



THE 8TH MASHARIKI LITERARY & CULTURAL STUDIES CONFERENCE

Venue: University of Nairobi, Kenya

Dates: 23rd to 25th June, 2027

Theme: Regional Encounters: East African literary topographies

The literary topography in East African literatures and their diasporas has largely been shaped by intellectual encounters, interchanges and exchanges involving the travel and circulation of individual thinkers, ideas, texts, and intellectual practices into, out of and across the region. These histories of circulation resulted in robust communities of artistic production and critique across the region convened under literary and artistic magazines, publishing networks, and conferences, most famously the historic 1962 Conference of African Writers of English Expression at the then Makerere University College. This conference remains a landmark event in African literary studies both within the region and globally. Similarly, the colonial yoking of the three tertiary institutions in the region — Makerere, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi — as constituent colleges of the University of London, for better or worse, laid the groundwork for regional circulations of ideas that would see the debates and decisions regarding the abolition of the English Department in Nairobi spread across the region, producing a unique regional framing of literary studies that remains distinctive across the entire continent.

At the same time, the different tides and waves of political and ideological climates resulted in enforced circulation of writers, artists, ideas, and artistic genres across national boundaries in the region. Austin Bukenya, Okot p'Bitek, Barnabas Kasigwa, Taban Lo Liyong and many others left the then tumultuous Uganda for Kenya, carrying with them intellectual practices that altered the terrain of the region's literature forever. One need only consider p'Bitek's inauguration of the 'song school' of East African poetry, and the subsequent admiration or emulation, to appreciate this fact. On another plane, while pursuing family interests, writers such as Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Barbara Kimenye settled in Kenya and Uganda, respectively, where they left lasting marks on the literary staples of the region. For example, Kimenye's Moses series of young adult narratives set in a Ugandan school remains a multigenerational shared cultural resource across the region. At the same time, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's military interventions in Uganda continue to be memorialised in Ugandan writing, while the Kenyan school and college curricula drew succour from his translations of Shakespeare's dramas into Kiswahili. However, the region was also hostile to some creative writers and critics, among them Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Mugo, Kimani Gecau, and Ngugi wa Mirii, who relocated to Zimbabwe, as well as Okello Oculi who went further west to Nigeria.

These waves of regional encounters, exchanges and circulations — past and ongoing— have shaped particular ideas of what literary imagination, production, and consumption looked like – at some point creating an idea of the region’s literatures that greatly reflected a Makererean imprint, so to speak. These exchanges also facilitated the travel of certain important texts that conveyed current ideological positionings of their bearers, leading to organic processes of canonising those texts, their writers, and, to some extent, their most prominent critics / respondents.

The 8th Mashariki Literary and Cultural Studies Conference invites panels and paper proposals that explore these and other patterns of literary and cultural encounters – and their corresponding intellectual interchanges and exchanges – in and beyond the Eastern African region. We seek reflections on the following themes and any other topics relevant to the thematic focus:

- Visual artists and music and musical creativity
- Institutions of literature making – publishing houses, national theatres, foreign language and cultural centres, music recording studios, universities and colleges.
- The Makerere-Dar es Salaam-Nairobi intellectual interchanges and networks of mobilities of scholars
- Initiatives of literary production seen in print cultures of *Penpoint*, *Transition*, *Zuka*, *Ghala*, *Cheche*, *Dhana*, *Thought and Practice*, the Moses Series, and spatial institutions such as *Paa ya Paa*, *Chemi Chemi* Cultural Centre, *Kwani?*, *Qwani*, etc.
- Debates of the founders – Ngugi wa Thiong’o (Theatre of Resistance), Okot p’Bitek (Song School), Taban lo Liyong (Literary Barrenness), Ali Mazrui (Power of Babel), Barbara Kimenye (Young and Adult Fiction), Penina Mlama (Theatre for Development), Pio Zirimu (Orature), Marjorie Oludhe (Freedom Songs), etc.
- Literatures of the 1980s: the Cold War, dictatorship, and literary images
- Literary journalism
- Literary Activism: Kamirithu, Femrite, Writivism, Africa Writers’ Trust, Ukombozi
- ‘Literary patriotism’? Trends and the politics of citations – who cited who, where and when
- Refugee and war narratives
- Asian East Africans and other migrant narratives
- Nationalism and its malcontents – expulsions and their tales
- In Other Words – East African literature in French, Kiswahili, and other languages
- Travel and leisure cultures – music, film, dance
- Life writing in the wake of travels
- Publishing Trends in East Africa
- Oral and popular literatures exchanges, growth and transborder encounters
- Eastern African ways of reading and writing: What conceptual tools are grounded in Eastern African thought?

We invite paper abstracts of 300 words and panel proposals on these and related themes to be sent to masharikiconference27@uonbi.ac.ke by November 30, 2026.