the pretentious lifestyles of African campus intellectual, especially when set against the harsh realities of the African surrounding. The academic pretensions are further marred by the grim descriptions of sexual exploitation of female students by their teachers, whose amorous pursuits make them abandon the responsibility to protect.

Arthur Gakwandi's *The Novel and Contemporary Experience* uncomfortably places him in the second generation of African writers. I say uncomfortably because others have entered there with creative works, but this a critical text. *Kosiya Kifefe*, published twenty years later, belatedly secures his place there, and also re-affirms his credentials as a key player in the African literary game. Both Gakwandi and Bukenya deal with second generation issues – the pains and dilemmas of managing post-independence African societies. Our loose

periodization would also place Mary Karoolo Okurut in the second generation, because her first novel, *The Invisible Weevil* was published in 1998, but the bulk of her publications come after the year 2000. Similarly, our own Susan Kiguli makes it to the second generation because her first volume of poetry, *The African Saga*, was published in 1998. Speaking specifically about Susan Kiguli, one modern day critic has observed thus: “Her first volume of poetry, *The African Saga* (1998) situated her among the most exciting poets from Eastern and Southern Africa.”³

The third generation consists of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and other younger writers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2003, but she is best known for her *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013), which won the US National Book Critics Circle Award. It is in this third generation where we would locate Doreen Baingana who first comes into print in 2002, and Jennifer Makumbi whose *Kintu* was first published in 2014. Makumbi now has several other novels to her name, including *The First Woman* and *Manchester Happened*.

Time and space are not on my side, otherwise, I should be saying more about many other African writers who are part of Gawandi and Buonya’s context. I should have made mention of Brian Chikwava and Tsitsi Dangarembga from Zimbabwe, Chris Abani from Nigeria, JM Coetzee from South Africa, Tayyib Saeh and Aher Arop Bol from Sudan, M.G. Vassanji from Tanzania and now Canada, Athol Fugard from South Africa and Ben Okri from Nigeria. But the general point being made is that the context of both Austin Buonya and Arthur Gawandi is continent. Knowing them and having them as friends, being taught by them, and having them as

³ <https://www.crossingborders-stimmenafrikas.de/en/gaeste/prof-susan-kiguli-ug-gb>

colleagues is an honour for which we shall always be grateful. May we live to be part of their celebrations at 90 and 100.