

“They Did and Taught:” An Audit of the Literary Creative and Criticism Careers of Selected Makerere University Alumni

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Abstract

This article audits the literary creative, and criticism careers of a special cohort of six Makerere University alumni. It claims that the creative oeuvre and literary critical scholarship of these Makerere University-trained writers and critics represents the finest turnout of the department. While their literary criticism and creativity started in the Department of Literature’s literary publication outlets of *Penpoint* and *Dhana*, we demonstrate how their careers grew both in and outside Makerere University. This is perhaps why our reading focuses on the public and critical reception of their creative publications and their contributions to literary critical scholarship of the continent. Our primary reading methodology is textual and content analysis of the literary creative and criticism archive produced by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Timothy Wangusa, Mary Karooro Okurut, Dominica Dipio, Susan Kiguli, and Evelyn Cindy Magara. Our selection is aware that Makerere University’s Department of Literature has produced many writers and critics. However, our subjective selection of the six focuses on the selected six’s creative and critical outputs over a period of 60 years.

Keywords: Literary creativity, Literary criticism, Makerere University, English Department



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Introduction

In his remarks during the Makerere@100 Homecoming Dinner dubbed “Through these Gates,” the 2018-2026 Vice Chancellor of Makerere University, Professor Barnabas Nawangwe, delineated Makerere University’s contribution to the Ugandan society in the past 10 decades. He argued that the past 10 decades have often coincided with momentous landmarks in Ugandan society. He concluded that as Makerere University celebrated its first century of existence, it was prudent to acknowledge the contributions of 10 generations of men and women who have had a profound impact on the country and East Africa. We agree with Nawangwe in terms of how transformational the last 10 generations of Makerere University alumni have been. This is why we seek to extend his argument by auditing the literary creative and criticism contributions of six Department of Literature alumni. Our inventory of the contributions of the selected six writer and critics to the African Republic of Letters places Nawangwe’s generational trope in conversation with Pius Adesanmi’s and Chris Dunton’s (2008) definition of the third generation of Nigerian writing.

In their introduction to a 2008 special issue of *Research in African Literatures* entitled “Nigeria’s Third-Generation Novel: Preliminary Theoretical Engagements,” Adesanmi and Dunton argue that the fiction

dissected in that special issue is “the work of [a] third generation [of Nigerian] authors” (Adesanmi and Dunton, 2008, p.vi). The adjective ‘third generation’ reinforces the concept of generations in African literary discourses because it implicitly acknowledges the existence of the first and second generations of African and Nigerian writing. This makes it plausible to apply the concept of ‘generations of writing’ to any Area Literatures including African and Ugandan literatures. Arguably, Adesanmi’s and Dunton’s theorisation offers scholars of African literature theoretical lens for reading continental fiction across time, in spite of Harry Garuba’s (2003) caution against the pitfalls of classifying African literature. Granted, any attempt to classify African literature is fraught with challenges and raises questions such as: should we conceptualise a generation in terms of a cohort of writers and their production at a particular time, or should we foreground the temporality of calendar years when considering a generation of African writing? Despite Garuba’s warning against the pitfalls associated with the classification of continental literature, we apply Adesanmi’s and Dunton’s concepts to stocktake the literary creative, and critical outputs of Makerere University trained writers and critics.

Our focus on the literary creative, and critical outputs of the selected six is anchored on David Cook’s

observation that “many of the students in the English Department were there reading English literature with an eye to writing themselves” (Elder, 1993, p.51).¹ The essence of Cook’s observation above is that the department was a breeding ground for East African writers in the 1960s. Cook’s observation that Makerere University students were plotting their writing and literary criticism careers while at the university explains the many writer and critics that Makerere University has produced. This is because *Penpoint* and *Dhana* allowed East African budding writers to try out their creative and critical ideas. This justifies our deployment of a generational motif to audit the contribution of three generations of Makerere University’s trained creative writers and literary critics. Aware that Makerere University has trained many creative writers and literary critics, our selection of the six is subjectively determined by their creative and literary scholarship. Our choice of Ngũgĩ and Wangusa (first generation), Okurut and Dipio (second generation), and Kiguli and Magara (third generation) is undergirded by the amount of the

creative work and literary scholarship they have produced.²

The First Generation: Reflections on the Works of Ngugi and Wangusa

Although Nawangwe’s generational matrix of Makerere University alumni that starts with the establishment of a technical school in 1922 is factually correct, our reading starts with Makerere University’s affiliation to the University of London in the late 1940s. This is why we start with what we call the first generation of Makerere University–trained creative writers and literary critics, namely, Ngũgĩ and Wangusa. Our selection is cognisant of the many deserving alumni of this cohort, which include remarkable creative writers and literary critics such as John Nagenda, David Rubadiri, and Peter Nazareth. Nonetheless, Ngũgĩ and Wangusa are featured in this article because of the quantity and quality of their literary creative, and critical scholarship over the last 60 years. We argue that they have made major contributions to African literature by offering unique philosophic insights into the African condition. This makes them what

¹ It is important to note that the Department at Makerere has undergone one name change. Although it was formerly known as the English Department, in the 1970s it was renamed the Literature Department following the decolonialization and Africanization debates that started at the University of Nairobi in the 1970s.

² The subjectivity of our choice is further indicated by the fact that while the first generation is composed of only male writer-critics, the second and third generations are made up of female writer-critics. This reflects the demographic character of Ugandan higher education in the last 60 years which was initially characterised by gender inequity. For example, while in the 1950s/60s higher education was a preserve of men, the 1980s-2000s created opportunities for women to access higher education. Nonetheless, most women who accessed higher education at the turn of the century were majorly placed in the Liberal Arts.

Wale Adebani has christened African writers who are “social thinkers” (Adebani, 2014, p.405). In “The Writer as a Social Thinker,” Adebani argues that “African writers are not merely intellectuals whose work can be used to mirror social thought but are social thinkers themselves who engage with the nature of existence and questions of knowledge in the continent and beyond (Adebani, 2014, p.405). We agree with Adebani’s postulation that African writers use their art to theorise the African reality. Adebani’s argument is applicable to the creative and critical works of Ngũgĩ and Wangusa, which variously unveil the dysfunctions of postcolonial East African society. Thus, it is arguable that Ngũgĩ and Wangusa exemplify Adebani’s theorisation of a writer as a social thinker.

The point that Ngũgĩ uses his creative and critical works to describe his society is eloquently captured by his website. The website describes him as a Kenyan-Kikuyu writer and academic who writes primarily in Gikuyu and who formerly wrote in English. The above description depicts Ngũgĩ as perhaps one of the greatest alumni of Makerere University’s department of literature. It is true that he started his writing career at Makerere University in English under the name James Ngũgĩ. It is also true that his academic and criticism career started at the University of Leeds as a graduate student and at the University of Nairobi as a teacher of literature. This means that Makerere University, the

University of Leeds, and the University of Nairobi were instrumental in his scholarly and creative journey. The different roles that Makerere University, the University of Leeds and the University of Nairobi played in his evolution as a writer and critic are perhaps eloquently captured by Susan Kiguli during her panel presentation at the 2022 CHUSS Humanities Conference, when she reveals an email exchange with Ngũgĩ where the latter avers cryptically that Makerere University made him. The above cryptic statement underscores the role played by Makerere University in Ngũgĩ’s career.

That Makerere University played an important role in Ngũgĩ’s professional life is distilled in his 2020 autobiography, entitled *The Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening*. In this important book, Ngũgĩ recounts how his formative years at Makerere University empowered him to find his voice as a journalist, short story writer, playwright, and novelist just as colonial empires were crumbling and new nations were being born. It is at this point that he starts to write stories about the carnage and mass suffering that were occasioned by colonialism. While *The Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer’s Awakening* documents his creative writing journey, his critical and theoretic itinerary starts with his 1986 polemic, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. This text lays down his thinking about the relationship between art and political power in society. He explains

that writers in contemporary Africa are often treated as enemies of the state because their work can awaken the consciousness of the masses. His recurrent philosophy of using fiction to stir people out of their colonial-induced stupor to resist exploitation and poor governance is at the core of his early creative works, such as *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965), that were written while he was still a student at Makerere University.

While Ngũgĩ’s creative career started at Makerere University, his critical and scholarly life was moulded at the University of Leeds as a graduate student and at the University of Nairobi as a teacher. We argue that his time at the University of Leeds and the University of Nairobi shaped his pedagogical revolution articulated in a 1968 co-authored memo entitled “On the Abolition of the English Department.” This was a turning point in the literature curriculum in the region and marked a turning point in Ngugi’s pedagogical inclination. Although the philosophy outlined above was actualised at the University of Nairobi, it is plausible to argue that it had started earlier at Makerere University, where he was subjected to what Rubadiri has elsewhere termed the epistemic violence inflicted on a generation of African students who were forced to write in the English language. This argument is true if we note an entry into his file by his teachers at Makerere University that states that although he was a brilliant student, he struggled to express himself in the

English language. It is perhaps this self-consciousness that drew him to the radical participants of the 1962 Conference of Writers of the English Expression, such as Obi Wali, who, as early as 1962, was campaigning for the centrality of African languages in African literature. This radicalism is reflected in his efforts that abolished the English Department and replaced it with a Literature Department at the University of Nairobi. His efforts inaugurated a default pedagogical category of teaching literature in the region. Although Literature in English was in a way a compromise pedagogical position because it fell short of Obi Wali’s call for African literature created, distributed, and analysed in African languages, it was foundational to his future theorisation of the role of language and literature in society.

We now turn to Wangusa, a Ugandan-born writer and literary scholar who joined Makerere University to study English in 1964, just as Ngũgĩ was leaving for the University of Leeds. It can be argued that Wangusa’s literary career tracks that of Ngũgĩ because his career follows in the footsteps of Ngũgĩ. For example, after completing his undergraduate studies at Makerere University, Wangusa also went to the University of Leeds to do his Master of Arts in English and returned to Makerere to undertake his PhD studies, which he completed in 1975. It is important to note that he was the first person to earn a PhD in

Literature at Makerere University. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that his PhD was conferred by President Idi Amin, whom he lampoons in his poem “A Portrait of a Dictator.” He was elevated to the position of Professor of Literature in the Literature Department in 1981, and despite several detours into government as a Minister of Education (1985-86) and Presidential Advisor, as well as tenure in several privately owned universities, Wangusa spent a large part of his working (writing and literary scholarship) life at Makerere University.

Despite his much-publicised career as an educational administrator and public servant, Wangusa is perhaps Uganda’s most renowned poet. Among the many poems he has published are four major anthologies, namely, *Salutations* (1971), *A Pattern of Dust* (1994), *Anthem for Africa* (1995) and *Africa’s New Brood* (2006). He is also a novelist who has published two novels, namely *Upon this Mountain* (2005) and *Betwixt Mountain and Wilderness* (2015). The list of his poetry anthologies and novels justifies our claim that Wangusa is an important Ugandan writer. This postulation is underscored by his former colleague and another Makererean writer and critic, Austin Bukenya, in his *Nation* article of May 28, 2022, entitled “Prof Wangusa @80 is Poetry and Scholarship Personified.” Bukenya highlights what he thinks are the main qualities of Timothy Wangusa’s verse that make him “tower above us

aspirers to the poetic craft” (Bukenya, 2022, p.np). He goes on to elaborate that Wangusa has published a “greater number of substantial poetry volumes than most East African writers; some of them have been translated into various languages, and many critical studies attest to the rare quality of his verse; his poetic success derives from four main characteristics of his skill: language, shape, humour, and concern” (Bukenya, 2022, p.np). Although Bukenya declares his conflict of interest arising from his long-term acquaintance with Wangusa, his assessment of Wangusa’s literary achievement is incontestable.

There is no doubt that Wangusa is a great Ugandan poet and novelist who uses his fiction and verse to distil important insights about the African condition. This claim is substantiated by his biography and assessments by his former students and colleagues regarding what they think of his teacherly exploits. For example, during “Celebrating Wangusa @80, Poet, Novelist, and Teacher” at Makerere University in July 2022, Austin Bukenya recalled Wangusa’s comment on his poem: “In a startling and incisive response to my little piece called ‘W-w-woman,’ the Professor suggested that I had somehow, written a Shakespearean sonnet for the www.com age. I called the Professor’s critique startling because I was not aware of what I had done, until he pointed it out, with a glaring textual evidence” (Makerere University, 2022. p.np). This is also a point made

by James Amatre, who notes that the famous class of 1978–79 was so impressed with Wangusa’s teaching that they emulated his teaching and recitation of poetry. He concluded that Wangusa “made poetry loveable, [...] the professor was an inspiring lecturer” (Makerere University, 2022, p.np). The two testimonies above attest to Wangusa’s teacherly exploits that make the teaching of literature an enjoyable experience for both teacher and student.

The intersection of Wangusa’s creativity and pedagogy as an enjoyable experience is underscored in his philosophy that literature is a form of expression. He argues that in a world that is becoming largely visual, the word as a unit of communication is starting to lose its importance. This Wangusaian view is underscored in his interview with Mable Twegumye Zake, where he underlines the importance of the word as a unity of literary creativity and critical communication. He avers that “For the last 50 years, I have coined a word to serve my purpose, such as Africanology, Corruptionology, and Banyamulengeocracy, for some of the poems I have written” (Zake, 2022, p.np). He also relates how during an interview for a place in junior high school in 1957, he passed an otherwise complex interview process by responding to the question: “How are you” with a seemingly incorrect “I am freezing?” (Zake, 2022, p.np). The two examples underline Wangusa’s literary philosophy, namely, the importance

of words as units of expression. This maxim is underlined in his own work, where he adopts a Horatian mantra of creating new words such as “Africanology,” “Corruptionology” and “Banyamulengeocracy” to express profound insights into the contemporary African reality of political instability, war, and corruption.

The Second Generation: The Contributions of two Women Literary Creators and Scholars

We now turn to the second generation of Makerere University-trained literary creative writers and literary critics. While there are many Makerere University-trained second-generation creative writers and critics, our exploration focuses on Okurut and Dipio, who have had rich careers as writers and teachers at Makerere University. While Okurut is also best known for her work in journalism, publishing, and public service, Dipio is a dye-in-the-wool academic and creative. We posit that the creative and scholarly work of the two writers cum critics can offer us profound insights into an understanding of the contributions of Makerere University to contemporary Ugandan literary history. Furthermore, we argue that their creative writing and literary criticism engages with specific issues attributable to the Ugandan postcolony. We further note that while Okurut’s work is largely inclined towards literary

activism, Dipio's is more interested in the intersection between literary creativity and teaching. Another important difference that is worth flagging about their work is that while Okurut's primary genre is the novel, Dipio's is cinema.

We start our audit of the second generation of Makerere University–nurtured literary creative, and critical public intellectuals with Okurut. She was born in Western Uganda in 1954 and joined Makerere University's Department of Literature in 1974, completing her undergraduate degree in 1977 and her Master of Arts in 1981. Unlike her predecessors, such as Ngũgĩ and Wangusa, who sharpened their critical and theoretical lenses at the University of Leeds, her studies were done at Makerere University under the mentorship of David Cook and Margret Macpherson. If Rubadiri was apprehensive of the epistemic violence that an English curriculum engendered, it is perhaps important to note that by the time Okurut joined Makerere University, the revolution started by Ngũgĩ at the University of Nairobi had already taken root because Makerere University's Department of Literature was teaching Literature in English. It is also important to note that it was while in the Department of Literature that she was given leave to establish the Department of Mass Communication (now the Department of Journalism and Communication). While her teaching career ended in 2004, when she was appointed into the Ugandan Public Service as a Presidential Press

Secretary, her writing career is still ongoing, as the publication of *The Switch* (2016) aptly illustrates.

We argue that she has contributed to literary creativity and activism in the country through her own writing and the establishment of a platform to publish the work of female writers. For example, we note that her novels and plays have received critical acclaim because they offer us profound insights into the Ugandan society of the 1990s and 2000s. Some of her texts, such as *The Invisible Weevil* (1998), *The Official Wife* (2003), *The Daughter of the Delegate* (2000), *Potiphar's Grand Daughter* (2013), *The Switch* (2016), and *The Curse of the Sacred Cow* (1994), explore some of the salient issues in the Ugandan polity of the time. The above-listed texts remind us of Ruth Robbins's argument that good feminist fiction seeks to contest the "private sexual relationship between men and women" (Robbins, 2006, p.72) because a feminist writer's first task is to equalise "the representation of the sexes both in the text and in the real world" (Robbins, 2006, p.70). Robbins argues that the writer does this by presenting the idea that "female roles, which in any given society may have come to be regarded as natural, are not really so, and that given that they are not natural they may be even changed" (Robbins, 2006, p.78). It is arguable that Okurut's literary voice advances the feminist agenda that Robbins outlines above. For example, her seminal text, *The Invisible Weevil* (1998), explores how patriarchy

disenfranchises women in the face of debilitating social challenges such as AIDS. We argue that her use of a cautionary motif in most of her fiction is a form of teaching that exposes the unintended consequence of unbridled patriarchy in Ugandan society. The above-cited didactic concerns are replicated in her recent novel, *The Switch* (2016), in which she confronts the issues of female genital mutilation in some Eastern African societies.

It is perhaps the centrality of feminist activism in her writing that authorised her support for women to tell their stories, which manifested in her setting up “Femrite.” The establishment of an organisation dedicated to publishing the literary outputs of women has inscribed her in the annals of Ugandan literary history. This is because Femrite has achieved two important milestones in the history of literary production in contemporary Uganda. First, it has empowered women to do what seemed impossible in the past, namely, to write and publish their stories. It is unsurprising that the first book to be published by Femrite was Susan Kiguli’s *The African Saga*, a collection of poems whose tone and thematic concerns echoed the fiery feminist preoccupations of the 1990s. Second, and related to the above, is the fact that the organisation to empower women to place their issues in the public sphere has been a model for literary activist platforms like Kwani and Writivism—organisations

that have ensured that marginalised East African subjects appropriate literary platforms to articulate their experiences in contexts where their voices are actively excluded.

While Okurut merged public service, literary creativity, and criticism in her uniquely important career, as outlined above, our next Makerere University’s Department of Literature-trained film maker and literary critic—Dipio—is what we call a dye-in-the-wool academic-creative. Dipio, who is currently a Professor of Literature and Film in the Department of Literature, belongs to the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Church—a Ugandan-founded religious congregation of the Catholic Church based in Lira, Northern Uganda. She was also appointed Consultor of the Pontifical Council for Culture in 2019. She received an award for exemplary service of the church in Africa in communication in early 2022. The above-cited accolades attest to Dipio’s achievements in her career of literary creativity and criticism. This makes her an important thought leader who straddles two fields of human experience, namely, the church and the university. Although it is often difficult to navigate the dual world of religion and secular academics, we note that Dipio has used the intersection between these worlds—commitment to the service of humanity—to carve out a niche in literary critical and film communicative media.

Dipio joined Makerere University from Trinity College Nabbingo in the early 1980s. After completing her BA and MA in Makerere, she left to carry out her PhD studies in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Upon her return, she was appointed Head, Department of Literature, and promoted to the rank of Professor of Literature in 2017. Dipio's academic and spiritual biography, cited above, attests to her achievements as a Makerere University-trained film maker and critic. Perhaps one of her enduring legacies to literary studies in the region is her introduction to film studies at Makerere University when she returned from her PhD studies in 2004. This innovation has groomed many Ugandan film makers and scholars, such as Evelyn Cindy Magara, someone whose career we engage with in our next section.

Another important aspect of her teaching has been the fusion of oral literature into film narrative structures. This can be discerned in her publication record. For example, she has co-edited with Stuart Sillars three important books on Ugandan Oral Literature: *Performing Community: Essays on Ugandan Oral Culture* (2013); *Performing Wisdom: Proverbial Lore in Modern Ugandan Society* (2014); and *Performing Change: Identity, Ownership, and Tradition in Ugandan Oral Culture* (2009). Drawn from the NUFU-Mak Folklore Project, the above-cited volumes offered Dipio an opportunity to curate important conversations about Ugandan oral

cultures. The above-cited publications have also cemented her position as an important Ugandan critic. However, her real contribution to the work of literary scholarship in the region is encapsulated in her 2014 book entitled *Gender Terrains in African Film*. In this work, she invokes the trope of a Griot as a useful tool for reading the recurrent motifs of representing women in African Film. Identifying three recurrent motifs in representing women in African film, Dipio synthesises how film discourse can usefully unveil issues affecting women in African societies. Her theoretical and conceptual focus discussed above is replicated in her own films such as *A Meal to Forget* (2009); *Dear Beloved* (2009); *Mother –Centred Africa* (2019), *Rainmaking: A Disappearing Practice* (2016) and *Crafting the Bamasaba* (2009). Her filmic work cited above revolves around Dipio's pedagogical passion for using film to highlight important societal issues such as gender relations and the position of women in African society.

The Third Generation and an Emerging new Canon and Praxis

We start by acknowledging the difficulty of commenting on the literary creative, and critical careers of the third generation of Makerere University-trained writers and critics. This is because their careers have just begun. However, we focus on their current accolades to argue that Kiguli and Magara, who have

been described as pioneers in their respective areas of specialisation as are important Ugandan writers and literary scholars.³ For example, Kiguli was the first Ugandan woman to publish an anthology of poetry and to win a Ugandan Book Award Prize for it. Similarly, Magara is the first Ugandan female film maker to produce an award-winning film to be screened at Cineplex and to air on Africa Magic, a premier channel on DSTV dedicated to airing important continental filmic content. This is significant given that in the 2000s, Cineplex was the only movie theatre in Uganda, and therefore, it was a sign of prestige for one’s film to be aired in this establishment. The two examples make Kiguli and Magara important cultural producers and literary critics.

What is Kiguli’s contribution to the Ugandan Republic of Letters? We argue that any answer to this question should acknowledge her description as Uganda’s contemporary poet. This claim is justified by both her poetry collections and the rank of associate professor of Literature in the Department of Literature.⁴ She joined the department as an assistant lecturer in the 1990s and has grown through the ranks to the position of an Associate Professor.

We argue that Kiguli’s work debunks Barnard Shaw’s maxim, framed as an epigraph to this essay. This is because she is not only an excellent poet, but she is also an articulate teacher of poetry and literary linguistics. According to one of her students, she teaches poetry with a sense of firm and uncompromising empathy. For example, the student noted that “SK is the best of all lecturers in the department. She teaches a hard paper, but she does everything to see that each student has understood. Sometimes I feel ashamed and pretend that I have understood so that she does not feel bad” (Student Interview 2022). Furthermore, the student noted that Kiguli is a very “kind and caring person. She is more of a mother to us than a lecturer. However, she is also tough and cannot allow nonsense in the class” (Student Interview 2022). The above testimony underline her love for poetry, her students, and the vocation of teaching. It can be argued that her teaching of poetry animates a genre into a lived experience for many of her students.

We note that her passion for teaching and writing poetry is attributable to the fact that she has dedicated her life to her writing and teaching literature at Makerere University. She has published several anthologies of poetry that have also been translated into other languages. While she has published poetry in a variety of outlets, it is her debut collection, *The African Saga* (1998), that stands out in terms of the freshness

³ More recently, Susan Kiguli was honoured with a prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the internationally acclaimed Civil Poetry Festival in Vercelli, Italy and Evelyn Cindy Magara received a Kabalega Award for her work.

⁴ It is important to note that she specialises in the teaching of poetry, performance, and Literary Linguistics at Makerere University.

of her register and the use of poetry to fight for the equality and human rights of women in the country. This is perhaps what makes *The Africa Saga* resonate with the Ugandan reading public in four interesting ways. First, it was a first poetry anthology by a female Ugandan writer. Second, it was the first collection to be published by an all-women publication collective called Femrite. Third, it was perhaps the only poetry anthology to win the National Book Trust of Uganda Award in 1999. Fourth, and perhaps more importantly, is its overarchingly defiant feminist tone and themes. Poems as “I am Tired of Talking in Metaphors,” “I Laugh at Amin,” and “My Mother in Three Photographs” unashamedly foregrounded feminist themes at a time when women were just finding their voices to critique patriarchy. This is perhaps why we argue that *The African Saga*’s feminist agenda is comparable to Sylvia Tamale’s (2000) *When Hens Cross: Gender and Parliamentary Democracy in Uganda*. Both are important Ugandan books that use writing as an emancipatory tool to debate the position of women in the Ugandan society of the 1990s.

Besides her creative work, Kiguli has immensely contributed to literary studies internationally. Her critical work focuses largely on how poetry, oral literature, and performance offer us vistas into existential societal issues. Her views about the importance of literature in society are laid out in a *Kunapipi* article entitled “Performer-

Critics in Oral Performance in African Society.” In this article, she carefully teases out what is “available in the oral literature that we study for meaningful discourse” (Kigulu, 2012, p.172). We argue that this article contributes to debates about how we can study and teach African literature in the Global South. This is further elaborated in her 2016 *PMLA* short reflection article entitled: “Personal Reflections on Teaching Literature.” She asserts that while she initially resisted starting her “reflections on teaching literature by discussing how [she] was taught the subject” (Kiguli 2016, p.1531), she concludes that “teaching literature in an African context has a lot to do with exchanges and contestations between cultures and disciplines” (Kiguli, 2016, p.1534). The essence of Kiguli’s argument above is that good literature teaching praxis demands an eclectic approach.

We close our reflections of the third generation by spotlighting the creative and scholarly output of Magara. Our earlier argument regarding the difficulty of auditing the outputs of the third generation of Makerere University-trained writers and critics perhaps strongly applies to Magara. Arguably, her literary creative and critical career is in its infancy. Thus, it is unfair to judge her based on her current accolades when perhaps her greatest work is yet to come. However, we note that her accomplishments so far justify her inclusion in this cohort of Makerere University-trained writers and literary

critics. Born in 1982 in Western Uganda, Magara joined Makerere University in 2002 and graduated with a BA (2005) and MA (2014). She continued with the study of African Cinema for her PhD at the University of Sydney, which she completed in 2020. From the intellectual biography outlined above, it is no exaggeration to claim that Magara is the future of the department’s scholarship of African cinema.

The fact that Magara is Makerere University’s next-generation academic creative critic is inscribed in her centrality to the study of cinema in the country. For example, as mentioned earlier, she was the first female Ugandan film maker to produce a movie that was screened at Cineplex Kampala and aired on Africa Magic, a premier channel of DSTV. Her film marked a breakthrough for Ugandan film makers on the continent, that is dominated by filmic products from South Africa and Nigeria. By breaking Nollywood’s stranglehold on Africa Magic, she demonstrated the uniqueness of her productions. While *Fate* (2006) was Magara’s debut movie, it has been followed by a substantial oeuvre that includes *Jiran* (2006), *Fair Play* (2010), *Windows of Hope* (2011) *A Book for Every Child* (2012) and *Breaking the Mesh* (2012).⁵ Her collection of films attests to the fact that she is a prolific film maker who uses film to address contemporary societal issues. For example, her award-winning film

— *Fate* — narrates the story of Kate, a successful university-educated and rich city woman who is unable to fit into a narrow-minded patriarchal society that cannot handle successful women. Here, it is arguable that Magara uses film to reflect on the dilemma of how a generation of successful and educated Ugandan women navigates the minefields of tradition and patriarchy.

Notably, Magara’s creative outputs dovetail neatly into her scholarship. Her critical writing explores how cinema is an important tool for the emancipation of marginalised peoples. This is the philosophy that anchors her PhD thesis, entitled: *Contemporary East African Cinema: Emergent Themes and Aesthetics*. Her study focuses on gender representations in African cinema. In this important study of East African cinema, Magara argues that the region has a dynamic and eclectic film industry that is uniquely moulded around the “African oral storytelling aesthetics” (Magara, 2020, p.iv). She elaborates that Ugandan filmic aesthetics are infused with foreign film making influences such as Bollywood, Nollywood, and Hollywood to spotlight a regional film tradition capable of distilling regional issues such as gender oppression. The subject matter of her PhD thesis was sharpened in her 2018 article entitled: “Imaging the Self: The Representation of Women in Mariam Ndagire’s Films.” In this essay, Magara reads the work of an important Ugandan filmmaker—Mariam Ndagire—to argue that Ndagire uses film to meaningfully

⁵ Her recent production is docuseries entitled “Tuko Pamojo” (We Are One) which explores Uganda’s sense of identity and belonging.

contribute to the struggle for the emancipation of women in Uganda. Magara argues that Ndagire uses Ugandan feminine stereotypes to shine a light on the oppression of women. She concludes that Ndagire also uses optimistic plots in her films to suggest that women can overcome their oppression by regaining their agency.

Conclusion

We set out to explore the contribution of three generations of Makerere University's Department of Literature alumni to literary creativity and criticism in the region. Our exploration has noted that at different moments at Makerere University, the Department of Literature has produced an alumnus that fuses literary creativity with literary criticism to offer insights into national and

regional debates. Dividing them into generations—Ngũgĩ's and Wangusa (first generation); Okurut and Dipio (second generation); and Kiguli and Magara (third generation)—we have audited their creative and critical outputs. Our subjective selection notes a gendered-generational continuum that reflects the demographic realities of Ugandan higher education trajectories over the last 60 years. This is signalled by the fact that while male writer and critics dominate the first generation, there are more female creators and literary scholars in the second and third generations. Nonetheless, we conclude that although many Makerere University trained writers and critics would have rightfully claimed inclusion on our list, the selected six discussed in this essay stand out because of the quality and quantity of their writerly outputs.

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Interviews

An in-depth Interview was conducted with a 2021 third year student of literature on June 20, 2022, about Susan Kiguli and her teaching.